



OKLAHOMA PECAN GROWERS ASSOCIATION

Volume XLIX, No. 1

Michael Smith, Editor

January, February, March 2008

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Oklahoma's 2nd Ice Storm in 2007

Michael Smith

Horticulture and Landscape Architecture Dept.

Ice storms in Oklahoma are becoming old news. This is our fourth major ice storm in seven years. In fact, 2007 has delivered two storms; the first in January and the second in December. The most recent storm severely damaged (> 50% canopy loss) about 4,000 acres with moderate damage on another 13,000 acres of Oklahoma's 86,000 acres of pecans. Counties with ice damage include Craig, Creek, Lincoln, Logan, Mayes, Nowata, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Osage, Ottawa, Payne, Pawnee, Rogers, and Tulsa.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices are assessing the damage and exploring ways to assist farmers with debris removal. At the time of this article it appears that a Emergency Conservation Program may be approved for counties declared a disaster area. There is also a possibility that a Tree Assistance Program may be implemented to provide additional financial assistance with the clean-up. OPGA President, Robert Schoenecke, is working with FSA to promote such a program. Affected farms should work closely with their local FSA office to determine what assistance is available.

Management of trees recovering from major canopy loss is similar to normal management, except nitrogen rates should be reduced to about one-half the usual rate. Nitrogen is needed to support developing new growth and the current season's crop. Damaged trees that are deficient in nitrogen will produce abundant but spindly growth and take longer to return to a production condition. Also trees deficient in nitrogen will be less cold hardy than trees with adequate nitrogen. However, too much nitrogen should be avoided since this will stimulate excessive vigor on trees that will already produce abundant vegetative growth. Zinc requirements are similar or higher due to the vigorous growth. Pest management of affected trees is the same as normal.

The remaining canopy will continue to produce nuts. In fact, production on the remaining canopy



Fig. 1. Trees near Muskogee in the January 2007 ice storm.

may be somewhat more consistent among years and produce slightly larger fruit than normal. However, there will be a yield reduction approximately equal to the amount of canopy lost. Typically, new growth will be extremely vegetative and unproductive for about three years. During the fourth year following damage the numerous lateral branches that develop from the new growth should produce a significant amount of fruit. This scenario is consistent with recovery and production characteristics of pecan trees damaged in the 2000 ice storm.



Fig. 2. Trees near Cleveland in the December 2007 ice storm.



Fig. 3. Trees in southeast Oklahoma damaged in the 2000 ice storm.



Fig. 4. Growth during the first season following ice damage in 2000. Fruit production continued on the undamaged portions of the canopy, and new growth produced fruit by 2004. In 2007, trees produced an abundant crop.

The Case for Crop Load Management

Eric T. Stafne

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Being an extension liaison between the university and the public, I receive several phone calls per week on various topics. Some of these topics have nothing to do with pecans, but deal with fruit crops, especially grapes, but occasionally crops like peaches, apples, pears, blackberries, blueberries, cherries, elderberries, gooseberries, currants, kiwifruit, and just about anything else you can imagine. That is what I consider a fun part of my job. I get to expand my knowledge and also convey it to others who don't necessarily have the background or resources to which I have access. I particularly enjoy answering questions that can make a difference in the outcome of how successful the final product will be at the end of the season – what is the right variety to plant, where should I plant, should I plant at all in this location, how and when to fertilize, how to control weeds, how and when should I prune?

Of course, there is the other end of the spectrum; those questions that come too late. Unfortunately, I get as many, or more, of these type of questions than I do the questions where I can actually do some good. It is frustrating for me to hear these questions knowing that the problems could have been avoided with proper management. There was a significant case in point this year with pecans. The infamous Easter freeze did significant damage to the crop of many trees in the northern part of Oklahoma, but the southern half of the state was largely unaffected. And, oh boy, was the crop tremendous. What will end up being an average year in terms of pecan production in Oklahoma could

have been so much more if not for the freeze. But, while a lot of nuts look good on the tree, a great responsibility for proper management is required.

Several times this year I received calls from pecan producers and county extension educators that went something like this, “My nuts look great from the outside, no weevil holes, no scab, but when I crack them open they look shriveled.” Most times this was concerning large-fruited varieties. I also had calls that went like this, “The limbs from my trees are bending over to the ground (or breaking). What can I do?” Well, the answer is quite evident to both questions – crop load thin.

In respect to the two questions above, crop load thinning will reduce the total amount of nuts on the tree, thus minimizing loss of structural parts such as limbs. Crop load thinning also helps the tree to evenly (or as evenly as possible) distribute essential carbohydrates, water, and nutrients to fill out the remaining kernels. This is especially important in large-fruited varieties where more space needs to be filled. Pecan trees are notorious for alternate bearing. Crop load thinning had help to mitigate this phenomenon and lead to more year-to-year balance in production. Under full management, alternate bearing can be minimized in many situations. Thinning should be done before nuts begin to actively compete for carbohydrate reserves, so when the ovule is at 50 to 100% expanded. They should be thinned before the kernel gets to the dough stage. Timing of crop load thinning will vary with cultivar and location. How much to thin is dependent on nut size, cultivar, nut set, and incidence of insects and disease. Thinning is especially important because the amount of leaves on a tree is correlated with the ability to produce nuts. More leaves equal better nut production, with at least 8 to 10 leaves needed per nut (large fruited cultivars will need more leaves per nut). Cultivars with large nuts should be thinned at 50% ovule expansion, whereas cultivars with small nuts can be thinned closer to 100% ovule expansion (but before the dough stage). It has been found through research that it is not usually beneficial to crop load thin native pecans. Not all cultivars or trees within a cultivar will require nut thinning every year. Some cultivars respond differently to shaking: ‘Mohawk’, ‘Peruque’, and ‘Giles’ dislodge mostly individual nuts, whereas ‘Western Schley’ and ‘Maramec’ dislodge clusters, necessitating more force in shaking. The cultivars that respond best to crop load thinning with increased profitability potential are ‘Mohawk’, ‘Maramec’, ‘Giles’, ‘Wichita’, ‘Cape Fear’, ‘Cheyenne’, ‘Kiowa’, ‘Barton’, ‘GraKing’, ‘Peruque’, and ‘Shoshoni’. No benefit has been shown for ‘Elliot’ and ‘Stuart’.

Some other items to remember about crop load thin-

ning: thinning too early requires force that can damage the tree, thinning too late reduces the benefits on kernel quality, return bloom, and cold hardiness, and not thinning at all leads to a situation where the percentage of fruiting shoots increase above the optimum nut load resulting in a decrease in nut weight, return bloom, kernel percentage, and grade.

So, my ultimate goal here is twofold: one is to help growers improve their pecan crop and the other is purely selfish – to reduce those frustrating phone calls where I am the bearer of bad news. I write this as a reminder to those in the southern part of the state to learn from mistakes made this year, as well as to those in the northern part of the state to prepare for the potentially large crop in 2008.

Considerations for Developing Management Plans for Pecan Scab in Oklahoma

Damon L. Smith

Entomology & Plant Pathology Dept.

Several diseases of pecan can cause reductions in yield and quality, which impact profit. Of greatest importance to Oklahoma production is pecan scab caused by the fungus *Cladosporium caryigenum*. This past season, many growers experienced high incidence of pecan scab. The abnormally wet conditions caused severe outbreaks of pecan scab in much of the State. Conditions like these can make disease management difficult to implement and maintain. However, there are some considerations that growers can make to improve the efficacy and efficiency of their disease management plans.

Plant disease management strategies should be based on sound plant pathological principles. The plant disease triangle concept is one of the most fundamental principles of plant pathology and can be a useful tool for any disease management practitioner when developing a control strategy. The disease triangle concept states that plant disease will occur if and only if the three components of the triangle are fulfilled at the same time. The three components of the triangle are as follows: the presence of a susceptible host plant; a pathogen (e.g. fungus) able to contact the host; and environmental conditions that favor disease development either by being favorable for growth of the pathogen and/or by inducing stress in the host. If any one of these components are missing, plant disease will not occur. Therefore, by focusing efforts on one or several components of the triangle, a practitioner can develop a simple and sound disease management plan.

Efforts focused on the host component of the triangle include selecting resistant cultivars, preventing stress in the

host by carefully choosing the planting site (improved orchards), and developing a stress management plan that includes careful attention to nutrient and water requirements of the host. Efforts to modify the environmental component have focused on proper planting site, and adequate canopy management. By promoting good airflow in the canopy and increased sun exposure, disease causing canopy humidity and moisture can be reduced. Pathogen directed efforts can include exclusion, sanitation, or protection of the host from the pathogen. The latter management strategy involves the application of pesticides (usually fungicides).

Fungicides come in two types, protectants or systemics. Protectants will simply provide protection against new infections, while systemic fungicides can slow or stop infections in their very early stages, in addition to their protectant activity. Typically protectant fungicides will have residual mobility, meaning that the fungicides will adhere only to the parts they are applied and stay only on those parts. This type of fungicide will not be translocated to other parts of the plant or to new parts of the plant. Protectants can be washed from plant tissue if substantial rain events occur. New plant growth after the application of the protectant fungicide will also be unprotected. Systemic fungicides have the capability to be translocated to other parts of the plant. If given adequate time for absorption into plant tissue, systemic fungicides are resistant from washing off plant tissue. Depending on the fungicide type and mobility, the time of use can be classified as prophylactic or eradicator. Because of the diversity of modern fungicides available to pecan growers, care should be taken in choosing the proper compound. The target pathogen, the disease cycle and the prevailing weather conditions should be considered before a fungicide is chosen.

Regardless of the type or mobility of a fungicide, no pesticide will 'heal' existing lesions. Practitioners should always strive to develop a proactive fungicide application plan for several reasons. Lesion development is continuous for many pathogens when environmental conditions are favorable for disease. While symptoms may not be visibly present, the pathogen may have already infected resulting in an incubating lesion. In this situation, protectant fungicides will be rendered useless. Furthermore, if infections have already occurred, the window of opportunity for systemic fungicide applications can be small (3-4 days) or nonexistent for many fungicides. Application of fungicide within the window of opportunity may not be possible due to weather conditions that are not conducive for spraying over extended periods of time.

The online pecan scab model (<http://agweather.mesonet.org/horticulture/default.html>) can be useful as a tool for developing a preventative fungicide program. The pecan scab model can provide growers with the ability to determine periods of weather favorable for infection by the fungus. By identifying these periods growers can improve their ability to apply fungicides preventatively before epidemics are out of control. Practitioners should keep in mind that this is only a tool. In years when weather is highly conducive for fungal infection, the model may recommend application of fungicide as frequently as the pesticide labels legally allow. The model should not replace common sense or first-hand knowledge of your orchard and the management strategies that have worked best in your location in years past. Research efforts are planned for the coming seasons to improve the accuracy of model.

Biography: Damon is a native of western New York and was raised in the heart of the Finger Lakes Region. Throughout his high school career he was actively involved in the Boy Scouts of America and achieved the Rank of Eagle Scout. During his undergraduate studies, Damon attended the State University of New York at Geneseo (SUNY Geneseo). At SUNY Geneseo Damon concentrated his efforts in the study of plant sciences while he conducted undergraduate research entitled "Effects of Light Emitting Diodes (LED) on Plant Growth." In May of 2001 he graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology. In August of 2001 he accepted a graduate research assistantship from the Department of Plant Pathology at North Carolina State University under the direction of Dr. Barbara Shew. Damon obtained his Master of Science degree in Plant Pathology in the spring of 2004. The title of his thesis was "Biology and Epidemiology of *Sclerotinia minor* on Peanut (*Arachis hypogaea* L.). He began his Doctoral degree program at NC State University in August of 2004 under the direction of Dr. Barbara Shew and Dr. Turner Sutton. His research was focused on improving the management of *Sclerotinia* blight of peanut by the development of regression-based disease advisories, fungicide spray programs, and pathogen detection methods. He completed his Doctoral research program in August of 2007. Damon is currently an assistant professor and state extension specialist of plant pathology in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology at Oklahoma State University. He has extension and research responsibilities for turf, ornamental, and horticultural crops including pecan. His extension efforts focus on generating, evaluating, and disseminating solutions to many of the disease prob-

lems associated with those commodities, while his research efforts focus on the biology, epidemiology, and management of diseases of pecan, grape, turfgrass and ornamental crops.

Overview of the 2007 Pecan Season

Charles Rohla, Noble Foundation

The 2007 pecan season started off earlier than normal with most trees budding out early because of the unseasonably warm late winter, which seemed to be starting the year off on the pathway to a bumper crop. Then on Easter weekend, a hard freeze swept down out of the north and damaged pecan and fruit crops across the southern states. The freeze was felt eastward into Georgia and as far south as Hill County in Texas. Early budding trees, both fruit and pecans, were damaged in areas across this region. Damage from the freeze was isolated in some areas, while total devastation was seen in other areas. The areas that suffered freezing temperatures for a sustained time still had trees that were able to put out secondary growth after recovering from the cold; however, crop set was lessened on these trees. Fortunately, in most of the Foundation service area we escaped a lot of this damage.

Mother-nature blessed us with above normal rainfalls during the spring and early summer, which aided in a very heavy crop set for most of southern Oklahoma and northern Texas. Along with the heavy rains and above average temperatures came problems in the form of pecan scab (fungus - *Cladosporium caryigenum*). Pecan scab is the most economically damaging disease affecting the production of pecans. It is often the cause of lower production and profit in commercial orchards and the reason for crop failures in yard trees. The disease affects the stems, leaves and growing nuts causing reduced yields. This pathogen infects actively growing tissues. Rapidly growing stems can be infected in early spring, as well leaves from budbreak until they are fully expanded around June. Nuts can also be affected from the time they are formed until they start shell hardening. Nuts are especially susceptible to pecan scab during the enlargement stage in late June through July. With the rains and warm summer months, scab can develop rapidly. Several native growers reported scab on trees that they have never seen problems with before. Scab is very expensive to control and treatment is needed early, before the infection becomes too severe. Once treatment is started it must be continued to save the crop. With the heavy rains, the growers that were trying to control scab had a hard time getting into the orchards to spray, and the

growers that were not familiar with scab did not notice the problem until it was too late to start treatments.

Because of the rains during the spring and summer, trees that were not flooded, were extremely healthy with numerous, large leaves and a heavy crop set. These two factors added up to additional weight that the trees had a hard time handling. As the pecans started to fill, the weight increased and several trees suffered major limb breakage. Some aggressive growers thinned the fruit from the trees to lighten the crop load, lessening the weight on the limbs and increasing the quality of their pecans.

With the heavy crop set and the rains stopping in many locations before and during nut fill, the quality of the pecans decreased. Along with lower quality, some growers had their first real experience with severe shuck decline. This is not a disease, but a physiological stress associated with high fruit loads and lack of moisture. When shuck decline occurs, the shuck deteriorates and may open prematurely. Fruit affected by this problem often appear black and may fall from the tree or remain in the cluster. Most affected nuts will be poor quality.

Harvest started in several areas earlier than normal. Several growers still waited to harvest until a hard freeze to assist in shaking the trees. Prices started out low and remained low throughout early harvest. Speculation of a large crop out of the Southeast producing states had the buyers waiting to see how the production in these areas would be. Prices did jump right before Christmas to only fall a few days later. Several custom harvesters were unwilling to harvest at a lower price. Therefore, numerous small plots of trees went without harvesting. In some orchards with older varieties, the quality was so poor that harvest was halted. All in all, the harvest was successful with mostly good weather that aided in a speedy harvest for growers in southern Oklahoma and northern Texas.

After all the problems that were experienced during the growing season from abundant rainfall, late freezes, pecan scab and shuck decline, growers were ready to harvest what was left of the crop and salvage the year. The year that growers were once looking forward to became the year that many growers will want to forget. However, some growers had a very successful year with heavy production. Nonetheless, harvest season is ending and the new season is just around the corner. Learn from the experiences of 2007 and buckle down for the 2008 season. Good luck with your pecan crop this year and when you have questions or concerns with your crop or industry please feel free to contact me.

Educational Opportunity for Pecan Growers

The 2008 Fundamentals of Pecan Management Course is currently enrolling students for the 9 month course designed for both experienced and novice pecan growers. The course is a good opportunity for people considering planting an orchard to see what is involved in pecan production.

The course begins February 26th, meeting one Tuesday afternoon a month through October, with the exception of June, when participants are encouraged to attend the OPGA annual meeting. The course meets at the Cimarron Valley Research Station north of Perkins. Participants get the chance to learn in both the classroom and orchard following management practices throughout the season. Orchard management programs for native and improved cultivar pecans are covered.

Dr. Eric Stafne, Fruit & Pecan Extension Specialist with the assistance of Dr. Phil Mulder, entomologist and Dr. Damon Smith, plant pathologist, as well as numerous other pecan specialists and growers will present materials during the monthly course. Class members will receive a notebook with reference materials, have the opportunity to make a pecan variety board, and grow rootstock trees from seed. A certificate of completion will be awarded to those students meeting the required attendance of the course. The students will also have the opportunity to use the web based course located at <http://pecan.okstate.edu>.

Registration forms are available online at http://www.okstate.edu/ag/asnr/hortla/ftpcns/ok_pecan_mgmt_course.htm or by contacting Stephanie Larimer at stephanie.larimer@okstate.edu or 405-744-5404. Cost for the course is \$250 per person.

The first class begins on February 26th at 1 pm. Please register early to ensure a seat in the course.

OPGA Needs Members

Oklahoma has 85,740 acres of pecans grown on 2,879 farms, but the Oklahoma Pecan Growers' Association (OPGA) has only about 300 members or about 10% of the pecan growers. OPGA's primary mission is education. However, it also serves as the lobby group and contact point for matters concerning pecans. This was evident when OPGA President Robert Schoenecke contacted the Farm Service Agency (FSA) concerning assistance for producers affected by the ice storm. In addition, OPGA will represent the needs of affected pecan growers to our Senators and Congressmen. This is but one instance when the OPGA has actively engaged in supporting pecan growers needs with federal and state agencies and our elected

representatives.

OPGA's actions benefit all pecan producers in Oklahoma. Their voice would be even stronger if a larger percentage of Oklahoma's producers were members. Pass this newsletter along to your neighbors and point out the educational benefits along with the need to be represented as a group. Producers should be active in the organization all the time rather than only when they need assistance. Copies of this Newsletter and others are available at the OPGA web site <http://www.hortla.okstate.edu/pecan/opga/index.html>. A membership application is on page 8 of this Newsletter.



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NEW PECAN BOOK — by Wes Rice., Pecans - Volume II, A Grower's Perspective.

Color pictures and descriptions of over 80 cultivars, including Oklahoma releases. Updates on all facets of pecan culture. Over 350 color pictures. Perfect bound — \$32.95 + 2.50 S&H and 8% sales tax or AG exemption. Hard cover — \$46.95 + 3.00 S&H + 8% sales tax or AG exemption. Wes Rice, 580-765-7049, 333 Braden School Rd., Ponca City, OK 74604

ORCHARDMANAGER

I am looking for a person with pecan growing/operating experience to manage a recently planted/grafted 80 acre pecan orchard. Must have references and the ability to operate and maintain most equipment appropriate for an irrigated pecan orchard. The orchard is located approximately 5 miles north of Tulsa between Skiatook and Tulsa.

Salary is negotiable and on-site housing can be provided as part of the salary package. Responsibilities will include the establishment of a new orchard on an adjacent 100 acres. Please submit your resume, salary requirements, and references to Dewey Bartlett at 1648 S. Boston Avenue, Tulsa, OK 74119. Any questions, please call at 918 587-4154 x100.

President's Corner

Robert Schoenecke, OPGA President

Each January since I became president of OPGA it seems that as I look back to the previous year. There have been many factors affecting our industry which we cannot control and this January is no different. We started January 2007 with a ice storm and an April freeze claimed much of the production in the northern part of the state. Those events alone took a major toll on our industry and then the year ended with another major ice storm in the northern part of the state that left a trail of downed trees, limbs and debris to be cleaned up. Despite the fact of these major events, the state has had an average harvest in the southern part of the state. With harvest near completion it appears that production will come in above the USDA estimate of 20 million pounds.

As the deadline approached for this newsletter and while I researched the damage of the December ice storm, I was invited to accompany the USDA FSA state committee on a tour of Northeast Oklahoma orchards to assess the damage that was sustained to many of the counties that have requested assistance through FSA. This tour allowed me to meet the state committee members and answer many questions that they had on pecan production and what input our industry has on Oklahoma Agriculture. We were also accompanied by Field Representatives from Senators Tom Coburn, James Inhofe and Congressman Dan Boren's offices. The mission of this tour with these representatives was to help determine what federal assistance is available to producers affected by this disaster. We toured three orchards, two of which experienced an estimated 75%-80% canopy loss and the other approximately 20%.

In summary, many of the affected counties have requested Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) funds to assist in the clean-up. The normal funds available under this program are \$150/acre at 75% cost share. It was estimated that the cost could reach upwards of \$300/ acre and there was a need to increase the \$150 allowable. It has not been determined what that increased amount will be, but I feel that it will come in somewhere between \$200-\$300 per acre. There was also a push toward the congressional delegation to enact the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) which would provide assistance to producers for pruning, rehabilitating and replanting trees in counties that have applied for ECP assistance. The TAP funds are an addition to the ECP funds and would administered by FSA.

As a result of my tour with the FSA committee I have

written a letter to each of the Senators and Congressman concerning the programs that I have mentioned and have enclosed a copy of that letter in this newsletter. I would encourage each producer that experienced damage from the ice storm to feel free to use the enclosed letter as an example and write to your Senators and Congressman. The Field Representatives and the state committee seemed to express much empathy toward producers and I believe that with enough support from individual producers, we may be able to see the additional assistance. I would also encourage you to contact your County FSA office to see if they have applied for ECP funds. As I understand those counties that have already applied are Payne and Lincoln with Creek county to be submitted shortly.

It has been my intention to give you as much information as I can; however if you want to discuss these programs or need more information please call me and I will try to explain how I understand the programs would work.



Membership Application

We invite you to become a member of the Oklahoma Pecan Growers' Association. Membership includes the *OPGA Newsletter*, *Pecan South* and *Pecan Grower*. Make your checks payable to OPGA and mail to:

Oklahoma Pecan Growers' Association
Janice Landgraf, Treasurer
RR 1 Box 148
Madill, OK 73446
okpecan@trinex.net (580) 795-7644

Name _____

Street Address _____

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Renew

New Member

Grower Member \$50.00
Industry Member \$125.00
Extension/Research/Student \$40.00



January 16, 2008

Honorable James Inhofe
US Senator
453 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-3603

Dear Senator Inhofe:

The ice storm of December 9-12 2007 damaged several thousand acres of pecan orchards in many Oklahoma counties which will have an economic effect on these counties for the next 4-5 years. On behalf of the Oklahoma pecan growers that were affected by this event I am requesting your assistance in making the USDA FSA's Tree Assistance Program available to Oklahoma pecan growers.

Oklahoma State University has estimated that 15-18 Oklahoma counties received severe (75%) to moderate (50%) damage to their orchards. This equates to over 17,000 acres that needs major orchard floor clean up, pruning, rehabilitation and replanting trees that will require producers to acquire special equipment to complete this task. It is estimated that this task will cost between \$300-\$500 per acre which equates to over 5-8 million dollars to the Oklahoma pecan industry, just in clean up and rehabilitation alone.

According to USDA Agricultural Statistics, Oklahoma's average production for the last 10 years is 21,550,000 pounds and the average price is \$1.00 per pound. With a 50%-75% canopy loss to the affected orchards this means that over \$10 million in production loss is projected for the next 4-5 years. This will have a direct effect on the economy of these local communities.

The Tree Assistance Program offers a balanced assistance package to help growers overcome this disaster and restore their orchards to productivity. This program provides assistance for orchard clean-up, pruning and tree rehabilitation and tree replanting. Without your support of this program, it will be very difficult on many producers as well as many local economies. Your help and support is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Robert Schoenecke, President,
Oklahoma Pecan Growers Association

Oklahoma Pecan Growers' Association

c/o Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

Oklahoma State University

360 Agricultural Hall

Stillwater, OK 74078-6027

Return Service Requested
