

# Growers try to expand existing cooperative

**The Washington Growers Clearing House has 2,600 members, mainly in north central Washington.**

BY GERALDINE WARNER

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"We're playing the game with one hand tied behind our back."

Dan Kelly

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A group of growers in Washington State's lower Yakima Valley has been promoting the idea of uniting growers through the Washington Growers Clearing House Association.

The Clearing House, formed in 1941 specifically to improve grower returns, is a cooperative with 2,600 grower members mostly in north central Washington and the Columbia Basin. A newly formed Washington State Apple Growers Steering Committee is urging growers in the Yakima and Tri-Cities area to join.

The Clearing House's aims at the outset were to develop more complete information regarding market conditions and the economic value of apples produced in the district, to stabilize and coordinate marketing operations, and to regulate the shipment and sale of undesirable grades and sizes. For the first few years, growers, marketers, and warehouses were asked to sign contracts stating that they abided by the regulations, and growers agreed to work only with Clearing House-approved marketers and warehouses.

Today, the Clearing House collects and compiles price information on Washington apple sales, and issues a weekly price summary to its members. It collects an assessment of 3/4 of a cent per box from its members.

Although there have been no formal contracts for many years, manager Kirk Mayer said the Clearing House still makes pricing recommendations based on the marketing situation.

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## One voice

Dan Dufault, a grower in Plymouth, Washington, said the Washington State Apple Growers Steering Committee is a group of growers who make money only by growing fruit. He noted that although the new marketing cooperative that has been set up is called the Washington Apple Growers Marketing Association, no one who is just a grower was involved.

If the apple industry is to survive in Washington, growers need to speak with one voice and he believes the Clearing House is the perfect vehicle to do that.

Dufault said if the Clearing House could represent 95 percent of the growers in the state, it could be more effective than it is now, representing only half the state.

"One thing I do know is that if we don't speak with one voice and speak specifically to issues, our industry is done for," he said.

If growers in southern growing districts join the Clearing House, they would have representatives on its board. Dufault said it would be up to the board to take