

whatever action is necessary to make sure apple growers are able to receive at least the cost of production.

"What that action is--whether it be to increase pressure standards, or use contracts, or put out suggested prices, I'm not sure," he said. But he hoped some action could be taken during the current season.

Mark Tudor, who is an orchardist near Grandview and a member of the Growers Steering Committee, said he would reserve judgment about the Washington Apple Growers Marketing Association.

While some growers complain that its organizers are exclusively large growers, packers and marketers, others reason that those people have to take the lead otherwise it will not succeed.

However, since growers have not been involved in its formation and there's little information about what it will do, it requires a certain amount of blind faith from growers who join, he remarked.

"There's not a lot of faith left among the growers. Until we can get trust and faith back in the industry, it's going to be tough."

Tudor stressed that the effort to expand the Clearing House is separate, but not opposed to the marketing cooperative.

"Regardless of whether they are successful or not, we need to get the growers together in the state to affect the things that are tearing this industry apart. It's not just one problem that's plaguing the industry. It's an accumulation of problems. To address this, if the growers are united and organized, they can be successful. The world around us is consolidating, so we need to consolidate."

Growers tend to underestimate the cumulative power they would have together as an organized unit, he added. "I think a lot of them maybe feel that they don't have the ability to leverage their position at all and this would give them a tool to be able to do that. Also, with information and knowledge comes strength."

He said there could be a change in the relationship between growers and packers, and instead of growers paying a per-box fee for marketing, they might consider paying on a commission basis to provide some incentive for marketers to sell at higher prices.

Tudor said he sees a need in the future for growers in Washington State to consolidate with American growers.

About 85 growers attended an informational meeting in Prosser and 200 were in Yakima. A significant number of growers signed up to join the association.

Dan Kelly, assistant manager, said the Clearing House could be a more effective voice for growers if it represented the entire state, rather than just north central Washington.

"As a unit, there would be more power and more things could get accomplished than right now," he said. "We're playing the game with one hand tied behind our back. We could be more aggressive if we had a bigger voice."

Kelly stressed that the Clearing House is willing to represent growers in marketing issues, but is not looking to take on an adversarial role.

The Washington Apple Commission estimates that there are 3,400 apple growers in the state. The Clearing House has about 2,400 full members. Ideally, it would like to pick up 800 to 1,000 growers from the Yakima district, Kelly said.

Its board has 20 members, who must make the majority of their income from growing fruit. Each board member represents a different district in north central Washington or the Columbia Basin. The board could be expanded to 25 in order to include representatives from the southern part of the state, Kelly said. In addition, the current districts could be redrawn.

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