

NewsWatch Briefs

Ascochyta blight found in Montana chickpeas

Ascochyta blight has been identified on chickpeas in Montana, near Bozeman, Billings and Sidney. The rapidly spreading disease is favored by cool, wet conditions such as Montana has been experiencing, says Mary Burrows, Montana State University Extension plant pathologist. Burrows says producers with chickpeas should be prepared to spray at least twice with fungicides during the growing season to control the blight. Because the disease can spread very rapidly, producers should spray a fungicide at the first sign of disease. Small kabuli and desi chickpeas are generally less susceptible to the blight, so fewer fungicide applications may be necessary than for large kabuli chickpeas, says Burrows. For more information, a fact sheet is available online at highplainsipm.org/HpIPMSearch/Docs/AscochytaBlight-Chickpea.htm.

Potato associations receive WSDA grants

Two potato organizations were among the recipients of 14 grants totaling more than \$200,000 from the Washington State Department of Agriculture. The grants will help promote Washington's food and ag industry with marketing and trade projects over the next year. The Skagit Red Potato Growers' Association in Burlington will receive \$15,000 to promote Skagit's red potatoes at the Produce Marketing Association Trade Show in Houston this October. The Washington State Potato Commission will receive \$10,000 to conduct an analysis of fresh potato profitability and Canadian currency exchange for Washington fresh potatoes sold to the Canadian market.

Ladders raise orchard injuries



NURSE MURF

By HELEN MURPHY

ORCHARD injuries are a major agricultural health and safety issue in Washington state, accounting for 45% to 58% of workers compensation claims. Because Washington is the No. 1 producer of apples, pears and cherries, this is an especially important concern.

To help workers in this industry, the Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center delved into the issue. To develop solutions, questions centered on the types of injuries, costs and circumstances of the accidents.

Step 1 was to examine all the Washington State Department of Labor and Industry's claims filed from 1996 to 2001 from the state's main tree fruit regions. This yielded 13,068 claims. Ladders were the No. 1 cause of orchard injuries, accounting for almost a third of all claims (4,020) and costing \$21.5 million over a six-year period.

Sprain and strains were the

most common consequence from ladder accidents, but fractures and dislocations were more costly, accounting for \$7.9 million as a group. Examples of the stated causes on the claims were unstable placement of the ladder, overextension of the ladder's third leg, slipping while descending and being struck by a falling ladder.

To learn the circumstances leading to accidents, detailed stories were collected from 35 workers who had filed a ladder injury claim. Ladder movement was a contributing cause for more than half (65%) of the injuries and the main cause in 47%. More falls occurred on the upper third of the ladder than in the middle or lower positions. Slipping accounted for a quarter of the cases. Here is an example of an account:

The worker was picking apples on a 10-foot ladder on the seventh step with a full bag of apples. The worker was beginning to descend the ladder and turned to the right so that his back or side was to the rungs. The left foot slipped from the ladder, and the worker grabbed the ladder with one hand and was left hanging. The



PLATFORM PICKERS: Using platforms, instead of ladders, is one way the tree fruit industry hopes to reduce accidents.

hand was injured as well as the back. The worker attributed the injuries and severity to the weight of the bag, the slippery conditions and frosty weather. The three-legged ladder was set with the third leg to the outside of the tree.

These stories, while vivid and informative, only came from a small group of workers who filed a claim and were willing to be interviewed.

Solutions under way

To determine circumstances leading to ladder injuries, a larger group of 180 workers was questioned.

About 110, or 60%, reported that they had experienced an injury while working in the orchard; the majority (78%) of these involved a ladder. Among the factors workers felt contributed most to injuries were ladders in poor condition, shifting weight of produce, bags and equipment in the way, poor weather, uneven terrain, and production pressures.

Several solutions are under development. The first is an engineering approach: replacing

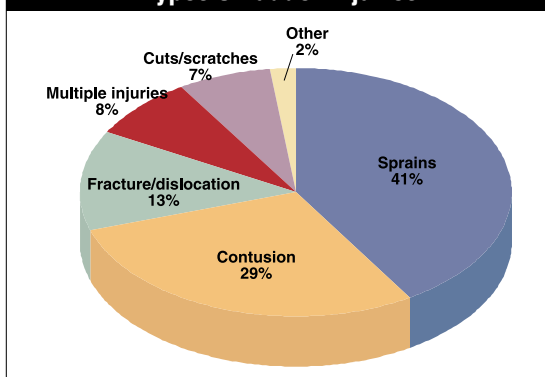
ladders with mobile platforms. This is rapidly being adopted by the tree fruit industry. Extension officers report increased productivity, fewer physical demands, and no accidents or claims filed to date related to platform work.

Until growers convert orchards to platform use, many will still need to use ladders. Final prototype testing is under way on a new "smart ladder" with sensors that provide information on the dynamic forces that lead to ladder falls.

The ladder can be equipped with warning signals to alert custom workers to the stability limits of the three-legged ladder. This will help workers understand what risky activities or overreaching should be avoided.

A third solution is a new bag for fruit harvest that reduces the weight load for workers. The new bag, developed by researchers in New York state orchards, will be field-tested in Washington this fall.

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Types of ladder injuries**Western Close-up**

Gray is recuperating from injuries sustained in an accident at the center in July 2005.

"The time has finally come to say goodbye," he stated in a letter to friends and colleagues. "There is so much to be thankful for and really not enough words to express my appreciation to all of you who have made my tenure at the Powell R&E Center so fulfilling and successful. Be assured, my job would have been impossible if not for you."

Wiemer new chairwoman of wheat committee

The Wheat Foods Council recently appointed Kathy Wiemer as its 2007-08 executive committee chairwoman. Wiemer

is a registered dietitian and director of nutrition for the Bell Institute of Health & Nutrition, a division of General Mills. Outgoing chairman Tom Mick, CEO of the Washington Wheat Commission, will continue to serve on the council's executive committee along with Hans Hayden, wheat producer and Idaho Wheat Commission representative, and Betsy Faga, president of North American Millers' Association.

Group travels to D.C. to discuss potatoes

Washington State Potato Commission's executive director, Chris Voigt, and grower Mike Pink joined other members of the Family Farm

Alliance in Washington, D.C., for an intense two days of meetings with congressional staff and administration officials. Meetings with USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Services focused on impacts of rapid urban development on agricultural lands and how challenges to agricultural water supplies are now amplified as a result of energy production and climate change issues.

Tree fruit industry awards 100-plus scholarships

The Washington Apple Education Foundation awarded 104 scholarships this year to outstanding young people in Washington's tree fruit districts.

In total these scholarships represent about \$175,000 in scholastic aid. "The commitment of the industry to its families and young people is without question. These awards help ensure students whose families are involved in the industry have the opportunity to attend higher education, especially considering rising tuition costs of the past few years," stated WAEF chairman Roger Calhoun. For more, visit www.waef.org.

'Ag Books for Kids' winners announced

Students from across Wyoming were recently recognized for their participation in the 2007 Wyoming Farm Bureau "Ag Books for Kids" contests. The

contests yielded roughly 1,900 entries in three categories: coloring contest for kindergarten and first grade; poster contest for second- and third-graders; and a book report contest for fourth- and fifth-graders. For more information and names of the winners, visit www.wyfb.org and click on "News."

Crowder fund launched

The Washington Apple Education Foundation has established a fund for the Rick Crowder family. Crowder, an industry leader, was diagnosed with stage-four cancer. Donations may be sent to the WAEF, P.O. Box 3720, Wenatchee, WA 98807.