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POMOLOGY NOTES

E-MAIL EXTRA: AUGUST 13, 2009

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Current Information on Sutter/Yuba Region 'French' Prune Harvest, 2009

Franz Niederholzer, UC Farm Advisor, Sutter/Yuba Counties

Thursday, August 13, 2009

Pressures and sugars were checked in eight mature, well maintained 'French' prune blocks around Sutter/Yuba Counties. Test blocks now include D-10, Live Oak (2), LoMo Crossing area, Geo Washington X Oswald, and Tudor (3) areas.

Pressures averaged in the range of 3.8 – 5 pounds for all blocks.

Pressures have been dropped an average of 1.5 pounds in the last week. Pressure drops in the orchards I checked ranged from 1– 2 pounds from the week before.

Sugars ranged from 19.25% to 25.5% soluble solids. An average sugar increase of 2.5% was measured over the past week. Sugars increases ranged from 2-3%.

Growers are urged to check pressures in each orchard as harvest approaches to best prepare for a high quality harvest. Fruit pressure testing is the best way to test fruit maturity and plan harvest. Optimum prune harvest maturity is reached when fruit pressures are between 3-4 pounds. When sampling fruit for maturity testing, look for late season pests – especially **brown rot**, rust, and mites.

On average, fruit pressures generally drop 1-2 pounds per week, while sugars increase about 2% per week. The softest blocks I checked this week are less than 4 pounds fruit pressure, and will be fully mature – approaching 3 pounds -- by Sunday or early next week. The highest-pressure blocks that I checked that this week -- currently around 5 pounds – should reach 3.5 average pressure by August 20.

Cooler weather results in a relatively rapid pressure drop, while hot weather slows the rate of fruit softening. Long-term weather forecasts (<http://www.accuweather.com>) suggest warm to hot weather for the next two weeks. Highs are predicted in the lower 90's to low 100's. Lows are predicted to range from 60-67°F.

When planning harvest timing, growers must balance fruit sugar, fruit firmness, equipment availability and dryer space to maximize their income while delivering a high quality product.