

Cherries: Too much rain

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state's cherry crop.

"The damage in Wenatchee seems to be as bad as anywhere," he said. "Our growers in Benton City seemed to have fared OK. There was a little more damage in the Tri-Cities and the worst being up here in the Greater Wenatchee area."

He said limb samples showed losses as high as 60 percent. Few cherry growers picked today. They were assessing damage, letting cherries dry and preparing to beef up field sorting.

"We're taking a closer look to see which guys can carry on in regards to how much field sorting it will take," Gale said. He said packing sheds get bogged down with culls if field sorters can't weed out enough of them.

"We have reports of some people walking away from their crops due to damage," Gale said. "One orchard on Western Avenue, Brandon Lewis's, is wiped out. He's counting 70-percent damage and will walk away from his Bing crop. He may salvage some Lamberts later."

Lewis could not be reached for comment.

Most cherry growers have no crop insurance, said Paula Woodruff of the federal Farm

Service Agency. The agency administers loan and government programs for farmers.

"Crop insurance has been available only in the last two years for cherries, so a lot of growers don't have it," Woodruff said. "They also didn't think it was necessary because we've had several good cherry years."

Todd Duncan, who manages an orchard at Ninth and Eastmont in East Wenatchee, said he's at 30-percent loss.

"The warehouse (Northern Fruit) called last night and said lots of blocks are running 80-percent damage, so I feel blessed that I'm still in the picking mode," he said.

Jeff Heath, another Stemilt fieldman, said it's hard to get the total picture yet. He said it's not total devastation, that he's seeing 20- to 30-percent losses in some areas which are manageable.

"Some orchards are total losses, others are borderline and others will be able to pack," Heath said. "There are so many variables — crop load, tree age, fruit maturity — that we can't make a broad statement. We had rain for such a long period of time. A passing shower wouldn't be so bad, but it was the duration of the rain."

Boyd Scroggins, a north

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BOYD SCROGGINS

Wenatchee cherry grower

Wenatchee grower, said almost seven hours of total wetness was just too much for cherries, saturating them and causing them to split.

"Their skin is quite porous," he said. "It does absorb a great deal of moisture, but it can only take so much. Something has to give. It's usually the skin."

Scroggins estimated his loss at 35 to 40 percent.

The National Weather Service said .53 inches of rain, slightly more than half an inch, fell at Pangborn Memorial Airport in East Wenatchee between 8 p.m. Tuesday and 8 p.m. Wednesday. Meteorologist Robin Fox said it wasn't a record but was a lot for this time of year.

She said there was no chance of rain for Wenatchee today or Friday, but showers could occur Saturday evening. Sunday, previously forecast for showers, should be dry, she said.

The warm-up will be gradual

with highs of 73 for today, 79 Friday, upper 70s to mid-80s Saturday and then warming into the 80s and 90s next week, she said. It was 67 on Wednesday and 65 on Tuesday.

"The rain could not have come at a worse time," Scroggins said. "If you were looking at the worst possible time for a disaster to hit the cherry growers, it would be right now because the harvest was just getting under way in Malaga, Rock Island and north Wenatchee.

"Whether or not we can pick the crop and field sort it before we take it into packing sheds remains to be seen. My personal opinion right now is that it's a wipe-out. If it's anything less, I will be very happy to say the least. Right now, it doesn't look good."

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