

Valley Fruit

Wapato, WA

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The picture above shows me measuring the diameter of the apple. This was done weekly on 15 apples per block to help create a growth curve. This growth curve is used to estimate crop size and help growers decide what fruit to thin in the following growing season.



These are the tools I used on a daily basis to gather data on fruit size and maturity. (Top Left) The penetrometer was used to test pear and apple pressures. (Top Right) The Cranston sizing gauge was used to measure pear and apple sizes. (Bottom) I used a cherry sizing card to measure cherry size based on how many cherries of that size it would take to fill one row in a box.

Introduction

Valley Fruit is a fruit warehouse that packs cherries, apples, and pears for domestic and export markets. Valley fruit uses state of the art technology to process and pack fruit to meet consumer demands. The employees at Valley Fruit are very knowledgeable and willing to embrace new ideas to improve production while maximizing profits for the growers.

There are many different jobs at Valley Fruit from warehouse operations to fieldman positions. Fieldmen are used to scout fruit maturities, size, and sugar levels to help the warehouse workers to process and pack received fruit based on potential storability or export market opportunities. Fieldmen also work with the growers to help make horticulture and market decisions to maximize their profits while meeting warehouse demands

Responsibilities

This internship required me to gather crop data in the field and report back to the warehouse and sales team to help determine packing and sales opportunities. During cherry harvest I worked in the Tri-Cities area with another fieldman to check cherry size, color, and maturity. Color and maturity were very to our sales team to ensure only high quality fruit made it to the market. Buyers look for dark burgundy skin with deep red colored flesh which are characteristics of perfectly matured cherries. I measured size daily to estimate sales opportunities and profitability for the growers. After cherry harvest was completed I began measuring pear and apple sizes and pressures in the Yakima Valley and Columbia Basin to determine crop maturity and plan harvest dates. As pears and apples mature their firmness begins to decline, which can lead to storage issues and poor eating quality. By measuring these pressures we could track when the optimum harvest date would be for each block while letting the fruit grow as much as possible before the pressures got too low. All of this data had to be entered into online programs in a timely manner so it is readily available to the warehouse and sale team. During free time I rode along with many different fieldmen from Valley Fruit to see new horticultural practices and management practices being implemented on many different farms. I was also required to learn about food safety protocols by shadowing growers during USDA Gap audits.

Summary

During this internship I learned a lot about the relationship shared by growers and warehouses. While working for the warehouse as a fieldman I spent most of my summer interacting and learning directly from many growers which enabled me to learn about new practices and technologies to increase fruit production while minimizing costs. The warehouse required me to determine harvest dates based on the field work I preformed checking fruit color and maturity. I worked with growers to plan harvest dates based on their schedules.

Food safety was also a very important aspect of this internship which allowed me to see USDA GAP audits first hand with Valley Fruit growers. By sitting in on these audits I learned what expectations growers are required to meet to sell fruit. While working with the warehouse management I was able to learn how fruit is processed and packed in a large scale operation. The most important aspect of this internship for me was to establish good relationships with co-workers and growers so we could communicate ideas or concerns effectively. Overall, I feel that this internship showed me many different career opportunities within the tree fruit industry and introduced me to the knowledge and work ethics necessary to be successful. This internship has allowed to get my name out into the fruit industry which has opened the door to many employment opportunities.



The picture above shows how I measured pear pressures using a penetrometer to estimate harvest dates and fruit quality. By pushing the penetrometer into the fruit it is able to measure how soft the flesh of the fruit is.



The picture above shows how cherries are sized. The last whole that the cherry sits in is the size of the cherry. This cherry card measures from 13 row to 8 row cherry sizes. A general rule is that the lower the row number the more money buyers are willing to pay for the fruit.