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College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences

Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News

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A newsletter for commercial growers of fruit and vegetable crops

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." Aristotle

Address any questions or comments regarding this newsletter to the individual authors listed after each article or to its editor, Rick Weinzierl, 217-244-2126, weinzier@illinois.edu. The *Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News* is available on the web at: <http://www.ipm.illinois.edu/ifvn/index.html>. To receive email notification of new postings of this newsletter, call or write Rick Weinzierl at the number or email address above.

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University of Illinois Extension Specialists in Fruit & Vegetable Production & Pest Management

Upcoming Programs

- **Illinois Small Fruit and Strawberry Schools. March 2-3, 2010.** Mt Vernon Holiday Inn, Mt Vernon, IL. For more details, check the *Fruit Production and Pest Management* section of this issue or contact *Bronwyn Aly* (618-695-2444; baly@illinois.edu).
- **20th Annual Greenhouse Tomato Short Course. March 9-10, 2010.** Eagle Ridge Conference Center, Raymond, Mississippi. For more information, see <http://greenhousetomatosc.com> or contact Rick Snyder of Mississippi State University at 601-892-3731 or RickS@ra.msstate.edu.
- **International Herb Association Annual Meeting. July 11-15, 2010.** Collinsville, IL. (More details in future issues of this newsletter.)
- **2010 Sustainable Agriculture Tours**
 - **May 27, The Business of Vermiculture**, Wilken Farms, Iroquois County
 - **June 18, Feeding Universities Sustainably**, Farmer Brown's Production Company and Mulberry Hill Farm, Jackson County
 - **July 26, Illinois Berries**, J & J Berry Farm, Jersey County
 - **August 13, Romance Tour – Flowers and Wine**, Bright Flower Nursery and Famous Fossil Vineyard & Winery, Jo Daviess County and Stephenson County
 - **September 15, Agritourism – Farm Fresh Fun**, Country Corner, Henry County

A fee of \$20 per person will be charged for each tour, which includes lunch. This year two adults pay \$30 when registered together and children under the age of 10 attend free. Registration at least one week in advance is required. Visit http://web.extension.illinois.edu/smallfarm/ag_tours.cfm to register and for more details about each of the tours including a map and agenda. To register by phone, contact Donna Cray at 217-241-4644. For more information, contact Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant (217-968-5512; cvnghgrm@illinois.edu).

Regional Updates

In the southern region, aside from February 18th, which was not quite short sleeve weather (but close), the last month has wet and cold. Fortunately, most of the rain fell when temps were above freezing, but for the most part cold temperatures have always followed, making ground condition unsuitable for most winter operations – such as horseradish harvest.

Based on upstream snowpack in the Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois river basins, and on forecast rainfall over the next two weeks to three months, the National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office is predicting near even or greater than even chances for flooding along most of the rivers in the St. Louis service area (Mississippi River from above Canton, Missouri to above Cape Girardeau, Missouri, the Missouri river above Jefferson City Missouri to its Confluence with the Mississippi river, the Illinois River downstream from Beardstown, Illinois to its confluence with the Mississippi River, and for tributary rivers in eastern Missouri and west central and southwest Illinois) over the next 90 days. Probabilities indicate significant flooding is likely at all points along the Mississippi river from Quincy to Winfield, indicating greater chances of significant flooding along the Mississippi river than at this same time in 2008 when major flooding developed in the summer along the Mississippi river north of Alton. More than expected rainfall could cause additional flooding over the area. For additional information as it becomes available, check: <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lx/>.

I have learned a few more details related to the USDA-NRCS “seasonal high tunnel” pilot program in Illinois which is being administered through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that was mentioned in issue 15:16. The 3-year pilot project will research and establish conservation benefits and issues associated with use of the practice, and interested producers must submit an EQIP application and follow specific NRCS rules and standards in order to qualify and receive technical and financial assistance. To be eligible to participate, you need to have an FSA farm number (crops reported to FSA) and/or farm receipts for an eligible commodity of \$1,000.00 per year for two out of the last five years. Under program rules, participating farms can receive funding for one or more seasonal high tunnels. Financial assistance for high tunnels is limited to 5% of one acre, or 2,178 square feet, approximately equivalent to a 30 by 72 foot structure, for each farming operation—equivalent to approximately \$2.65 a square foot with a maximum of \$5,772.00. **Participation in the seasonal high tunnel pilot is limited to operations where commodity crops were grown previously, and the same crops will be grown again in the high tunnel structure.** Recipients must provide annual reports each year to track the performance of the pilot practice, which is in the form of a workbook that tracks expenses and income related to the high tunnel.

See your local USDA-NRCS office for a complete list, but here are just a few of the participating companies: Haygrove Tunnels <http://www.haygrove.co.uk/>; Atlas Greenhouse Systems <http://www.atlasgreenhouse.com/>; Farmtek <http://www.farmtek.com/farm/supplies/home>; Poly-tex <http://www.poly-tex.com/>; and AgraTech <http://www.agra-tech.com/menu.php>.

Elizabeth Wahle (618-692-9434; wahle@illinois.edu)

In northern Illinois, winter has seemed harsh to many, but to our crops, it hasn't been too bad. The coldest temperatures we've seen in northern Illinois this year (so far!) have been mild. At St Charles we haven't been colder than -10°F. Tender trees and shrubs such as peaches or blackberries should come into spring with viable flower buds and good crop potential ... that is, if they survived the previous winter and summer! Moisture levels in the soil should be good, so cover crops should be healthy if they were established in a timely manner. Soil conditions for planting should start out very good as well.

At this time of year growers' plans should have been largely determined and some work begun in greenhouses. It's still too early to plant in high tunnels, but transplants for high-tunnel production need to be started if they have not yet. Tomatoes in high tunnels can be planted as transplants in the tunnel by mid-April in northern Illinois. Spring greens can be started earlier. If the tunnel needs a new layer of plastic, it's time to be ready to go if the weather permits. Calm days are rare in spring, and if one occurs in early March, you may not want to miss the opportunity to get the structure covered.

It's close to starting time for some greenhouse vegetables. The alliums and celery should have been started by now. It won't be long before peppers need to be started, and some growers should be getting their cole crops started soon. But it's still too early for field tomatoes and way too early for cucurbit crops.

How likely are we to have late blight in tomatoes this year? How likely is it we'll have a severe problem with any other disease this year? It's hard to say, as the weather going into the season plays a large role in determining disease potential. But it doesn't hurt to be ready. The fact that we saw certain problems last year suggests we need to be ready if they reappear. Winter – and it's still not over – is a good time to read some literature and deepen your understanding of the risks you face as a commercial grower.

The longer days and warmer sunshine point to the return of good growing conditions and another opportunity in the cycle of seasons. There is a lot of twittering out there and some of it is birds. All of us who work with commercial growers (risk managers!) wish you success and a kinder season in 2010.

Bill Shoemaker (630-584-7254, wshoemak@illinois.edu)

Organic production guides available from Cornell University

Cornell University and the New York State IPM program recently posted a new organic production guide for apples, and it's the best such publication I've ever seen. I often tell organic growers that there is a wealth of information for them in "conventional" publications, and the reverse is true in this case. The new organic apple production guide from Cornell has lots of great background information for conventional growers as well, particularly those who are just starting out or not yet very experienced.

In total, there are 11 organic guides currently available from the NYS IPM at http://nysipm.cornell.edu/organic_guide/. The available guides cover apples, blueberries, grapes, strawberries, beans, carrots, cole crops, cucumbers and squash, lettuce, peas, potatoes, and spinach.

Rick Weinzierl (217-244-2126; weinzier@illinois.edu)

Fruit Production and Pest Management

Illinois Small Fruit and Strawberry Schools, March 2-3, 2010

A last-minute repeat announcement ... The 2010 Illinois Small Fruit and Strawberry Schools are coming up soon, and as always, they are designed to provide information to help producers successfully grow and market these crops. Bernard Zandstra, Michigan State University, will be providing information on weed control options for blueberries and brambles as well as outlining what's new in strawberry weed control. Stephanie Rhodes, Bloomington Communications, will discuss marketing strategies for selling small fruit, and important information on GAP programs also will be presented. The Illinois Small Fruit School will include presentations on insect and weed management, cultural practices, and variety information. Two grower presentations will cover topics ranging from growing and selling blueberries to bramble establishment guidelines. The Illinois Strawberry School will provide information for both matted-row and plasticulture growers. Topics will include pest management, variety selection, and marketing. A grower panel will discuss and review the 2009 season. The pre-registration fee of \$30 per farm family includes admission to the educational sessions and trade show as well as one copy of both the *2010 Midwest Commercial Small Fruit and Grape Spray Guide* and 2010 Proceedings. **Pre-registration cards need to be mailed by February 25, 2010.** The on-site registration fee will be \$35 per farm family. Complete program information and registration forms are available at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/regions/hort/hort2.htm>. For more information, contact Bronwyn Aly at the University of Illinois Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, Rt. 1, Box 256, Simpson, IL 62985.

Bronwyn Aly (618-695-2444; baly@illinois.edu)

Dormant Pruning in Vineyards

As winter begins to transition to spring, grape growers must get their vineyards ready for production. Obviously, dormant pruning is a key task. Let's go over the reasons dormant pruning is necessary and how to get it done.

During the growing season, grapevines produce buds at every node on actively growing shoots. For mature vines, most of those buds will have flowers that will open and produce next year's crop. When those shoots begin to shift into dormancy in the fall, they become canes. The buds also sink into full dormancy as the cold temperatures of winter move in. The following spring, as temperatures warm, and if winter did not damage them, those buds begin to swell and break open, allowing a shoot to begin growing. That is how grapevines survive winter and fulfill their perennial destiny. But without pruning, they will just become wild vines as every bud grows into a shoot and a tangled mess.

Pruning is a practice which gives the grape grower an opportunity to manage how the vine will grow during the next growing season. It is essentially making the decision of which of last year's buds will get to grow into this year's crop, and therefore which ones must be removed (pruned). This is due to the fact that growers need only a small percentage of the viable buds to produce an optimum crop. So at the basis for decision making for pruning dormant grapes is the knowledge that a certain number of buds must remain when pruning is finished on each plant. All the other buds will be removed.

But there is another key consideration. Grapevines have an amazing capacity for growth. The grower must manage that growth into an efficient form for production. So trellis and training systems are chosen which favor both the grower and the vine. But the grower must successfully manage the vine in that system. Pruning is the pre-season effort to prepare the plant to grow and produce in that system. It properly sets the stage for the coming growth cycle, making it easier for the grower to manage the crop.

The trellis and training system is designed to arrange the parts of the plant to ensure it grows well and produces a fine crop. Cordons (arms) are permanent structures that support the renewing wood of the plant. In spur training systems, spurs are semi-permanent wood which is used to produce the next year's foliage and crop. These are created by cutting back canes and leaving 2-3 buds to grow. A series of spurs are left on each cordon to arrange the growth in a manageable system. The shoots which form that growth come from the buds on those spurs.

In cane training systems, there are no cordons. The only permanent wood is the trunk. There are spurs at the top of the trunk which produce the shoots which become next year's canes. All but one of those canes is removed and the remaining cane is cut to length and tied to the trellis wire. The buds which occur at each node will produce shoots and later, fruit. A spur is left from one of the canes that was cut off. That spur will produce new canes for next season's production. Cane systems usually leave fewer buds and give the grower a means for managing excessively vigorous varieties.

Dormant pruning must be finished before the beginning of the growing season. While cuts can be made after budbreak without harming the vine, the new emerging shoots are weak and can easily be knocked off. So pruning after budbreak can result in many damaged shoots, defeating the purpose of proper pruning.

There is much more to learn about pruning and how it fits into trellis and training systems. An excellent resource for learning more about pruning and grape growing in general is the Midwest Grape Production Guide from Ohio State University. Many Extension offices can help find the publication, and it can be downloaded from the internet at no charge from <http://ohioline.osu.edu/b919/>. Scroll to the bottom for a link to the pdf version of the publication.

Bill Shoemaker, (630-584-7254, wshoemak@illinois.edu)

New fact sheet on grape phylloxera

Donn Johnson of the University of Arkansas has posted an excellent new fact sheet on grape phylloxera. It's available at: http://www.uaex.edu/Other_Areas/publications/PDF/FSA-7074.pdf.

Rick Weinzierl (217-244-2126; weinzier@illinois.edu)

Survey on grower's needs in order to scale up to wholesale production

I'm including an on-line and printed version of a survey prepared by Jim Slama and Family-Farmed.org on the desire, readiness, and barriers to readiness of Illinois growers to scale up production and participate to a greater degree in wholesale markets. Please take a look at the introduction to the survey, and if you're interested, complete the online or printed version.

Rick Weinzierl (217-244-2126; weinzier@illinois.edu)

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Are you ready to grow? “Locally-grown” is one of the nation’s hottest food trends, and it presents Illinois growers with significant revenue opportunities. Wholesale customers are ready to buy, but today there isn’t enough Illinois-grown produce to meet their demand. A new study seeks to understand the barriers that keep growers from increasing their participation in wholesale markets and discover ways to remove those barriers.

With funding from the Illinois Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Cop Block Grant, FamilyFarmed.org is researching how to enhance the competitiveness of IL-grown produce by assessing and addressing stakeholders’ needs in regards to scaling up wholesale-level production. To begin the process, FamilyFarmed.org is conducting an assessment of the IL fruit and vegetable industry to find out what 2009 actual and 2010 planned production levels are, what barriers keep growers from scaling up production for wholesale markets, and possible ideas to remove or lessen such barriers.

Your perspectives and ideas are critical to the study. Please go to

www.FamilyFarmed.org/RTGSurvey <http://www.FamilyFarmed.org/RTGSurvey>

and complete a 10-minute survey by March 19. If you have received a printed copy of this newsletter by US Mail, the survey is included, and you can fill it out by hand and return it by US Mail.

Participation as a stakeholder ensures your voice is heard in this data and information gathering stage. The summary results of this survey and select follow-up interviews will inform a set of recommendations that will be submitted to the State of Illinois on how to best respond to the identified needs. It will also inform a feasibility study that is being conducted to determine if a central IL packhouse that aggregates, packs, markets, and distributes fruits and vegetables might be helpful in reducing certain barriers.

Questions? Please contact Jim Slama, Project Director of Ready to Grow, at 708-763-9920 or info@familyfarmed.org.

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Less seriously ... what's in a word?

ADULT: A person who has stopped growing at both ends and is now growing in the middle.

CANNIBAL: Someone who is fed up with people.

COMMITTEE: A body that keeps minutes and wastes hours.

DUST: Mud with the juice squeezed out.

EGOTIST: Someone who is usually me-deep in conversation.

HANDKERCHIEF: Cold Storage.

INFLATION: Cutting money in half without damaging the paper.

MOSQUITO: An insect that makes you like other flies better.

RAISIN: Grape with a sunburn.

SECRET: Something you tell to one person at a time.

SKELETON: A bunch of bones with the person scraped off.

TOOTHACHE: The pain that drives you to extraction.

TOMORROW: One of the greatest labor saving devices of today.

YAWN: An honest opinion openly expressed.

WRINKLES: Something other people have, similar to my character lines.

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