

U.S. to Buy Apples to Boost Market

438,000
boxes of
fruit will
go to
schools,
other
feeding
plans

By **DAVID LESTER**
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

Responding to industry pleas for help, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will make its largest-ever purchase of fresh apples this fall for school and other feeding programs.

Industry officials said the government's purchase of 438,000 boxes nationwide should help jump-start sales of the 2001 crop, the smallest crop in several years.

The 2001 Washington apple crop of 76 million boxes is 22 percent less than last year and the state's smallest crop in almost a decade.

The smaller state crop is blamed on

hail damage and the removal of orchards because of four years of low prices.

Nationwide, apple production is forecast to be off by 15 percent to 215 million boxes.

A box weighs 42 pounds.

Kraig Naasz, president of the U.S. Apple Association of McLean, Va., an industry trade group, said the federal purchase is the latest in a series of moves designed to help beleaguered fruit growers.

"The announced intent to purchase almost 500,000 boxes is the largest ever by the department and should significantly boost our efforts to get the 2001

marketing season off to a profitable start," Naasz said.

Miles Kohl, manager of the Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association, called the purchase an encouraging sign for the industry.

Apple shippers interested in the program must act quickly. Bids for the number of boxes and at what price shippers would be willing to sell are due by Sept. 30.

The Agriculture Department purchase is in two parts. A total of 80,000 boxes will be distributed to school lunch programs and is part of the

PLEASE SEE **APPLES** PAGE 8A

YHR 9/7/01

APPLES/Congress Helps

Continued from Page 1A

agency's regular purchase program. The apples are scheduled for delivery between Oct. 15 and April 24, 2002.

USDA bought 88,700 boxes of apples last year for school programs.

The majority of the apples, 358,000 boxes, are to be bought under a \$200 million congressional appropriation to help growers of apples and other fruits and

vegetables who have suffered from low prices. The fruit must be delivered between Oct. 15 and Dec. 26.

The purchase plan is one more element of a two-year aid program approved by Congress. Growers received \$100 million in direct assistance earlier this year to make up for low prices during the 1998 and 1999 marketing years.

A separate \$150 million aid package for low prices in 2000 is still under review in Congress.