***President’s Message***

It seems cliché for a fruit grower to talk about the weather conditions in the spring, but this spring could be one for the record books, and not in a good way. I guess there’s some solace in the fact that just about every fruit grower in our area is in the same boat. I’m not sure why, but I actually feel a little better after talking to my fellow fruit growers and comparing the damage. Not that it makes the damage less severe, but there is some psychological benefit to knowing we all have suffered losses. Misery really does love

company. I guess we will all continue to chant the farmer mantra “next year will be better”.

As I write this the third week of April, the weather has gotten warmer and the forecast doesn’t predict any temperatures below freezing. We are all cutting and counting buds trying to figure out what is still alive, and the next question, will it pollinate? The morning after back to back nights of temperatures in the low 20’s, I was honestly thinking we may all be in the shade tree business for 2016. Maybe I should just take a sabbatical and go to a beautiful island until next spring. As I looked at buds this weekend (a week later), I became a little more optimistic. Some varieties are going to be light, but overall we may have enough to keep the shelves full in the market.

Now we turn towards the importance of good pollination. To add insult to injury, I had a higher bee mortality this winter than I can ever recall. Only 4 of my 14 hives survived the winter with any strength. I was lucky enough to get a phone call about a swarm this weekend a few miles from my farm and captured them. Other beekeepers in my local area seem to have had a rough winter too, so there aren’t many hives around that aren’t spoken for. Hopefully the native pollinators are ready for a heavy workload.

As you read this, fruit thinning will no doubt be the question on everyone’s mind. Apples are going to be extra difficult because every variety will be different. I currently grow 57 varieties of apples, so my apple thinning scenario is normally a fruit grower’s nightmare and a chemist’s dream. This is one of those years that I will more than likely wait to see what sets before I apply thinner. I’ll estimate the crop load on a variety, mix my tank and hope I still have the guts to spray the row when I get to the field. I will spend more time surveying, thinking, mixing and driving than actual thinning. Let’s just hope the weather in

thinning season cooperates. We deserve a little break this spring.

Peach thinning will be a challenge too. For those of us who grew up on a fruit farm, it has been engrained in us since birth exactly how far apart to space the peaches to get the optimum fruit size. This year we won’t have that option on most varieties. The challenge will be to get the seasoned workers to understand that spacing is not as important as total crop load, and that doubles are okay.

Keep your head up and keep plugging away. Every experienced farmer has endured tough years, and if you’re young and this is your first one, it won’t be the last. Farmers have character, and 2016 is looking like a character building year.

*A farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn’t still be a farmer.* –Will Rogers

Stay optimistic,

Tad Kuntz

SHAP President