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Orchard Outlook Newsletter

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The technical information contained in this Orchard Outlook publication is the result of the combined professional opinions of employees of AFHRC and AgraPoint.

Time to Renew

The 2006 growing season is about to begin and although we desire ideal growing conditions these seldom occur. Growers need the ability to adjust to the changing growing season and the problems that are presented to them, such as pest and disease outbreak, poor set, excessive set, etc. Last year fire blight was a new problem for a number of growers and adjustments need to be made in orchard management for the next year or two to minimize the spread of this disease. As I begin to write 2006 issues of the Orchard Outlook, I trust that the information provided will help producers deal with the ever-changing disease and insect complex while providing sound horticultural advice. **Growers who wish to continue to receive the *Orchard Outlook* in 2006 will need to renew their subscription as this will be the last issue covered under the 2005 subscription.**

2006 Winter

I have been asked by a number of people what impact the mild winter has had on tree fruits. The pat answer is, "Time will tell if it has had a negative impact". I feel I am correct in stating that to date the 2006 winter has been one of the mildest, if not *the* mildest, in recent history. The mean temperatures for December, January and February were all higher (warmer) than the 45 year average and it appears that the mean temperature for March will also be higher. The month of January was much warmer than average with a mean of -0.9°C which compares to the 45 year average of -5.6°C . The extreme lows for recent months were Dec: -13.5°C , Jan: -10.5°C , Feb: -18.1°C and Mar: -18.2°C . Last year's extreme lows for the same period were Dec: -15.9°C , Jan: -21.2°C , Feb: -20.7°C and Mar: -15.9°C . Snow accumulation was also below average, with Dec having the most snow accumulation, 65.6 cm compared to the 44 year average of 56 cm. Snow on the ground had pretty much gone by Mar 10th. So, did the mild winter have any impact on tree fruit, especially the mild period in Jan when temperatures got up to 15°C and again in Feb when a high of 13°C was recorded? Based on the winter lows of -18°C in the dead of winter there should be no bud kill in apple or pears and peaches should have come through in good shape. If there is a problem it would occur from the fluctuations in temperatures, cold to mild to cold, which may have reduced hardiness in some of the stone fruits. Bloom time will be the indicator if there was a problem. The ups and downs with the rainfall may have also contributed to frost heaving of trees on the clay-type soils. On the other hand mouse damage should be minimal because the winter was open.

Likely the greatest risk from the mild winter and early disappearance of snow is a bud break prior to May. The risk of spring frost damage to flower buds always increases with an early spring.

Collection of Scion Wood for Grafting

Growers who are planning to graft trees over later this spring will need to collect scion wood as soon as possible. Scion wood should be collected prior to bud swell. Collect healthy one-year old shoot growth from the tips of lateral limbs. When possible, look for shoots that are longer than 25 cm in length and pencil size or greater in diameter.

Pear Psylla

In order to obtain control of pear psylla growers are advised to apply a dormant oil spray early in the season prior to egg laying. This insect overwinters as an adult in the cracks of the bark or under debris. On warm sunny days as the temperature reaches 10°C, the adults begin to move around on the bark. Once temperatures remain above 10°C, mating and egg laying may begin (under mild conditions this may take place in early April). Egg laying begins prior to bud break, with eggs being laid singly or in line on rough areas of buds, twigs and bark crevices. Egg laying shifts to the margins of leaves and stems of shoots, as buds develop and new shoots emerge. Egg hatch takes place over an extended period of time (i.e. 6 to 7 days at 21°C or 35 days at 5°C) following laying. The earliest egg hatch usually coincides with when the foliage begins to expand.

Dormant oil treatment has been a standard treatment for this insect and is effective if applied prior to any significant egg laying. The coating of oil on the wood and buds of trees acts as a deterrent to egg laying. If the oil is not adequately applied to the surface of the tree it will not act as a deterrent and result in poor control of the insect. Likewise, if applied after significant egg laying has taken place, poor control results because the oil will not smother the eggs. In years with heavy rainfall and delayed egg laying, a single application of oil may not provide sufficient protection. With the arrival of warm temperatures adult psylla will start appearing and laying eggs. Growers who plan to use oil as a step in psylla control should be prepared to apply a dormant oil spray to pear blocks in the early part of April if warm temperatures occur. The rate for dormant oil on standard size trees is 65 L/ha. This could be applied as a split application to even out the coverage. In a wet spring a second application at a reduced rate could be made to maintain the protective coating of oil.

Spring Stone Fruit Diseases

The stone fruit diseases peach leaf curl and plum pockets need to be controlled early on in the growing season. To be effective fungicide applications need to take place prior to fruit bud swell. These two diseases infect the fruit buds as soon as the buds begin to swell and the bud scales separate. The infections take place during wet weather. Given the weather conditions bud swell will likely be early and treatments will have to be applied in early April. In Nova Scotia the Japanese-type plums should be treated for plum pockets. The recommended treatment is Thiram 75 WP at 6.72 kg/ha. To control peach leaf curl apply one of the following fungicides: Bravo 500 at 7.00 L/ha or Ferbam 76 WDG at 6.75 kg/ha.

Spring Grower Workshop and Pruning Demonstration

The NSFGA is planning a Spring Grower Workshop for April 18, 2006. This will begin with a Honeycrisp pruning demonstration/discussion at Ravenswood Farms (Ken and Peter Sanford) in Coldbrook at 3:30 – 4:30 pm. Supper will be provided at the Waterville Fire Hall at 5:00 pm, followed by presentations on several topics. Registration is required for the supper. Further information will be available in the next NSFGA News.

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