

Editorial Views

by Robert Crassweller

“The Growing Season So Far”

Well, we are over half way through 2017. July 2nd was the 183rd day of the year with 182 days remaining to the end of the year. Of course it is still early in the growing year for tree fruits. Our season will probably stretch until about mid- November for those of you growing Cripp’s Pink or Olympic Asian pear. I thought it would be interesting to look how this has compared so far to last year and long term averages. We have been keeping weather data at Rock Springs reliably since 1995, so to get a 20 year average I used the data from our beginning up to 2015 to determine averages. While a 20 year average is not exceptionally long, it does help provide context to our trends.

This year, as I have mentioned in Fruit Times and in this column, did start out with some dire expectations. I like to look at growing degree days with a base temperature of 50°F (GDD₅₀). To determine the GDD₅₀, you take the high temperature for the day and the low temperature and determine the average temperature for the day. If that average is less than 50°F, then 0 GDD accumulated that day. However, if the average is greater than 50°F, then you subtract 50 from the average and what is left over are positive GDD’s.

The entire season of 2016 had the greatest GDD since measuring temperatures going back to 1995, so I have also included that data to see how that year is stacking up against this year.

January 2017 temperatures were right on the average, February was a little bit warmer and March was also right on average. April 2017, however, accumulated over 100 more GDD. There was not a lot of GDD difference between 2017 vs. 2016, or the 20 year average for May or June. In talking to some growers, however, they seem to think the season is a little ahead of average based on peach harvests. It will remain to be seen if that holds up as we get into later peach cultivars and early apples.

Our rainfall records are not nearly as accurate as temperature records because the rain gauge is not heated, so we do not get accurate readings during winter months when temperatures are below freezing. However, assuming the readings over the long run are equally affected by freezing temperatures, we can see some differences with this year. Compared to long term

average, we are just about 2.7 inches above normal. We had a difficult time getting all our trees in the ground this spring due to the spring rains. In May and June we had over 9 inches of rain as compared to an average of 7.3 and compared to 4.85 last year for the same period. In the next couple of weeks we should begin harvesting our early season cultivars of Lodi and Pristine. We had a good sweet and tart cherry crop. It certainly has been an interesting year so far. I wish you luck with your peach and apple harvest.

I put in one article in this issue that I thought was somewhat ironic – the one on Rockit™ apples. As I read the story, it seems that they received the NZ export award for guaranteeing a prewashed apple that is only 1.5 times the size of a golf ball. They come in a recyclable tube that fits in the car cup holder. The advertisements tout that they provide essential vitamins, minerals and fiber that contributes to good health. Correct me, but don't all apples get washed and provide vitamins, minerals and fiber and are good for you?