

President's Message- MAY

Chemical Thinning. Two words that could generate hours of discussion at any grower meeting. No two years are alike in the weather before, during, and after applications. It is also just as unlikely that any two growers follow the exact same philosophies about thinning practices. There are so many factors to consider: cultivar, rootstock, vigor, bi-annual tendency, weather, target crop load, initial fruit set. These are just some of the critical items in a "normal" year. But this, after all, is the year 2020.

The days between May 9th and May 12th saw widespread sub-freezing temperatures and frost several mornings. Here in Boyertown, we experienced a low of 29 degrees on May 9th. This freeze damage coupled with a prolonged bloom during cold, cloudy, and windy days appears to have resulted overall in a relatively poor initial fruit set. Some exceptions I am seeing and hearing about would be 'Gala' and 'Pink Lady', which seem to look good. Years of data and conventional thinking prove that earlier thinning results in larger high-quality fruit. Perhaps, though, unconventional thinking is required in an unconventional year. This year might be the time to take a "wait and see" approach to chemical thinning. Take that extra time to make sure your crop is truly there before applying thinners which could reduce it further. By the time you read this, my guess is that the chemical thinning window will be coming to a close. It will be interesting to observe our results later in the year.

I am happy to report that there is some good news that can be passed along as well. In early May, construction on the new engineering building at FREC was able to resume. While this project has had some "hiccups" along the way, it is wonderful to see the latest asset to the facilities at FREC taking shape. There have also been two positive changes to the H-2A program as a result of COVID-19. First, the Department of Homeland Security has temporarily amended regulations to allow H-2A workers to remain in the U.S. beyond the standard three-year maximum period. The second is that employers will be able to petition to employ workers who are already in the U.S. on H-2A status, but working for another employer who no longer needs their services. For more information on these changes and future meetings, please check the following link: <https://extension.psu.edu/h-2a-agricultural-workers-in-times-of-uncertainty-webinar>. Penn State will continue to post webinars of H-2A meetings, as well as virtual twilight meetings once they have been completed. A link for the archive twilight meetings is as follows: <https://tinyurl.com/2020-psu-twilight-meetings>.

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