

The Nutty News

Provided by the North Carolina Pecan Growers Association

May 12, 2007

IT'S REBOUND TIME

Weeks after being slammed by the Easter weekend deep freeze, without question, hope for a decent crop can be seen in the heavy crop of catkins and flower development. That is of course in some varieties, Stuart and Sumner leading the way. From what's been seen of these varieties would suggest that management might be in anticipation of a full crop. As Dr. Mike Parker has pointed out, pollination of the Stuart is a concern, based largely in the fact that Cape Fear, the superior pollinator, was the hardest hit and after four weeks, Cape Fear regrowth is very light.



Abundant crop of catkins in Stuart.

Picture taken on May 11.

Very poor catkins in other varieties

Stuart is a variety where there is slight overlap of pollen flow and female receptivity, meaning they can self-pollinate. But, self-pollination is never a good thing, lesser crop and inferior quality usually results. Sumner and Pawnee also provide pollen for the Stuart, but there are fewer orchards of these varieties.

In the business world an often-heard expression is: "Limit one's exposure". Another way of saying we should be looking at varieties with different growing characteristics for added assurance that some crop might be realized in any given year. For example, every few years a late freeze will hurt the Cape Fear, conversely, early freezes will occasionally hurt the late bearing Sumner.

All this to say, we have to work with the weather we have and attempt to make wise decisions in orchard design and planting, keeping in mind that diversity is very often a most desired approach to many things.

YOUNG TREES ARE AT RISK

If we were so inclined, lots of pictures could be shared of young pecan trees which have already given up and need replacing. The "deep freeze" was the harshest on trees up to five years of age. Those are the easy ones to make a call on. The difficult ones are those that will struggle and maybe recover but will take a long time. The decision

there will be whether to oversee the recovery or simply replace with a healthy tree. In the nursery, I have emptied lots of pots where the young trees were too damaged to wait and see what may happen in a year or so. Time and energy is better spent elsewhere.

Following are thoughts about what might be done to help young trees in their recovery.

- Don't over manage, help trees, not try to force them.
- Fertilize normal rates, include micro-nutrients.
- Water weekly, if rains are insufficient.
- Maintain vegetative growth free zone.
- Prune only to develop central leader.
- Spray to control bud moth and Ambrosia Beetle, Lorsban is effective for both.
- Treat as needed against eating insects, Sevin will be effective.
- Observe, learn how to manage future events.

MARCH 24 WORKSOP

The unseasonably warm and cloudless day helped to usher pecan growers from three states to the Associations 13 Th annual spring workshop at the Johnston County Extension Center in Smithfield and later at Alton Woodard's Pecan Nursery. Given the weather competition, NCPGA was well pleased with the number in attendance. The large number of favorable comments underscored the Associations focus of providing presentations from its members, Extension Professionals from N C State University and the N C Department of Agriculture.

For those taking the short trip to Woodard's Pecan Nursery, the growers heard presentations focused primarily of establishing pecan trees and early tree-training pruning techniques. Hands-on demonstrations and comments were provided on strengths and weakness of planing bare-rooted trees and the same for container grown trees.

The Association is indeed grateful for sponsor support which greatly underwrote the programs success. We are indeed appreciative for the very generous financial support from the N C Farm Bureau and their specialty crop representative, Ms. Debbie Hamrick who also joined the list of program presenters focusing on the '07 Farm Bill.

'08 SPRING WORKSHOP

With special thanks to NCPGA director, Tim Haithcock, the Wayne County Extension Center in Goldsboro has been secured for next years Spring Workshop. We have been promised that the facility will be reserved for Saturday February 16, 2008.

Members can also look forward to visiting a large Wayne County orchard under aggressive management which has not been used as a NCPGA demonstration orchard.

Wayne County trails slightly Sampson County as having the largest number of NCPGA members and it was in Wayne County the Association had its beginning in 1995.

MEMBERSHIP RESPONSES

The Association gratefully acknowledges the encouraging number of membership renewals received to date. We need membership suggestions and input and very important you're being involved with the Association and its programs. If you've not slowed enough to send your renewal, please be reminded to do so.

The editors of Pecan South and Pecan Grower have been sent lists to whom their respective magazines should be sent, beginning with their next issue. We need to know if anyone does not begin receiving their publication within the next month or so. Your subscription is for 12 months.

EMAIL ADDRESS

Thank you, thank you, for sharing your email addresses. For members who have not, we will continue provided the Nutty News by U S mail, no problem. The Nutty News by email using color pictures is not an issue. The but is, providing it by US mail where postage and copy cost is required. For example, providing an edition with two pages in color, including postage, that edition costs the Association at least \$2.00 for each copy mailed. While that's not huge, every nickel we can save will be used in more constructive ways.

PROFITS FROM INSURANCE

Growing pecans is the wrong business to be in if the motive is profit from crop insurance. But, given the weather sensitive nature of pecans and the long 200 plus day growing season, not to take advantage of the low cost NAP (Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program) may not suggest that one is "Limiting Their Exposure". The NAP is a federally funded program that "provides financial assistance to eligible producers affected by natural disasters". The Easter weekend freezes qualify. The NAP program is not intended to provide a profit, but it has and will continue to provide dollars to offset expenses incurred in affected crops. Monies received from NAP will not be huge, but when trying to recover cost, a little is better than zero.

On the other hand, available to N C pecan growers is Pecan Revenue Crop Insurance which can provide returns to help sustain a revenue stream somewhat

consistent with the farm crop history. The program available to N C growers is the very same as available to growers in Georgia, Alabama, Texas and other Southeastern states. More information is available on Pecan Revenue Crop Insurance at www.rma@usda.gov. As would be expected, the Pecan Revenue Crop Insurance program requires a very detailed history of the orchards, including documented yield and price history for the past several years.

CHEMICAL MOWING

With the cost of diesel fuel getting too close to \$3.00 a gallon, no stone can be left unturned to save even a fraction on fuel cost. It simply makes good sense in many respects to mow less and still not compromise having an ideal orchard floor to harvest from. Chemical cost is a factor in this decision, but with much cheaper Roundup alternatives available and one pass through the orchard with the herbicide sprayer will do the job for many weeks, several mowings. Even with very dense Bermuda growth, we have been able to groom the floor for mechanical harvesting, starting early in September.

According to NCSU's Wayne Mitchem comments last year during the orchard tour, a half-rate of roundup type product will stunt the growth leaving it green in color. The normal rate will, of course, result in complete burn-down.

PECAN FARMING EQUIPMENT

Often, we have shared that the Nutty News is available for listing pecan farming supplies and equipment. The service is offered at no cost and any interaction as a result of the listing is between interested parties, holding NCPGA in a "No Risk" position.

Accordingly, following are two items from NCPGA growers:

Frank Waldron who farms in Columbus County lists as follows: I need a shaker suitable for a 45 HP tractor and an aspirating cleaner. Frank's cell phone is 336-465-1120.

PECAN HARVEST FESTIVAL

The Association continues its planning to participate in the '07 N C Pecan Harvest Festival the first weekend in November. The two-day educational program directed toward lower school children in Columbus County will be held on the Thursday and Friday. The parade and day long festival on Saturday. We need lots of warm bodies for the three day event. Volunteers for any of the three-day program are needed. Please let us know which day(s) you can join us.

The Association continues to be deeply appreciative for the opportunity to partner with the Whiteville Downtown Development Commission in sponsoring the Festival. The visibility we enjoy and the educational programs provided help NCPGA to meet its mission as a non-profit educational Corporation.

ORCHARD TOUR '07

The Easter weekend deep freeze continues to be felt. Given the tree damages and anticipated '07 weak crop promises, the Association's directors have agreed to forgo the Orchard Tour for 2007. We were concerned about orchard conditions and questionable whether a suitable educational program sufficient to justify travel time and expenses.

Plans are to begin considerations for the 2008 demonstration tour during the next Board meeting.

Effect of Easter Temps on Pecans

Michael Parker, Tree Fruit Ext. Spec.

Department of Hort.Sc. N C S U

The impact of the cold temperatures during the Easter weekend on pecans is a question that we are all asking as we look at the trees that are now (hopefully) beginning to show a little green. However, this is a question that we cannot readily look up the answer to in production guides or scientific literature because it happens so infrequently. People have described this as a once in a 50 year storm or the perfect storm where all of the right circumstances of early budding and late cold temperatures came together. Thankfully this is something out of the ordinary and hopefully will not be repeated for at least another 50 years. We can look at the literature and find information on winter injury. However, what we are experiencing is a spring freeze where the trees are not dormant. There are two major questions that I have been receiving and am asking myself. The first question is what will happen to the trees and crop this year and the second question is what, if anything, can or should be done to avoid this problem in future years.

The question of what will happen to the trees this year is one that I do not have the answer to. I will share what I perceive will happen from what we are seeing and what I expect to happen. Dr. Darrell Sparks in his book "Pecan Cultivars - The Orchards Foundation" has a few comments on late spring freezes and references a similar event that occurred in 1955. During that event the cultivars that had the earliest budbreak had the greatest amount of tree injury which decreased to minor injury in the late breaking cultivars. They also

reported that there was greater injury in younger trees than in older trees. For this year it is too early to tell how much, if any, tree damage we may have received. Tree injury will show up this summer after we get several hot days and a period of mild stress. If tree injury shows up it will most likely be the most severe in younger trees. I think that the larger trees, although looking very bad after the freeze, will probably grow out of the situation as they appear to be doing. It is too early to comment on the crop for this year, although I am not optimistic for the cultivars with early budbreak such as Cape Fear or Desirable. The cultivars with late budbreak such as Stuart and Gloria Grande will probably fare much better and MAY have a crop. All this said, I reserve the right to change my mind at anytime as soon as the trees prove me wrong.

The second question addressing what should, if anything, be done to minimize this problem in the future is really a tough question. I would expect to see cultivar differences in how they respond to this freeze event. Should cultivars that break bud early, that have performed well in NC for many years, such as Cape Fear, Forkert, and Desirable (if sprayed) be discouraged from being planted due to a once in a 50 year storm? I would tend to say no at this time. We know that the potential for hurricanes is great in NC. And yet we still plant pecans even though there is a chance every fall that we could lose the trees or crop to tropical storms and/or hurricanes. We know that every cultivar has weaknesses and I would suggest that we understand the weakness of each cultivar and then manage the trees accordingly. I also think that the more cultivars that we can plant in the orchard is a way to diversify the risk from many different problems such as freeze, scab infections, tropical storms, etc.

To conclude, for the most part we are now in a "wait and see" situation, which is the hardest part for all of us to do at this time. The best thing you can do is to minimize the stress on the tree and not apply any additional fertilizers at this time to minimize excessive tree growth that

may result if the crop is lost. We should also make sure that we pay careful attention to what happens so that we can share our experiences and hopefully gain a better understanding of what happens after this freeze in case we see this type of situation again.

TIMELY TO DO LIST

Chemical Mow
Train young trees
Water young trees as needed
Fertilize as needed
If needed, apply Zinc
Finish Spring Grafting
Monitor for Bud Moth
Monitor for eating insects

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

It's better done, than said