



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Tropical Fruit Growers Newsletter

October - December 2001

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Tropical Fruit Growers Newsletter

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UPCOMING EVENTS

1. Papaya Growers Seminar / Field Day

When: Wednesday, December 5, 2001,
10:00 a.m. - 12 noon

Where: Conference Room and Field, TREC,
18905 SW 280 St, Homestead

Phone: (305) 246-7001, x290 or x350

2. Weather Update , Predictions and Preparations for the Winter

When: Thursday, December 6, 2001,
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Where: Miami-Dade Extension Service - John
Campbell Agricultural Center, 18710
SW 288 St, Homestead

3. New/Novice Grower Freeze Protection Seminar

When: Wednesday, December 12, 2001,
7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Where: Conference Room, TREC,
18905 SW 280 St, Homestead

4. Growing Lychees

When: Wednesday, January 23, 2002,
1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Where: Miami-Dade Extension Service - John
Campbell Agricultural Center, 18710
SW 288 St, Homestead

5. Growing Longans

When: Wednesday, February 20, 2001,
1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Where: Miami-Dade Extension Service - John
Campbell Agricultural Center, 18710
SW 288 St, Homestead

6. Weeds and Weed Management

When: Thursday, March 14, 2001,
10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Where: Miami-Dade Extension Service - John
Campbell Agricultural Center, 18710
SW 288 St, Homestead

Sponsored by: Monsanto, Lunch included,
RSVP required

Phone: (305) 248-3311, x242

COMMENTS

AVOCADOS - We have had another good season. The crop as expected, is going to be smaller than last year's. Prices have been good. I hear \$17 - \$22 / bushel as I write this Newsletter. For several years avocados have been a reliable crop and it appears that it will continue to be so for several years. The only drawback when floods have occurred has been the loss of trees. This loss has been considerable since tropical storm %Gordon' and the traditional areas that flood continue to do so but to a larger extent. For example, the area just east of Krome on 232 Street has been susceptible to floods but during the last two years damage can be seen right up to Krome. This is true in 216 Street and 202 Avenue and west, all the area west of 217 Avenue and some east of it. Hopefully when all corrective measures are taken, flood damage will be minimal as it used to be before 1981. Fortunately for the area, there was no damage from hurricane %Michelle' - not even fruit drop as a result of the wind. Rains were minimal. As always, you are faced with having to prune the late cultivars - a task that must be done, yet at a most inconvenient time because this is the time bloom buds begin to form. However most growers with late cultivars do the pruning after harvesting the crop and are able to produce a crop every year. Those that do not prune are

faced with loss of production, loss of lower canopy, severe wind damage from hurricanes, expensive picking and poor insect and disease control because coverage at the higher parts of the trees is poor. This is easily seen in %Lula' (scab); %Hall' (scab, anthracnose and *Cercospora*) and %Monroe' (*Cercospora* and anthracnose). Follow a yearly pruning program and a good spray schedule. Planting or topworking to early varieties continues but mostly at a slow pace and small areas. No plantings of large areas are predicted - nor possible or recommended.

LIMES - After a "quiet" early canker season due to the drought, we are now seeing a resurgence of the disease which has now spread to the heart of the commercial area - DeSoto and Martin counties. This is very discouraging as the huge effort to eradicate the disease seems to be in vain - mostly due to the extremely high infectiousness of this bacterial disease and what seems to be a program that, apparently, cannot reach the level of effectiveness needed for it to be successful. The reasons are first, as said, a) the virulence of the disease, b) the extremely favorable climate, in Florida, for its development, c) the presence of the disease in highly populated areas, d) ignorance of some people, e) carelessness of others and f) a program that, by its nature, cannot reach the level of perfection needed for it to be successful. There is a strong sense of pessimism and frustration in the citrus growing areas. We have reached a point that will decide if all the efforts and sacrifices by both commercial and backyard growers, have been in vain. Prices have been low but may slowly increase as we go into the season when volumes decrease. Do not expect large changes in prices. The volume of imports from Mexico, though large, is a little lower than past years.

MANGOS - In general, we had a good crop but, as always, extremely poor prices. However, there is some you talk to that were able to make some money. These people use all avenues to market their fruit - the only choice available to make money for mango growers. You should have already pruned your trees, applied the last fertilizer application and the cleanup spray for scales. As avocados, they are going into the bloom forming mode from now on. You could apply some copper during November / December to reduce the amount of inoculum that initiate infections later on. Your trees should be open to let light penetrate throughout the canopy and provide air circulation. Both of these diminish disease pressure, preserve the lower canopy and result in a much better colored fruit. Talking about color, I was very impressed by the excellent color and large size of the 'Lancetilla' cultivar that Dr. Richard Campbell had at the display table during the mango festival at Fairchild. The quality is excellent and because of its size - like 'Keitt' it lends itself for the green market. We do not have commercial experience to talk about production of this variety. Food safety laws and enforcement are being emphasized and enacted for all produce - local or imported. This may be a good opportunity for locally grown produce to help in marketing them and should be considered and exploited by local growers. We hope U.S. consumer's pay more attention to this item and pressure buyers of produce to buy locally produced crops. Though I do not want to use this as a means of advertisement or marketing advantage, because it may not be ethical, it is a fact that locally produced crops are less subject to manipulation by unscrupulous persons than produce that is imported. I think this will have an impact in marketing local crops. Also, safety regulations in the U.S. are much more strict than in most countries sending produce to the U.S.

LYCHEE - Planting of lychees continues but at a slow pace and in small areas, so the increase in acreage is slow. More emphasis is being applied to experiment with "new" cultivars. There is a definite disposition of not planting 'Brewster' anymore because of its very unreliable bearing. 'Hak Ip' is the most commonly planted "new" cultivar after 'Mauritius'. It commands better prices because most fruits are seedless and the quality is good. There is not a lot of commercial experience with this cultivar or others but some growers are taking a calculated risk and are planting them. Groves in flood prone areas suffered tree losses. Lychees and longans are susceptible to flooding particularly during the first and second year after planting. If you had damage or there is a possibility of flooding where you want to plant, use 3-foot high beds or mounds to protect young trees. It may be a little more work but you buy protection and reduce tree losses. If I were you, I would be applying Dipel or similar products (many brands of *B. thuringiensis*) and maybe some copper to keep the level of webworm (*B. thuringiensis*) and anthracnose (Copper) at low levels. Maybe three sprays/month until the bloom season. I think this may be helpful but we have no data to support it. Be sure you check your trees - specially those that show dieback, stunting, etc., for the presence of black scale or other scales. If uncontrolled, tree death may result. Though I know some of you do not believe in this, this is a time to stress the trees by not watering, not pruning and not applying nitrogenous fertilizers. By doing this, trees are helped to stop growth (flushing), accumulate carbohydrates, shift the balance to bloom - inducing growth regulators, etc. In a wet, mild winter these practices may be the difference between having a crop or not, or having a better crop.

LONGAN - It is sad to see how many trees died and are still dying from the excessive load of fruit most growers had this season. I do not know if the stress of excessively wet years also had an additive effect to this problem. I have seen damage from overcropping in other crops. I rate longans as the worse, mamey sapote second and some avocados like Booth 8 third. Jackfruit also suffers from overcropping. I have seen dead mameys from overcropping but only a few trees. Mostly what you see is a lot of dieback in mameys and avocados but what we had on longan this year was unexpected and very severe. The lessons to be learned are that for trees with excessive crops a) you might remove 50% of the fruit (crop load) not only cut half the length of the panicle which removes less than 50% of the crop; b) besides the above, you must also remove some entire panicles as removing 50% of the fruit may not be enough; c) increase the amount of fertilizer a bit in the spring and in the last application after harvest and d) follow a good nutritional spray / iron chelate program. I think next year's crop (2002) will be very light and correspondingly, prices will be very high to high. What I said about flooding effects on lychee also applies to longan. Longans may be a bit more susceptible to flooding than lychees even though they are better adapted and have fewer problems otherwise than lychees. Pruning to develop a strong tree structure and compact trees is important the first two or three years after planting longans and most tropical fruits. Remember to do leaf analysis during bloom, make the first fertilizer application during bloom and check for webworm damage.

MAMEY SAPOTE - The crop in 2001 was not heavy but, in general, prices have been low. If you are getting less than \$1.00/Lb., try to look for alternative markets on your own. No new plantings are being set so, with time and these affordable prices for consumers, the

demand may slowly increase. What is needed is a crossover from ethnic consumption to general population consumption and that takes time. We have good examples of this with three crops; avocado first, then limes and then mangos. Meanwhile, look for new markets on your own. It takes time but it pays in the long run. Mamey, as avocado is a crop that has suffered a lot with the floods in the past. We actually have lost some groves and others are almost abandoned. This is true around 217 Avenue and around 197 Avenue North and south of 136 Street. Mamey is a difficult crop because of the many risks that it goes through during the whole year, floods, freezes, hurricanes and thefts. The advantages are good quality and good production - a must when prices are low.

CARAMBOLA - The worse is over as the September - October market glut is behind. I hear that prices are beginning to improve. The winter crop is already set. In some trees that have been topped I do not see blooms or set. These may happen a little later which may hit a season of high prices.

PAPAYAS - Flood damage and mites continue to be a problem. If you are going to plant papayas, the site chosen is most important. If the site has a history of flooding do not even try to plant them. They are extremely susceptible to flooding - the first to show damage and die from floods. Choose an area that does not flood to plant them. The mite problem requires continuous monitoring. Check the undersides of the leaves where all the veins join. If they are present and you are beginning to see lower leaf yellowing, it is time to spray. Either Vendex or sulfur are approved and should control them. You must do a good job, using enough water or going slow enough so the sprays cover well the top and especially, the lower leaf area. Mites in papayas is a year

round problem - just like it is in limes. We are having a workshop / field day on papayas to update you on the excellent work being done at TREC by Dr. Mike Davis. He is making progress in transferring papaya ring spot virus resistance. He is also selecting the best types for in-breeding to fix their genotypes. He may select five to seven of the best types to continue his work. He needs your input as far as what characters he should emphasize. If you are interested try to attend upcoming events. I have not had complaints about wind damage from 'Michele'.

BANANAS - You can see quite a bit of leaf lamina tearing caused by the winds but I have had no complaints.

SAPODILLA and JACKFRUIT - I hear some people talking about planting some but it is very minor acreage if any. Jackfruits need flood free areas. Sapodillas can do better in areas that flood if they are bedded. There are good cultivars to try for both of these crops if you want to try them.

CULTURAL PRACTICES

Many of the fruit crops are going into the bloom mode now (avocado, mango, lychee, longan) and some are already blooming, like the mamey sapote. For the first four, it is better to use practices that are conducive to stop growth, such as I mentioned - no nitrogen fertilizer and restrict or stop irrigation. Hopefully, these crops have already put out one to three flushes after harvest and are ready to stop growth and accumulate carbohydrates to prepare for the bloom season. If we add to the previous factors a cold and dry winter that tends to stop growth, the result may be a good bloom. There are other factors that influence bloom, specially the stresses such as crop load, diseases, root

damage, nutritional status, etc. Try to manage these factors to your advantage (the ones you can control).

It is very important to soon finish all preparations for the freeze / frost season. Your engines and pumps should be in working conditions. Check your sprinkler and pipes and fix problems now. Be ready for the cold weather by November 15. There has not been a big freeze since 1989 so we are due for one. See upcoming events.

The cool, dry season is usually very good to catch up with weeds. They slow down now and, if you do a good job now, you may not have to worry a lot about controlling them - except for spot treatment, until March or April. Remove vines by hand (the only way) if they have already climbed the trees. Except for Cissus; most vines die after you pull them out. You can clean the groves with an approved weed killer. Roundup is registered for most tropical fruits. See upcoming events.

As you know, the legislature is having to revise the budget due to not getting the expected revenue. As a part of the state, the University is going to have to also do quite a bit of adjusting and it is very possible that many programs will be affected. These cuts are already affecting the University of Florida. For example, all vacant positions are frozen (cannot be filled) and it is very possible that some experiment stations will have to be closed and some extension programs may also suffer. We hope you bear with us and help us overcome these trying times.