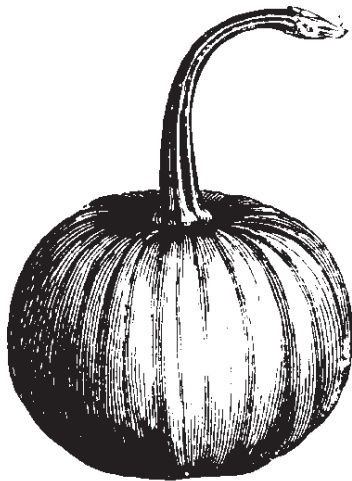


PLANT & PEST ADVISORY

FRUIT EDITION \$1.50

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Reflections on the 1997 Peach

Jerome L. Frecon, Agricultural Agent

Some of you are too busy with other farming activities to reflect on whether you had a good or bad peach season. However, most will be planning ahead and reflecting on what happened, went wrong, and what can be done to make corrections for next season.

Most growers and shippers did not have a season that was up to their expectations, while some had a good or excellent season. The major problems were poor yields, less than a full crop, and a poor packout due to high cullage on some varieties. While I don't have an official report from Joe Tarpine at the Market News Service, in southern New Jersey it appears our shipment volume was down between 25 and 30%. In most cases FOB prices were above the break even point. We did have our usual surge of low prices in late Redhaven and Loring season. Some shippers also had trouble moving late peaches.

Many of our yield and packout problems were related to the spring frosts we had on April 4, 5, and 6th coupled with an early but long bloom, and then another frost on May 3rd. We spent a lot of time evaluating flowers and their pistils, hoping they would make it. It didn't make too much difference on the variety or site. Poor fruit set was simply related to what stage of bloom the variety was in, and how cold it got. I saw injury on winter hardy varieties like Encore, and on sites with good air drainage and with poor air drainage. There was injury on high sites and low sites. In conclusion, I don't think we could have affected this frost injury with better varieties or the selection of better orchard sites. Bloom delay treatments also did not always make a difference.

What we didn't anticipate was the effect the cold weather would have on poor seed development, split stones, internal injury, fruit shape, fruit finish (nectarines especially), and dropping. This "latent" injury really affected the pack out of some varieties. Late peaches like Cresthaven, Autumn glo, Jerseyqueen, Sweet Sue, Rio Oso Gem, Parade, and even Encore seemed to be most affected. One tree removal company was in my office yesterday and said these varieties are "getting dozed". I don't think we have good replacements for Cresthaven and Encore but I'm not sorry to see some of the other varieties disappear.

We had very bad early season infections of rusty spot and bacterial spot. Where we have susceptible varieties to rusty spot and mildew we'll be spraying more Nova during our late bloom, petal fall, and

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early cover sprays.

The bacterial spot is another problem. Our controls of Tencop and Mycoshield did not work well under the severe spot pressure we experienced. We have to hope for less pressure and try to alternate the materials particularly if we think we are having resistance to the Mycoshield sprays. We have no new or exciting chemicals on the horizon to replace these. Certainly growers will be more cognizant of spraying earlier and even considering the use of Kocide or more active coppers early in the season. Some will probably spray in the fall which is probably a waste of money but at least will help with the Fusicocum control. I am sure Norman Lalancette and Dean Polk will be discussing bacterial spot at the spring fruit meetings.

We cannot forget good management practices for bacterial spot. We have to give more consideration to only planting less susceptible varieties which will be addressed in our [1998 Tree Fruit Production Guide](#). For example, all of our best nectarines and white peaches are susceptible or very susceptible to spot. We might consider how we plant varieties making sure to not plant very susceptible varieties beside each other. We might consider wind breaks to reduce the effect of wind-driven rains that carry the disease. How about overhead irrigation? This might be spreading a lot of disease.

Some growers had a severe problem with brown rot. Much of this may have been due to damage during the cold weather either because the stones were shattered and the disease was carried into the fruit by moisture, or simply because some cuts were made in the pre bloom and bloom spray schedule to save money because of the lighter crop.

The yield was down on some farms because of the June and July drought. It takes a lot more peaches to fill a box when they are small, and some shippers can't sell peaches unless they are over 2 1/2" in diameter. The drought lasted up to eight weeks and some blocks of fruit did not get irrigated sufficiently. Growers in these areas with trickle irrigation seemed to receive a payback on their investment in better fruit size, and less bacterial spot. We will see more trickle or micro irrigation installed next year. We had some growers that had over 4 inches one day in late August, which ended the drought quickly, and helped spread brown rot. We still had some problems with fruit finish, cold weather, chemicals, physiological, thrips, over maturity, skin discoloration and other unknown reasons. We usually blame this on the variety but these will all be investigated.

There was a lot of debate about PLU stickers. Eastern Pro Pak opened in Glassboro, and because they were offering fruit with PLU stickers, many competing shippers felt they lost sales. They probably had little effect on this situation since peaches were being shipped

in large quantities from Georgia, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and California with PLU stickers. It is probably inevitable that in 1998 a pre condition of sale will be having fruit PLU stickered. This may cost the grower from 20-30 cents a box more depending on how thoroughly and rapidly it is done.

The 1/2 bushel peach box is here for now, although growers who sold fruit from \$5.00 to \$7.00 a box may wish they were packing in 38 pound boxes. Some shippers were doing a nice job on consumer packages. The demand and price for good nectarines and white peaches was strong throughout the season. We will probably see more volume in 1998.

As for our competition, the lateness of our season helped prices and movement in most instances. Georgia finished up early before we ever got going full force. South Carolina and California seemed to be on schedule but did not have the volume we anticipated. South Carolina shippers were hurt by a lot of bad weather. This may all change next season.

We saw a lot of trees die due to Phytophthora. We'll probably be recommending more Ridomil Gold. We could cut our losses if we planted trees at the proper depth (stop mounding them with soil) and planted them on a berm to improve drainage in new fields. □

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Sign-up '96 will run October 14, 1997 through November 14, 1997. Under CRP, owners or operators receive a rental payment and up to 50% cost share assistance in return for converting environmentally sensitive acreage to desirable environmental practices. Operators or owners of eligible cropland and those with expiring CRP contracts may apply to participate in this program. Rental rates are based on soil type. The term of the contract is for 10 to 15 years. Planting permanent vegetative cover on highly erodible land and environmentally sensitive land can improve water and air quality as well as benefiting many species of wildlife. For further information, please telephone your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. □

Calendar of Events

November 5, 1997 - New Jersey Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference, Quality Inn, 1850 Eastern Avenue, Somerset, NJ 08873. Contact: Dr. Ramu Govindasamy (732) 932-9171.

December 2, 1997 - Annual Meeting of New Jersey Agribusiness Association, Bridgeport Holiday Inn, Swedesboro, NJ. Contact: Dean Polk (609) 758-7311.

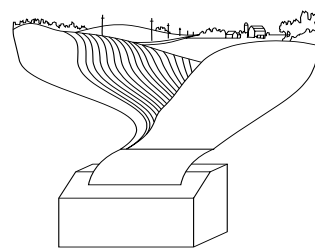
January 17-19, 1998 - National Peach/Vidalia Onion & Roadside Market Conference, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Savannah, Georgia. Contact: Jeff Wainwright, Georgia Peach Council, P.O. Box 1031, Fort Valley, Georgia 31030.

January 22-24, 1998 - Annual Meeting of Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey, Inc. (January 22nd, AM & PM - Small Fruit Sessions, January 23rd, AM - Blueberry Session). Contact: Phil Traino (609) 985-4382.

January 27, 28, 29, 1998 - Tri State Horticultural Meetings, Hershey Lodge & Convention Center, Hershey, PA. Contact: Bill Tietjen (908) 475-6505 or Jerome L. Frecon (609) 863-0110.

February 18, 1998 - South Jersey Fruit Meeting, Masso's Crystal Manor, S. Delsea Drive, Glassboro, NJ. Contact: Jerome L. Frecon (609) 863-0110.

February 22-25, 1998 - International Dwarf Fruit Tree Association Conference, Paseo, Washis1ton. Contact: Bruce Barrett (609) 663- 8181 or Charles Ox, Jr. (717) 837-1551.



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