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POMOLOGY NOTES

E-MAIL EXTRA: JULY 30, 2009

Franz Niederholzer, UCCE Farm Advisor, Sutter/Yuba Counties

Current Information on Sutter/County 'French' Prune Harvest, 2009

Franz Niederholzer, UC Farm Advisor, Sutter/Yuba Counties

Thursday, July 30, 2009

Pressures and sugars were checked in six mature, well maintained 'French' prune blocks around Sutter/Yuba Counties. Two additional blocks were added this week. Test blocks now include D-10, Live Oak (2), LoMo Crossing area, Geo Washington X Oswald, and Everglade X Sawtelle areas.

Pressures averaged in the range of 7-8 pounds for all blocks.

Sugars ranged from 15% to 20% soluble solids. An average sugar increase of 1.8% was measured since last week, a little less than the 2%/week that is expected.

Growers are urged to check pressures in each orchard as early as late July 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 timing is when fruit is between 3-4 pounds fruit pressure. 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. Using a 1.5 pound pressure drop per week, the softest block in this survey would be at 3.8 pounds pressure by around August 13. The blocks that I checked that are currently around 8 pounds would fall below 4 pounds on 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. There is no rain in any forecasts I have seen.

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.