

Editorial Views

By Dr. Rob Crassweller

“The Home Stretch”

Mid-August and we are starting to enter the home stretch for this growing season. There is still a lot of work to be done but in recent days the weather has turned decidedly cooler. Ag Progress Days wrapped up yesterday. This was one of the few shows that I can remember when we were not dying from heat stroke. It was also the first that I can remember in a long time that we actually had day long rain showers. Normally we have to watch for afternoon thunderstorms because of the high temperatures. Wednesday’s luncheon at APD was interesting as the new PSU President, Eric Barron, spoke to the crowd followed by Governor Corbett and then his opponent Tom Wolf.

Classes at Penn State will start in another ten days, but you can already see the rental trucks pouring into town as students move back into apartments. Construction crews are rapidly trying to finish up the road construction projects. The first PSU football game will be a real “away” game in fifteen days.

In looking at my fruit crop, the apple size seems especially large with Jonagold over 3.25 inches in diameter and even my Gala, for us, are large this year. However, I cannot figure out why the Asian pears do not seem to be sizing. I know that this summer has seen some cooler than normal weather so I am guessing this may explain the smaller size. We actually had a few peaches on our trees enough to at least know how they tasted. One odd thing was that within the fruit there was a lot of variability in fruit firmness. One half of the fruit could be rock hard while the other half was soft. Of course, we never tasted our Saturn as they vanished over one weekend.

We have already harvested Lodi, Yellow Newtown, Pristine and Sunrise apples. Next will be Sansa followed by Zestar. ReTain was applied to the Honeycrisp to make sure they don’t all drop suddenly like they did many years ago when on a Friday we said “Let’s wait until Monday.” Out of all the trees we planted this spring, over 300, we only had two that did not grow. Three hundred is not a lot compared to commercial growers who plant in tens of acres at a shot, but it did keep us busy. Post and wires are all in place thanks to being able to borrow the post pounder from the Fruit Lab. (Thank you Jim and Terry, and “yes” it will come back set for 12 foot posts.) We were fortunate that we had some timely rains when we were putting in the support systems. All the new trees are being trained as tall spindles so the limbs were bent below horizontal.

It looks like the new rootstock trial with Aztec Fuji and Honeycrisp will have flowers next spring; and barring a reoccurrence of 2012, some fruit on two year old trees. I hope all of your harvest season goes well and that you have enough labor to get the fruit picked and packed. It will not be long before we will be meeting in Hershey again and I am finishing up the last few details of the educational program.