

Implementation Programs

Update on the Integrated Fruit Production (IFP) Program in Northern Oregon

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In the fall of 1994, an IFP Committee sponsored by the Hood River Grower Shipper Association was formed to explore how the Mid-Columbia fruit industry could benefit from an IFP program and what could be done to familiarize growers with the concepts and ideas of IFP. The IFP Committee has taken leadership in the development of this program and its implementation. This industry committee consists of growers, packers, consultants and university research and extension personnel and is responsible for the pace and direction of program implementation. IFP Guidelines which spell out the specifics of the program were developed by this committee in 1994 and are updated annually. The IFP Committee also developed an IFP Label which will first be used for the 1997 crop and will appear on fruit boxes from several packing houses.

The adoption of production practices which are in agreement with the goals and principles of IFP depends on well-trained growers. Therefore, a major goal of this project is educational, to inform growers about the aims of IFP, to demonstrate to them the potential benefits and also costs of IFP, and to assist the industry in the development of IFP Guidelines as an essential step for a future IFP certification and marketing program. Oregon State University and the Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center play a supportive role in the development and implementation of the IFP program, primarily in the areas of grower education and data gap research. The principal vehicles for grower training are IFP Workshops which are held annually at various times of the year. These workshops deal with topics such as tree nutrition, leaf and soil analysis, orchard ecology, ground cover management, concentrate vs. dilute and tree-row-volume spraying, pest and disease management, and postharvest problems. An IFP Newsletter which is published as needed and is sent to all growers in the area provides growers with summaries of the workshops, minutes of IFP Committee meetings, and other IFP topics of interest. An IFP Web Site is also under development and will provide linkages to similar sites on the internet. On-farm research is also an integral part of the IFP program to demonstrate to growers the nuts and bolts of IFP and alternative production practices which growers may wish to incorporate in their orchard operation. IFP Demonstration Orchards were established at four sites in the Hood River Valley for that purpose. A permanent IFP site will be set up in 1998 at the Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center for research demonstrations and as a teaching tool. A major goal in the educational arena for 1998 will be to improve sprayer calibration and introduce tree-row-volume spraying to the industry. We expect that this effort will result in lower and more efficient pesticide use.

The IFP Committee is presently involved in a number of projects to help with the implementation of the IFP program. A major effort was the development of a computerized standard spray record system (funded by the EPA Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program) which will be used by all growers and packers in our district. This spray record system was just completed for IBM PC users. A Macintosh version will be added in the coming year. This system will allow us to track pesticide use as pest management practices change and the industry begins to adopt the IFP program. With the expanding IFP acreage in the valley, fruit grown under IFP practices will be available and can be identified and sold with an IFP label. In 1998, IFP-labeled fruit from the Hood River district will be test marketed in cooperation with The Food Alliance.

The implementation of the IFP program is proceeding at a faster pace than originally anticipated. The fruit industry is showing a strong interest in this program as evidenced by the support it has received by the local grower organization and packing houses over the last several years. It is hoped that the marketplace will reward the fruit growers in the Hood River district for their effort for using ecologically safer production practices and for being environmentally conscious stewards of the land they farm.