August - September 2006

CONTENTS

Upcoming Events

Workshops, Seminars and Field Days

Comments

Cultural Practices

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Foliar Iron Applications Update for Tropical Fruit Crops (Using iron sulfate foliar sprays to prevent/correct iron deficiency)
Thursday, August 24, 2006, 11:00 a.m.
Field Demonstration at TREC

Interamerican Society for Tropical Horticulture
San Juan, Puerto Rico
September 24-29, 2006

General Standards Pesticide Training
Wednesday, September 27, 2006; 8:30-5:00
John D. Campbell Ag Center
Pre-registration required, 305/248-3311 x 242

AGRI-Council BBQ
Saturday, September 30, 2006
6:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m.
Harris Field Pavilion (US1 & 312 Street, Homestead)
Honoring: Ray Timmons and John LaPradd

Internet Resource Training for Growers (Hands on training)
Wednesday, October 4, 2006; 10:00 - Noon
Tropical Research & Education Center
(FREE Training but Pre-registration required, 305/248-3311 x 225)

Carlos F. Balerdi, Ph.D.
Extension Agent IV
Miami-Dade County
Cooperative Extension Service
University of Florida
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Consumer Services Department
18710 SW 288 Street
Homestead, FL 33030-2309
Telephone: 305.248.3311 Ext. 233
Fax: 305.246.2932

It is the policy of Miami-Dade County to comply with all the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For sign language interpreter services, call (305) 670-9099 five days in advance. For material in accessible format call the Consumer Services Department (CSD). For ADA complaints, call CSD at (305) 375-3566.
COMMENTS

AVOCADO harvesting began with very good returns to growers. Fruit is scarce. Some growers say they may have 50% of a normal crop depending on varieties. Others say it is less than 25% of a crop. Most “Donnie” growers say they did not have a crop. This variety can produce good crops but experience with it is showing it to be an unreliable producer. Simmonds growers are saying they had a good crop. Many growers say they also have a crop (Lula, Tonnage, Monroe). The initial prediction in the spring was about 33% of a crop. Hopefully it may turn out to be closer to 50% which will be very good for the industry. If you have mid season varieties try to harvest early on the first picking date to avoid competition with the Dominican Republic. Since we do not have a good crop, prices should hold at a good to very good level.

They have some problems in the Dominican Republic too. One very important one is the lack of quality control at the nursery level. I had a group of Dominicans visitors about two months ago and they were complaining that local inspectors were stopping some shipments for not having the right cultivar declared. I reminded them of the problem with variety identification and mixed varieties in their groves. I showed them the Marcus, they identified it as their Choquette. Naturally, this helped me prove our point that they need to know exactly how our cultivars look to avoid problems with their shipments.

If economically possible, follow all maintenance recommendations so your trees have maximum recovery by the time next late fall comes. There are still many trees that have not recovered from hurricane damage and I know all of you need a good crop next year. This is a good time to apply minor element sprays and iron chelate drenches plus your granular fertilizer to get trees in good shape.

MANGO harvesting is over. There was a smaller production than avocados. There were lots of imports from Mexico with Tommy Atkins and now Kents and Champagne (a selection of the Manila mango). As always, it is difficult to compete with imports unless you sell to specialty markets or sell the mangos for the green market where there still is an opportunity to make some money because of low maintenance costs and good prices.

Some growers are happy with growing mangos for the green market. They tell me they are making money. Some growers sell some for the green market and some for the ripe market. If you had mangos for the ripe market this year you probably made good money.

LYCHEE prices were very good but there were very few lychees to sell as most growers had no production. A lot of lychee groves do not look good. There are several reasons: trees have not recovered from hurricane damage; growers cannot afford the maintenance costs so they are cutting on maintenance items like nutrition (dry fertilizer, foliar micro nutrients and iron chelate drenches) and trees are infested with the lychee bark scale which is probably the most damaging scale we have in all tropical fruit crops. You MUST control this scale as, if uncontrolled, it will kill your trees and
spread to others very fast. Many growers are not pleased with the returns they have gotten from lychees for the last five years and a few have taken the trees out to grow something else. I heard that China was delivering lychees to the West Coast at very low prices. The price per pound our growers pay is high to just pick the fruit how can growers compete in the general markets? The conclusion is that our lychee industry is in trouble unless growers find market alternatives other than the general market to sell their fruit—not an easy thing to do, specially when growers do not have the expertise or are not willing to do it themselves. Do not plant any more lychees.

The LONGAN crop is also very low. I see, as I write this Newsletter, many groves where apparently, growers have used the fertilizer potassium chlorate to induce offseason blooms. Others may be waiting until a little later to induce blooms. The normal crop (mid-late July and August) is very light. Hopefully, prices will be good. The use of potassium chlorate gives a tool to longan growers to induce blooms that unfortunately, lychee growers do not have. Furthermore, longans are much better adapted to our growing conditions and soil; are less susceptible to insect and disease problems and are higher yielding than lychees.

MAMEY SAPOTES were severely affected by the hurricanes and the 2006 and 2007 crops will be reduced. As a result, prices for growers have been good—much higher than in several previous seasons. The fruit looks fair to rough in the markets because of wind damage from the hurricanes but there is a good demand for both damaged and non-damaged fruit. Prices will be high for the 2006 and 2007 seasons. Good growers are giving good maintenance to their trees and it is now difficult to see the damage from the 2005 hurricanes. This crop responds very well to good maintenance. Remember to prune as soon as you have finished picking. Keeping mamey tree size at 14-16 feet high is extremely important to minimize wind damage and for easy picking.

BANANA groves where plants were very small during Wilma are doing well. Thai banana is one of the most popular types planted in our area now. They bring higher prices than the imported or local frying types even though they are susceptible to Panama disease. Be extremely careful with the source of suckers for planting as if the “mother” block where you get suckers is infected with Panama disease it is almost certain you will have the disease in your planting. Once you get the disease in your planting, plants will keep getting the disease as the fungus causing the disease can live in the soil for years. Tissue cultured plants are the safest but you need to keep them free of the disease while you grow the tissue cultured plants to desirable planting size.

PAPAYA plantings were destroyed by the hurricanes. I have not seen many new plantings this year and imports from Mexico and Central America are supplying the markets. A few local papaya are being marketed now.

GUAVA plantings are back in production. Soon, production will reach the same level as that of pre hurricanes. Volume is increasing now and will keep doing so until late September. Prices were very high in the spring and early summer and are still high now. This is a high maintenance crop but most growers are doing well since it is also a high yielding crop and this, combined with good prices, specially offseason crop prices, is still a good business for those that are not afraid of high maintenance costs. Be extremely careful when shipping, specially to Western states, as one insect can stop the shipment from reaching the buyer. It has happened many times. Bagged or non-bagged fruit need to be carefully examined
before shipping. Both, red and white guava growers are doing well. Most guava groves should have a life expectancy of 8-10 years. High consideration should be given to removing the trees after 8-10 years and if possible, plant somewhere else or use other crops for 1-3 years as rotations.

**CARAMBOLA** harvesting is slowly picking up as we approach the end of August and September high volume season. Groves in Pine Island are in excellent shape. Local groves are in fair shape and never look as good as those in the acid sands of Pine Island. There is a small group of local growers that have been successful and have a profitable carambola operation. As with mameys, prices have stabilized, growers have learned to grow them and if well cared, carambolas like avocado, mamey and guava are very productive. Quality and appearance in the markets need to improve. The fruit is so delicate that a lot of fruits are not packable and the result is a poor pack out which may be 50% or less.

**SAPODILLA** trees are recovering from hurricane damage but production is not good. Hopefully by the fall, trees will be recovered and will be ready to produce normal crops. Several growers complained that they are getting blooms but almost no fruit set. Be sure you check for moth damage because it damage the blooms and small fruits. If present, you need to control this moth.

There is some potential for this crop if you learn to grow and market it. There is only a very small group of growers growing sapodilla with a small total acreage planted.

**PITAYAS** are in season right now with picking going on as I write these lines. The normal season is from now until mid fall. I hear that there is quite a bit of variability in the quality of the fruit. This is probably due to the many different clones being planted which may have a similar appearance, but differ widely in quality and also to management practices. I think production is going to be reduced, at least in the early season due to hurricane damage but later on, yields will be normal. Prices are good. Be sure to find friends up North that can tell you how much they are being sold at the retail level to be sure you are getting your fair share on price/pound. You are taking all the risks! Do your homework and you will get more for your fruit!

---

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

For crops you have finished harvesting already, hedge and top now (lychee, mango, early avocados). The sooner you do pruning the better for trees to replenish their carbohydrates and minerals. Also, trees will have less tendency to flush with leaves in the pre bloom period (late October - January). Top at 14-16 feet height and leave an open middle of 6-8 feet. It is better to hedge at an angle from the vertical to allow for more light penetration. The bottom of trees should be wider than the tops. The angle should not be more than 10° from the vertical. This is a good time to apply foliage nutritional sprays (late March-September). Try to attend the field demonstration at TREC on the use of iron sulfate sprays. They are getting good results. See Upcoming Events. Remember that trees have lost a lot of mineral nutrients and you need to supply them to the leaves to be
absorbed. In our high alkaline soils, minor elements applied to the soil (manganese, zinc, copper, iron sulfate) cannot be absorbed by the roots or just a minimal amount is absorbed. A total of 2-4 minor element sprays per year needs to be applied to all tropical fruit trees. You must apply chelated ferrous (iron) sulfate for alkaline soils as a soil drench since very little iron is taken up by the leaves. Apply 2 to 4 oz/tree/year. The best time is from now to September. Be sure to calibrate your equipment so you apply the correct amount, not more or less. You could take leaf samples now and send them to the laboratory for analysis to see the nutrient level status of your fruit trees.

Weeds are growing fast, faster than you can keep them under control but this is a must now or you will have a lot of work later. Keep up with herbicide spraying, mowing and vine removal. Keep up the monthly copper sprays for mid and late season avocados if you have a crop. Prune your trees as soon as the crop is finished or immediately, if you do not have a crop and your grove needs pruning. The pruning options are by hand or using the topper/hedger.

For some crops, apply fertilizer evenly throughout the year (guava, papaya, mamey, carambola, banana, coconut, etc.) For others (lychee, longan, avocado, mango, etc.) do the last application immediately after harvesting and pruning to give trees time to put out 1 or 2 flushes before they go to rest into the pre bloom season in late fall and winter. Usually, no fertilizer is applied after September. At that time (late September/early October) drastically reduce your irrigation too help trees of the latter crops go into rest.

If you have scale problems sometimes common in lychee, mango, longan, etc. apply a scalicide immediately after pruning so to get maximum spray penetration into the canopy.

I hope you have already **REAPPLIED** (if you did not get the exemption) for your agricultural tax exemption because the deadline is very close. This is extremely important. From now on, keep receipts of anything you buy, contract, etc. Keep track of your costs, even if you do most or all of the grove maintenance. Give a value to your labor, picking, tractor, mower, fertilizers, sprayer, etc. and how many times per year you do these practices so you can calculate the cost per year. Go to Dr. Edward Evans website and you will find an easy way of calculating your costs (website: http://agec-con-trec.ifas.ufl.edu/CostandReturn.htm. Related economic analysis links can be found at this site.

Have all of your hurricane preparedness equipment ready and enough gas for irrigation and motorize equipment. I hope you do not have to use them. Strongly consider buying insurance as it has helped growers repair the damaged trees. There is only a short time when it is available. Call FSA or check with local insurance reps that sell it.

Pictures by Ian Maguire, TREC