Mid-Columbia Cherry Crop Update – July 16, 2013

By Lynn Long, OSU Extension

The following people contributed to this update: Bob Bailey, Orchard View Farms; Lynn Long, OSU Extension; Mike Omeg, Omeg Family Orchards, Gip Redman, Oregon Cherry Growers and Chad Wimmers, Diamond Fruit.

Horticultural Topics

Rain and heat have left their toll on the 2013 season and even though the late varieties are showing good quality, getting that quality in the box has sometimes been difficult. Of the late varieties Skeena showed the greatest damage with a lot of side splits and heat damage. Field sorting allowed for many blocks to be harvested but those that weren’t able to make grade went to the freezer market.

Sunburn, especially on young trees where the canopy was not quite mature, affected Regina to some extent as well. Firmness was also not quite what we have come to expect from Regina, and fruit size was down somewhat. Nevertheless, Bob Bailey stated that overall Regina looks clean and very good in the box.

Lapins survived the summer of 2013 in better shape than any other variety. It suffered a low rate of cracking and sunburn but overall fruit quality has been very high.

Sweetheart has shown some rain and heat damage but damaged fruit has shriveled, making it easier to sort and pack. Mike Omeg commented that Sweetheart cullage has been running higher than he expected at 20-25% but the fruit has been very large and firm.

Harvest is now moving out to South Wasco County, Sherman County, as well as Odell and south in Hood River County. Bob said that they have just started with Lapins and Skeena in areas south of The Dalles. They will be harvesting Sweetheart next week. He said that they finished Bing harvest in Dufur yesterday.

Skeena and Regina in the south county area have good size and Skeena was very firm with firmness readings of 370-420 g/mm.

The Orchard View Farms orchard in Wasco is 5 and 6 years old this year. They were able to harvest 20 tons of nice Regina from the block but the lower areas were frosted out.

Fruit firmness in Hood River County has been variable so far this year but overall the fruit in the Odell region and south looks solid with little cracking. Most of the packouts are running in the 80-90 percentile.

Due to fruit quality Bob stated that little of their fruit has been exported but about 40% is now being shipped overseas, mainly to Asia and Brazil.
Chad Wimmers said that they will be picking Lapins in Parkdale at the end of the week. The north side of Parkdale seems to be running about 4 days early relative to the rest of the area. Sweethearts are ripening early relative to Lapins. As harvest moves further south in Hood River County the Skeena are looking better with the help of a lot of shrivel that is dropping out of the sizer. Overall, Sweethearts in this area are not large due to overcropping or water issues and are averaging only 10 row.

Lapins packout has been in the upper 80’s and lower 90% range and size is good this year. As in other areas Regina is smaller than usual.

**Pest Management Topics:**

Mike and others commented that they have seen powdery mildew on Sweetheart foliage in the tree center and on new growth at the tips. He will be applying oil post-harvest along with a miticide to help control powdery mildew and mites. They have used pyrethroids this year in order to control spotted wing Drosophila (SWD) and he has seen the beginnings of some mite infestations as a result. He feels that he waited too long to apply a control last year and ended up having to apply two sprays to control the mites. He recalled how Dr. Tim Facteau confirmed that early defoliation had a negative impact on fruit quality the following year.

Chad commented that SWD finds are down substantially from late season last year. Nevertheless, some larvae are being found in the fruit. Growers need to keep their spray intervals tight and not allow populations to build.

**Market Update from B.J. Thurlby, NW Cherries**

Through today the industry has shipped just over 9.3 million 20 lb. equivalent boxes. Again, the industry estimate for the season remains at 14.2 million 20 lb. equivalent boxes. The industry has seen volume receipts to the warehouses increase drastically over the past week. Shipments have been above 300,000 boxes per day for 7 consecutive days – which to this point has been manageable relative to the market demand. To put the previous statement into perspective we need only to look back to 2012 … where we saw the industry averaged 258,000 boxes per day for the entire 92 day season; and an amazing 430,000 boxes per day during the month of July.

As for the overall market, the increase in volume we have seen the past week continues to be absorbed by the trade. However, over the next ten days will see another significant jump in receipts coming into the warehouses. The fact is that the continuous weather uncertainties and lack of promotable volumes of fruit that we have experienced during the first 40 days (we have shipped for 46 days so far) of shipping has done nothing to build momentum coming into the peak of the 2013 season. As an industry, we will be challenged over the next two weeks to get the largest portion of this crop moved. The key will be to keep retailers focused on the opportunity that our current volumes bring to the table … and work through the remaining July portion of this crop in an orderly manner.

The team at the Northwest Cherry Growers has been pushing every retail group to increase display size and location for the remainder of July – as significant sweet cherry volume is finally
here! Our message to the trade this past week has been clear; they have the next few weeks to make up for the sales lost due to lack of volume during June and early July. As for domestic promotions from 7/6 to 7/18 … NW Cherries held 11% of all fruit ad space this past week (the #2 promoted fruit item behind table grapes) … and were on ad in over 20,000 stores in the U.S. Of note, the only fruit items that increased in price vs. this same time period last year; were red cherries which were up 27% ($3.30 per pound), rainier cherries prices increased by 13% ($4.50 per pound), black berries climbed by 7%, strawberries (1 lb pkg) up 9% and raspberries up 4%.

Exports have increased significantly over the past week as well. Our largest off shore market of China is finally starting to pull some significant volumes of fruit! Timing is good, as our largest consumer media promotions are hitting there right now. As an example, NW Cherries received some outstanding coverage this week for a promotional event we held on July 4th. This is one of many articles that is running Chinese media http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-07/09/content_16751239.htm … it specifically refers to the online merchandiser TMall.com … China’s version of Amazon.com. NW Cherry sales at TMall have been brisk … food is delivered to homes via scooters with chilled mini refrigerators on the back … TMall scooters are quickly becoming commonplace in China. On the down side, China’s second-quarter GDP only rose 7.5% which is the second straight quarterly slowdown for the world’s No. 2 economy. On the positive, the Australian dollar strengthened slightly against the U.S dollar this quarter … as shipments to Australia have been slower than hoped … the strengthening of AU dollar can only help. This season, our most prolific export market has been Korea where we have shipped over 330,000 20 lb. equivalent boxes. In all three of these markets, we have promotional programs running into August.