

'Overthinning' Not A Word To Peach Orchardists

ANDY ANDREWS
Editor

HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — Listen to orchard managers sometimes. One thing you learn: you can never take too many peaches off during thinning.

According to Ken Kauffman, who maintains about 35 acres of peaches in Bird In Hand, "I would suggest to the novice grower the word 'overthin' should not be in his vocabulary."

As long as a "3-inch peach is irresistible to a housewife or tourist," he said, "then thin (the peach trees) hard."

Kauffman spoke along with four other growers at a panel on peach thinning in early February during the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center.

Peach thinning, according to David Benner, El Vista Orchards, Fairfield, is a large expense, "and nobody looks for-

ward to doing it." Benner noted the importance of proper employee training as they go and noted that he is willing to spend money to get proper thinning.

Proper fruit tree is critical, according to Doug Zee, Zee Orchards, who grows his own label of "Zee Best Orchards" in New Jersey. Zee, who farms 500 acres in Gloucester County, said growers should always plant "medium to large" varieties.

"If it's not going to be a large peach, don't plant it," Zee told those who attended the conference. "If it's only a medium peach, don't plant the thing."

Zee noted the importance of "getting fertilizer for the tree" early on, one of the cheapest things you can do, he noted. "Have (nutrients) ready for the tree when it is blooming."

Zee also spoke about his experience with ammonium thiosulfate, at a rate of 3.5 to 4 gallons per acre, as a bloom thinner. He cautioned growers to avoid cold, wet weather when applying the chemical thinner.

Mark Rice manages 800-900 acres of orchards, with about 50 acres in peaches. Rice lost about 100 acres to plum pox virus in 2001. What he grows is sold to Rice Fruit Company for packing.

Rice noted that he begins thinning the last week of May and watches carefully to see what's on the tree. Early June is also a good period to thin.

"Guys clap their hands when they see the thinner coming out of the barn,"



Peach growers at a panel during the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Hershey included, from left, Doug Zee, Bob Best, Dave Benner, Mark Rice, Ken Kauffman, and moderator William Tietjen, Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Photos by Andy Andrews, editor

noted Ken Kauffman of Kauffman's Fruit Farm. A mechanical thinner, purchased in 1993, knocks off about 40-50 percent of the blossoms.

When it comes to hand thinning, Kauffman noted that waiting until the June drop is too late. He asks the thinning crew for about 10 inches between blossoms. "Ask for 10 inches of space between fruit, you'll get maybe 8 inches," Kauffman noted.

Kauffman said the crew thins the early varieties twice. Early and complete thinning is a must for early varieties.

Zee uses a trunk shaker for

the larger trees. A trunk shaker costs about 95 cents a tree in labor costs, and with a special mechanical thinner, a crew can do it for about 50 cents per tree.

Bob Best, grower from Hackettstown, N.J., with 15 acres in orchards, said managers have to go out in the orchards and "know what's going on. You have to know your varieties, too."

Rice noted that last summer the orchard used a cherry shaker to help thin the trees.

Best used a chemical thinner. He went up one night when the peaches were at 90 percent bloom and put the material on at a 6-quart rate.

"I am very happy evaluating how it affects each variety," Best said. "It affects each variety differently."

Best outlined several varieties. Thinner worked well on several of them, including excellent results on Harmony, in big demand at the retail level, and on PF-5, an early variety. "It clobbered them," he said. "I wouldn't hesitate to do it again."

"The secret is to get as much off the tree before pit hardening as you can," Zee noted.

"It's something everybody ought to at least try," said

(Turn to Page E6)



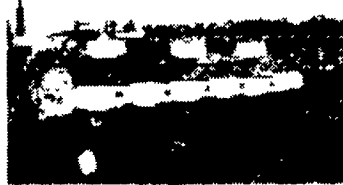
Dr. Kathryn Taylor, University of Georgia, provided a research update at the convention.

We Salute Our Farming Industry

BINKLEY & HURST BROS. INC. IS YOUR SPECIALTY PLANTER DEALER!

Ask For Merv and Place Your Order Today!

MONOSEM Specialty Precision Planters



- Proven Precision
- Fertilizer, Dry or Liquid
- Heavy-Duty 7"x7" Frames



- 2 Row to 12 Row Unmatched Accuracy In The Metering & Placement Of Corn, Sweet Corn, Edible Beans, Squash, Melons, Cucumbers, Sunflowers, Sorghum & More.

PNEUMATIC PLANTER MODEL MS

PLANT WITH PRECISION

RAW • UNCOATED • SEED

CARROTS • LETTUCE • ONION • ETC.

CALL FOR INFORMATION - Ask For Merv Nissly

Other Models & Configurations In Stock

BINKLEY & HURST BROS. INC.

133 Rothsville Station Rd.

P.O. Box 0395

Lititz, PA 17543-0395

(717) 626-4705

1-800-414-4705



Packaging Solutions

for any season

- Plastic Containers
- Paper, Poly & Mesh Bags
- Wood Baskets
- Cider Jugs
- Labels
- Bin Liners
- Fruit & Vegetable Picking Containers
- Corrugated & Gift Packaging
- Custom Printing Available

1.800.457.3099

Putnam Plastics

FAA: (937)866.9365

www.putnamfarm.com

