

Hort Headlines

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Top 10 Tree Fruit Industry Events of 2007

Following are the top ten events *in no particular order* that we chose as being the most important events for the tree fruit industry in 2007.

1. **Labor Issues Keep Industry Focused** – The tree fruit industry faced a host of various labor issues in 2007. This is no surprise given the fact that the tree fruit industry is a labor-intensive business. Concerns over an adequate labor supply to meet the demands required in the production of tree fruit topped the labor issue front. Once again, the industry found ways to stretch a thin labor pool without suffering sizeable crop losses. The labor supply situation pushed state agencies to even try new methods to attract workers to Washington State, from recruitment videos to initiating an Agricultural Recruitment System.
2. **Industry Puts Guest-Worker System To The Test** – More and more tree fruit companies in 2007 turned to the federal H-2A system to help meet their labor needs. According to state officials, 26 applications were accepted and more than 1,600 workers certified under the H-2A system. Though these figures represent a large increase over previous years, the number of workers permitted in 2007 represents a tiny fraction of the actual workers needed in the tree fruit industry to prune, thin and harvest apples, pears and cherries.
3. **Politics And Perceptions Doom Immigration Reform In Congress** – A healthy mix of politics and the 24-hour talk show circuit helped doom immigration reform. The congressional process eventually melted down over two basic views linked to this critical issue: border security vs. amnesty. A number of industries, including labor-intensive agriculture are finding the current federal guest-worker system outdated and inefficient to address the current labor market. Efforts to detach a guest-worker program for agriculture and move it separately also failed.
4. **Strong Apple Prices Reach Ten-Year High** – Apple prices reached their highest point in at least ten years. The average price of a 42-pound, fresh-packed box of all apple varieties was \$18.92 compared with \$15.45 from the previous year during the same time. It's worth noting that while the industry is experiencing higher prices, producers are seeing costs increase across the board from fuel,

added regulations, and labor. The high-quality crop for the 2007 season resulted in fewer lower-grade apples for juice processing causing Tree Top, Inc. to temporarily close its Cashmere apple and pear juice plant.

5. **Record Production Values For Ag Crops** – A report released from the Washington Bureau of Agricultural Statistics Service showed that several commodities, apples, pears, potatoes, hay and onions, set value records. The value of Washington's 2006 agricultural production broke a record for the second straight year in a row, reaching 6.87 billion dollars which is a six percent increase from 2005. Tree fruit crops continue to dominate the state's agricultural portfolio and for the most part continue to increase in value.
6. **Food Safety: How Safe Is The Food We Eat** – While strict standards are crucial to food safety in the U.S., they are nearly worthless without adequate food safety enforcement. The news of tainted food in the United States highlighted the issue of food safety as it pertains to imported food products, fresh or processed. According to U.S. officials, more and more U.S. citizens consume food produced with ingredients sourced from overseas. The USDA approved more than \$14 million in food safety grants to various universities throughout the country. In addition, the Northwest tree fruit industry launched the Pacific Northwest Food Safety Committee.
7. **Pesticide Issues Dominate Committee Agenda** – A new legislative committee in Olympia dedicated to environmental health issues spent a large share of time reviewing pesticide issues and considering new laws and regulations over the use of pesticides during the 2007 legislative session. Issues related to pesticide drift, notification and electronic reporting were considered. Although the House Select Committee on Environmental Health did not approve any new policy bills regarding pesticides, committee members agreed to reconsider those issues if necessary in '08.
8. **WSHA Secures Funds For Pest Management Transition Program** – State budget writers approved a \$550,000 appropriation in 2007 aimed at helping the tree fruit industry adopt softer crop protection chemicals as replacements to azinphos-methyl (AZM) and other organophosphate materials. The Pest Management Transition Program is now operating under the guidance and leadership of WSU-TFREC, county extension, WSHA, and the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission. The program will help fund education and training sessions.
9. **Annual Meeting Considers Labor/Technology Intersection** – The 2007 WSHA Annual Meeting featured a strong program that attracted solid turnout throughout the three-day conference. The educational program leaned heavily on a critical subject: labor. The opening session proved both educational and entertaining regarding the practicality of robots one-day working in orchards. However, the Batjer Speaker outlined a host of projects, plans, and ideas that in his opinion make it feasible and even practical to one day observe unmanned tractors rolling

through Washington's orchards completing a number of tasks. The 103rd Annual Meeting featured over 90 speakers and 1,400 attendees.

10. **Virus Suspected In Mass Honeybee Deaths** – Tens of thousands of honeybee colonies across the country were destroyed by a mysterious illness that had researchers initially mystified; scientists possibly discovered a virus associated with the destruction of a large fraction of American commercial bee colonies referred to as “Colony Collapse Disorder”. The culprit, reported in the journal Science, may be the Israeli Acute Paralysis (IAP) virus. The ailment is threatening the livelihood of commercial beekeepers and potentially putting a strain on fruit growers and other farmers that rely on bees to pollinate their crops.

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