



NW MICHIGAN HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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IFTA Post-Conference Tour Highlights Local Growers

Dr. Nikki Rothwell, District Horticulturist
 Karen Powers, Research Technician

As many of you probably know, the 53rd International Fruit Tree Association (IFTA) Conference was held in Grand Rapids during the first week of March. This annual workshop offers cutting edge educational programming on high density tree fruit systems. The conference also provides researchers, extension specialists, and growers from around the world the chance to meet face to face and exchange horticultural information and ideas. This year imparted a unique opportunity for our northwest Michigan community: the NWMHRS staff organized and hosted a Post-Conference Tour event to highlight our region and local growers.

The two-day tour showcased some of the treasures of the region. We highlighted area fruit growers and some of the ingenuity that has made



IFTA and young farmer participants at Cherry Growers Inc., the first stop on the Post-Conference Tour.

northwest Michigan a great place to grow quality cherries, apples, and wine grapes. Additionally, we added members of our young farmer leadership program to the tour, which allowed new growers to interact with progressive and innovative fruit farmers from around the globe.

On the first day of the tour, we started out at Cherry Growers, Inc., where the

group was given an informative presentation on the history of the company, the daily operations inside the plant, and its role as a grower-owned processing facility. From there we visited one of the largest preservation and reuse developments in the country, the Grand Traverse Commons. We also enjoyed a lunch crafted with locally sourced foods prepared by the staff at Trattoria Stella. After a terrific meal, we traveled along East Bay into Antrim County to visit Russell Ridge Orchards. Mark Doherty and Jim and John King candidly shared their successes and challenges with growing apples in a moderate density system. Apple pie and a warm fire showed off the grower hospitality in NW Michigan. The day ended with a stop at Hoxsie's Farm



Sweet cherries growing under high tunnels at Hoxsie's Farm Market.

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NWMHR Foundation Assists Exciting Grant Effort

Erin Lizotte, IFP and IPM District Educator

The NWMHRS Foundation Board recently supported a grant to provide much needed funding to the New FARM (Farmer Assistance and Resource Management) Program that started in the fall of 2009. The New FARM Program is designed to help beginning farmers increase economic viability, maintain and enhance environmental stewardship, and ensure today's emerging farmers are prepared to lead the Michigan fruit industry into the future. Based on an in-depth needs assessment, the Pro-

gram includes a two-year series of eleven educational sessions, three field-based tours, an international trip to a specialty crop producing region, a formative evaluation, and a comprehensive summative evaluation. Workshop topics include how to be an effective board member, changing trends in agriculture, national, regional, and international agriculture policy, economics, banking, loans and credit, alternative market-

ing strategies, farm transfer, estate planning, land acquisition, and effective communication. Participants will meet with elected officials in Lansing to learn how the legislative process can positively impact agricultural policy. They have participated in the International Fruit Tree Association Conference, which provided an opportunity to meet and learn from agricultural leaders and researchers from around the world. Participants will also coordinate a tour of their individual farms and agribusinesses. The program will culminate with a trip to an international agricultural destination.

The Foundation Board believes that educational, skill-building efforts like the New FARM program can directly impact beginning farmers' success and will enable emerging farmers to learn the technical and unique skills necessary to begin and maintain sustainable agriculture operations in northwest Michigan. In order to support the Program, Nikki Rothwell, Erin Lizotte, Rob Serrine and program participants recently submitted a grant proposal to Rotary Charities of Traverse City through the Foundation.

The New FARM Program aligns well with the goals of Rotary Charities, "to lead positive change in the five-county Grand Traverse region by assisting community organizations to better achieve their missions. We do this by providing grants and resources, providing leadership, providing a Management Support Organization (MSO) for the nonprofit sector, facilitating strategic partnerships, and promoting philanthropy." Success of our new farmers and their farms ensure a safe, healthy, and local food supply to the community. Profitable farms also help maintain local citizens' quality of life by preserving the rural character of the area, and protecting the region's natural resources through continued environmental stewardship. Perhaps most importantly, given the current financial climate, farms and agricultural infrastructure improve the regional economy through local sales, taxes, and job creation/retention.



Members of the New Farm Program mingle with produce industry leaders at the Great Lakes EXPO in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

New Planting Going In At The NWMHRS

Dr. Nikki Rothwell, District Horticulturist

In the next two years, the NWMHRS staff will be planting three new orchards; all of these plantings will focus on developing the tart cherry system of the future. Currently, processing cherry varieties are grown on standard rootstocks, but more vigorous rootstocks with greater precocity are currently available and need to be investigated under Michigan conditions. These new rootstocks have the potential to bring trees into bearing

more quickly, which in turn leads to increased grower returns. However, rootstocks that impart reduced size or earlier cropping require dramatic changes in orchard management in the following practices: a) fertilization, b) irrigation/ fertigation, c) pruning/training, d) pest management, and e) cover cropping.

At this time in Michigan, almost 100% of cherries are

mechanically harvested, and most employ trunk shaking mechanisms where the current technology grabs each individual tree trunk and 'shakes' the cherries onto a catch frame. In order to improve the current system and to maximize efficiency for profitable processed cherry production, trees would be planted at high densities, which would require modifications of current harvest technology



Montmorency on their own roots.

to move toward a continuously moving harvester. This type of harvester has been implemented in blueberries, which has improved harvest efficiency, and we anticipate that a continuous moving har-

Post-Conference Tour Highlights Local Growers Cont.

Market in Williamsburg where we had the chance to see sweet cherries growing under high tunnels. Dennis Hossie has planted Chelan, Teton, Burgundy, Rainier, and Selah on Gisela 5 in his tunnels; he hopes to move his harvest date up to July 1st to sell local cherries at his farm market during Cherry Festival.

The second day of the tour took us up the Old Mission Peninsula where we stopped at Mutual Farm Management to check out their wine



Lenny Ligon showing off his superspindle apple systems.

grapes growing under tunnels. This company has a vision to produce longer season red varieties that do not typically ripen under normal Michigan conditions. The next stop was the Ligon Farm where participants had the opportunity to meet a cutting-edge grower with a strong

passion for farming. Lenny Ligon, a current NWMHRF Board Member, shared his methods for growing superspindle Honeycrisp as well as his enthusiasm for this method of farming; both IFTA and young farmer participants were encouraged and impressed with his exciting results. Next stop on the tour was 2 Lads, a new winery specializing in red wine grape varieties using unique cover crop rotation to build organic matter and microbial biodiversity. We were treated to a tour of the winery and an exceptional lunch provided by Ethnic Garden Catering featuring local foods. The next stop was Grant Farms, a unique farm that specializes in equipment innovation. Steve, Joe, and John Grant shared their notable

equipment designs and how they were built to specifically fulfill their practical needs in their orchards. Most equipment on the farm has been fabricated by the Grants; they have built three one-man cherry harvesters, two truck mounted sprayers, a one-sided rotary

hedger for large trees, and they are currently working on an over-the-row rotary hedger. Participants were excited to see interesting equipment, and the Grants' willingness to share their ideas and vision. The last stop was

at Cherry Bay Orchards where we looked at their high density apples and their new hydrocooling technology for tart cherry developed by Mark Meizio. Under this new system, all tanks of cherries are cooled uniformly and all cooling is completed on the truck; therefore, tanks are only handled once. This new system has more than doubled the capacity of the cooling pad.

Overall, the Post-Conference Tour to northwest Michigan was a success! Participants were impressed with the innovation, enthusiasm, and achievements of our growers. Participants were able to taste the fruits of the region as well as to interact with local growers for a



Grant Farms latest innovation—the over-the-row hedger.

true northern Michigan experience. The NWMHRS staff would like to extend a much deserved 'thank you' to all participating growers and businesses.



2 Lads Winery's barrel room.

New Planting Cont.

vester would reduce harvest time by ~30% in cherry while minimizing damage to trees as can be common with our current harvest system. A high density horticulture Montmorency planting will help researchers develop, modify, and evaluate proto-

type harvesters, to compare the influence of rootstocks, determine optimum plant spacings, and evaluate pruning systems for the most favorable fruit quality and yields.

This spring, one new high density Montmorency or-

chard on Gisela rootstocks will be planted at the NWMHRS for horticultural and future harvester purposes. Three hundred and twenty trees on five different rootstocks will be put in the ground in May (own-rooted Montmorency, Gisela 3, Gisela 5, Gisela 6, and Mahaleb). The replicates

will be planted at a spacing of 1.5m (4.9ft) between trees and 4m (13ft) between rows with two training systems, whorled axe and parallel V. Currently, the NWMHRS is the one of two places in the country with density tart cherry plantings — come over and check out this cutting edge orchard later this spring!

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We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

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NWMHRS Open House – Save The Date!



The NWMHRS Open House is scheduled for ***Thursday, August 19, 2010***. Please save the date so you can enjoy educational sessions on cherries, apples, and wine grapes and a wonderful meal with MSU researchers, Extension specialists, Leelanau Horticultural Society, and fruit growers from the community.

