

Fruit Growers Gather For Tour At Cherry Hill Orchards

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LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)
— When it comes to growing tree fruit, Dick and Tom Haas aren't afraid of trying new ways to do it better.

The father and son team at



Tom Haas of Cherry Hill Orchard checks a trap used for monitoring tufted apple bud moth populations.

Cherry Hill Orchards near New Danville has been a leader in putting innovative practices to work, including the most updated pest management tools available.

About 40 fruit growers gathered at Cherry Hill Tuesday evening to see the Haas's operation and take home some new knowledge to put to use in their own orchards. The annual Twilight Fruit Growers' Tour is organized by Penn State Cooperative Ex-

tension of Lancaster County and hosted by a local orchard each year.

Over the past few decades, Cherry Hill has developed a thriving pick-your-own operation and farm market, offering customers a wide selection of home-grown fruits, including apples, cherries, peaches, nectarines, plums, and apricots.

Managing apple trees was the focus of the orchard tour Tuesday night.

Sometimes experiments and discoveries happen by chance at Cherry Hill. In the fall of 2001, for example, the Haases cut all the lateral branches off an aging stand of Red Delicious apple trees. They were planning to remove the trees — trunk, root, and all — to make way for new plantings. However, the next growing season rolled around before the Haases had a chance to clear out the trees.

They discovered that the old trunks sprouted a healthy crop of new branches. Now in their second year of growth, the branches are showing signs of good potential for future production. The Haases have decided to let them go and see what happens.

"With growth like this, you can't complain," Tom said. "You have all new wood."

According to Dick, the unplanned experiment just shows one of the principles of horticulture: "Growing plants is an evolution," he said.

The technique for renewing apple trees could potentially double the life of some tree and root

stock combinations, allowing them to remain productive for 30 to 40 years, he said.

For insect control, the Haases have been employing several innovative techniques that help reduce pesticide use considerably.

Targeting insects and pinpointing spray times is becoming increasingly important, Tom said. That's partly because effective, labeled chemicals are getting scarce on the market. Available chemicals are also much more time-specific than chemicals of the past.

The Haases have been using a global information system (GIS)/weather-tracking system since

1996 — shortly after the technology first became available to orchardists.

Called SkyBit, the method was developed at Penn State to predict site-specific hatch dates for many fruit pests, including tufted apple bud moths, codling moths, oriental fruit moths, and peach tree borers.

SkyBit uses degree-day data along with GIS mapping to provide tracking information on insect hatch times within targeted locations of about a one-mile radius, according to Dr. Greg Krawczyk, Penn State fruit entomologist on hand during the tour. During growing season, the



Greg Krawczyk, Penn State fruit entomologist, right, and Tom Haas discuss innovative pest management methods used in apple production.

SkyBit information can be accessed daily via computer or fax. It also provides up-to-date weather data, including wind forecasts, to help plan spray times.

Along with SkyBit, the Haases rely on a variety of insect traps to monitor pest numbers in the orchards.

"The traps are valuable in that they help verify the info you're getting (from SkyBit)," Tom



Dick Haas talks about the history of some older apple tree stands at Cherry Hill Orchards.

ogy will definitely play a big part in the future at Cherry Hill Orchards.

The tour also included a run-down of fruit-thinning agents available to growers.

Dr. Rob Crassweller, Penn State pomologist, reviewed the best times to apply these growth inhibitors to trees in order to be most effective.

Choosing the right agents and applying them at the right time are keys to getting the best thinning results.

Conditions this season should allow thinning agent applications to do a good job with a minimum of hand-thinning, according to Crassweller.

"In general, I think thinners are going to work really well this year," he said.

This year's twilight tour was about two weeks later than it is normally scheduled.

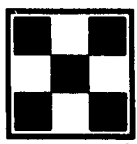
Tim Elkner, Lancaster County horticulture agent and tour organizer, said he was pleased with the number of growers who turned out. Attendance was greater than he expected.

(Photos by Dave Lefever)

What Do These Farms Have In Common ?



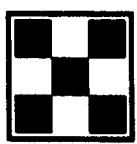
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