

## Crop Management

# New WA 2 apple praised for its taste, shelf life

By T.J. BURNHAM

**W**ASHINGTON State University is releasing its first new variety in 15 years under the apple breeding program.

The selection, WA 2, is singled out for commercialization "because of its overall appearance and good texture," says Kate Evans, an associate horticulture professor at WSU's Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee, Wash.

"Credit for this release must go to Bruce Barritt, who did most of the work," says Evans. She replaced him after he retired as a professor of horticulture a year ago.

She describes WA 2 as "a very attractive orangey-red

### Key Points

- WSU releases first apple in breeding program.
- WA 2 is in a class by itself for taste, storage and texture.
- A good farmer's apple, it has no special production challenges.

apple," distinguished by lentils setting it aside from other varieties.

Its taste, she says, exhibits "very good eating quality with an excellent sugar-acid ratio." WA 2 is very crisp and has a juicy texture, she adds. It is round-shaped, and a bit larger than a Gala, but smaller than a Fuji.

WA 2 originated from seed collected in 1994, the first year



of the WSU breeding program, explains Evans. Its female parent is Splendour, but its male parent is uncertain. It may be Gala, says Evans.

The seedling tree was selected in 2001 based on its fruit quality, and propagated for a second trial in central

Washington at three sites in 2004. Orchard trials with larger tree numbers on M9 rootstock were planted in 2007, says Evans, at four commercial orchard sites in the central state. "Extensive fruit quality data collected over more than six seasons from this original seedling

tree and from second test trees from grower orchards revealed a very high eating quality, she adds.

### Shelf, storage firmness

As an extra attraction to the market, this is an apple that retains its firmness in storage and on the store shelf, says Evans. Ripening at the end of September or early October, WA 2 is a good "farmer's apple," she says, since it comes with no difficult challenges in production.

Trees exhibit an intermediate growth habit, she adds, producing abundant blooms and consistently high yields similar to those of Gala and Fuji. The variety has only moderate susceptibility to powdery mildew and fireblight, she notes.

Evans expects nurseries will provide trees to growers this spring through a license of the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission, which provided research funding in conjunction with WSU financial support.

More than 170 tasters have tried WA 2, giving the selection their highest eating quality marks for two years of trials.

Fruit sensory evaluation at WSU using trained and untrained consumer panels found that WA 2 stored for four months logged better quality (firmness, juiciness and crispness) than nine other apple selections, including Fuji.

To see the new WA 2, go to the Washington State Horticultural Association annual meeting and trade show in Yakima Dec. 3-5. For more information about the event, go to [www.wahort.org/hortprog.html](http://www.wahort.org/hortprog.html).

"We'll present a variety showcase for delegates, and at that time we'll be discussing the commercialization of WA 2 with growers and the rest of the industry," Evans says.

## Oregon still kingpin in Christmas tree trade

By T.J. BURNHAM

**O**REGON may be the biggest Christmas tree producer in the world, but those who live in the state are not the industry's best customers.

Only 8% of the 7.34 million trees harvested last season was purchased within Oregon. The big buyer is California, which absorbs 48% of the output annually, according to Oregon Agricultural Statistics Service surveys.

The next biggest customer is Mexico, taking 16%, with other Western states (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Alaska and Hawaii) accounting for 10% of all the 2008 market. (See chart at right.)

Oregon's kingpin leadership of the industry earned \$110 million for producers last year, but that figure would have been better if prices hadn't declined by about 50 cents a tree.

A reduction in trees planted, noted in the survey, shows that 6 million trees were planted last year, down sharply from 9.7 million in 2002, possibly

a grower response to price decreases.

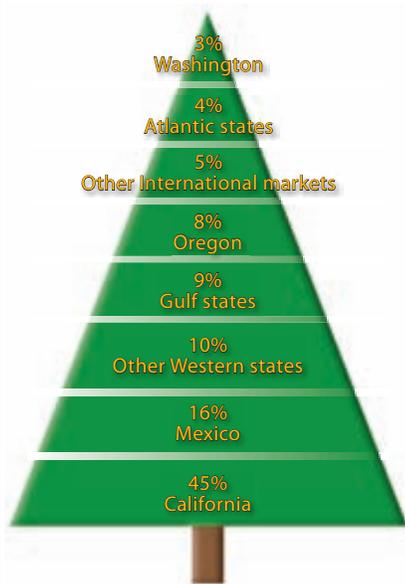
But considering the economic conditions, the yule tree remains strong, says Bryan Ostlund. "We've seen it before where sales generally are strong in down economies," says the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Growers Association executive director. "We had a nice bump in sales last year."

Producers remain concerned

about what might happen with the Mexican market as trade matters loom as a negative impact.

Sales to Mexico, strengthened by a heavy demand for Douglas fir trees, have climbed from 13% to 25% for the variety between 2003 and 2008, the OASS report shows. Canada, another nearby export interest, purchased 2% of Oregon's Christmas trees last year.

### Buyers of Oregon Christmas trees



### Nobel makes a play

"Doug" and Nobel Firs dominate the Oregon industry, resulting in 92% of overall sales last year. While Douglas has been the mainstay of the industry until recently, Nobel firs are quickly catching up.

"We find ourselves today in a position, as those inventories work through the cycle, where we are actually getting short of Douglas fir," says Ostlund. "As we watch the new planting numbers, growers are coming back to a better balance between the fir species."

While Oregon is the biggest vendor of Christmas trees, the Northwest overall represents the sector playing the major role in supplies. There are about

10,000 producers throughout the region, collectively supplying a third of the world's holiday conifers annually, says Gary Chastagner, Washington State University plant pathologist and Christmas tree researcher. So popular is the PNW in yule tree production, that a September WSU seminar on tree health attracted delegates from around the world, he says.

WSU's Puyallup Research and Extension Center focuses much of its efforts on Christmas tree studies, including a probe that helps identify trees with superior postharvest needle retention — something every homeowner would probably appreciate.

"For the consumer, that means trees that stay fresh longer in the home and that are more fire resistant," he says.

Other PREC studies focus on tree root health, identifying rot susceptibility for various varieties.

Looking at Oregon and Washington industries combined, Chastagner says the two PNW states market \$176 million in trees a year, with a harvest of 10.3 million.

More than 90% are sold in other states, mainly to California, where he says the two-state total represents about 50% of all sales.