



Ecosystem Insights

Happy New Year!

7 January 2016

Happy New Year everyone! 2015 was a heck of a year and I look forward to working with everyone again this season. This is the first in a new series of newsletters that focus solely on the management of organic, biodynamic, and holistic orchards. I say solely, but I don't really mean it. It's also an opinion page with a purpose; I'm sure I'll veer off course and talk about things that seem to have little to do with orchards. But rest assured, they will. I will challenge the dominant orchard management paradigms and in the process hopefully spark meaningful conversation and practices that affect the entire tree fruit industry — large and small — from the ground up. Along the way there'll be plenty of useful tips for managing your orchards better, more sustainably, and with a vision for the future. There will be plenty of that. So stay tuned for an exciting year.

Although I have worked in the commercial tree fruit industry for over 30 years, my real passion has always been sustainable orcharding. I've used a significant portion of my career to work towards a more advanced use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in order to reduce the amount of pesticides applied to apples, pears, peaches, and the like. And in many respects, the industry as a whole has moved in a more sustainable direction. Over the course of my 30+ years, I've seen ultra-toxic pesticides hit the history books. I've seen a massive increase in the use of pheromones for pest monitoring and mating disruption to the point where their use is no longer debated but rather wholeheartedly embraced. I've seen digital technology reach a point where — through the click of a button — it can help growers with their pest management decision-making process by tracking and calculating degree days, assigning biofixes, apple scab infection modeling, and more. And I know no one has missed the massive increase in the consumer organic food market that's driving a lot of sustainability initiatives today. We know more about our orchards than ever before, and yet...the industry as a whole is still mired in a old-school, input-based, reductionist approach to orchard management. The industry — and this includes some organic growers — are still locked into a "treat the symptom, not the problem" approach.

I've learned a lot from my years in the commercial tree fruit industry. I've learned that all growers face similar problems. No matter how large, their philosophical approach, growing techniques, or geographic region, all growers face similar biological realities. Yet, truth be told, many of these problems could be mediated or even solved through a better understanding of the orchard ecosystem and improved reliance on nature. The solutions don't lie with novel chemistries or fancy fertilizers on any scale. The solutions lie with nature. Nature has always held the answers, we just stopped asking the questions. We need to put a new lens on our farms and farming systems in a way that stops us from looking for the next stop-gap cure and gets us creating healthier farms all the way around. That's what this is all about. Naturally.

Ecosystem Insights: Advice and Opinions for Organic, Biodynamic, & Holistic Orchardists

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