

Almond Board's Environmental Tour Educates Regulators

By Patrick Cavanaugh, Editor

The Almond Board of California's (ABC) spring environmental stewardship tour opened the eyes for Sacramento's water, air, and pesticide regulators to the challenges and positive solutions in the industry. Hosting the one-day event in early March was Dave Phippen, chairman of the ABC board of directors and co-owner of Travaille and Phippen, growers, packer and shippers of almonds in Manteca, Calif.

The tour was part of Almond Board's implementation of a five-year plan (2003-2008) "to be the healthiest specialty crop in the world," benefiting the consumer, the environment, and the industry.

Joining Phippen in the tour was his son-in-law Nick Gatzman, one of the operation's farm managers. Both led attendees through their orchards and processing facility and outlined ways they are reducing their impact on the environment.



Dave Phippen, left, speaks with Gary Wolff, who is on the State Water Resources Control Board.

Organizing the even were Mark Looker, Looker Communications Consulting, and Gabriele Ludwig, the

ABC senior manager, global technical and regulatory affairs. "This was an
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Stuart Layman, with Flory Industries.



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opportunity for regulators to see how almond growers are implementing environmental stewardship goals,” said Ludwig. “We invited the regulators and other experts to see firsthand the grower and processor’s accomplishments.”

Ludwig said the Travaille and Phippen operation offered a view of both the field and processing side of the industry. “Environmental stewardship doesn’t just occur in the field, but also in the processing line and warehouse,” she noted.

During the tour, Gatzman explained how they are eliminating dormant sprays for San Jose Scale. “We allow predators to keep the scale pressure down,” he said. “We do scale counts in the winter and if the pressure is overwhelming predators we may make a decision to come in with oil (if pressure is light), or a single dormant control spray if the pressure is high.”

The approach is classic Integrated Pest Management in that control sprays are held off until a treatment threshold is made. “We no longer spray by calendar date,” Gatzman said.

Gatzman also outlined their navel orangeworm (NOW) control. He said the single most important practice



Gabriele Ludwig speaks with Mike Flora, Flory Industries.

for low reject levels is shaking mummies out of the trees and flail mowing them.

The Travaille and Phippen orchards also have a strip spray program in place, where only contact herbicides are used--

avoiding pre-emergent materials which have a greater chance of entering water runoff.

“We use mostly Roundup or other glyphosate materials as strip sprays.

To reduce resistance we may use 2, 4-D or Gramoxone,” said Gatzman. “And to reduce impact, we also use very low water volume when spraying the herbicides. At the same time, we’re getting more effectiveness.

“Typically we come in with 12-16 ounce of Roundup per acre, instead of 32 ounces,” he said.

Gatzman explained that cover crops are also used in sandy soil areas of the orchard.

“We want to improve the organic matter and water holding capacity of these lighter soils,” Gatzman said. “We plant a winter cover using a seed mix of beans, vetch, oats and clover, and during the summer we plant Sudan grass. We mow the grass, regrow it, and later, disk it in.”

On the processing side, Phippen talked about how they are making environmental improvements. “We are using state-of-the-art bag houses where the air going out is as clean as the air going in,”

“What we saw here today were solutions and that’s what we want to see. The governor does not want to see a ‘I can’t do it’ attitude. He wants solutions.”

Gatzman noted that they do come in with a hull-split spray to control in-season NOW as well as pick up peach twigborer (PTB).

Mary-Ann Warmerdam, center speaks with Tom Tomich, left, and Richard Waycott.



he said. However, he did explain that it costs more to run these effective bag houses, as they require more horsepower. This also makes him less competitive with other processors that are not doing as much in dust abatement.

He noted that regulators need to give processors incentives to make the improvements so that everyone is on a level playing field. Currently processors in operations before newer air regulations do not have to make improvements unless they expand or make major improvements.

Phippen also told attendees that they use IPM in the warehouse. He said while they fumigate the almonds prior to warehousing to clean up NOW and PTB, once in the warehouse they closely monitor for the Indian meal moth--a food storage pest.

"When we start to catch moths, we may fog the warehouse," said Gatzman. "If it's an isolated area of the stored nuts, and if the moth numbers are super high we may move the nuts out of the warehouse and put them through our fumigation chambers," he said.

Almond Board President and CEO Richard Waycott said the industry is committed to finding solutions. "We are a huge industry with unprecedented growth. We have a lot at stake in California," he said. "We are a very profitable industry and we want to sustain this profitability.

"We want to work with regulating entities with solutions," noted Waycott.

Among the regulators in attendance was Mary-Ann Warmerdam, director of the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. "What we saw here today were solutions and that's what we want to see," she said. "The governor does not want to see a 'I can't do it' attitude. He wants solutions."

Among the other speakers at the day's events included Dave Baker, chairman of the Environmental Committee (ABC); Merle Jacobs, associate director of Food Quality and Safety (ABC); Steve Shafer, CDFA director, Agriculture and Environmental Stewardship; Tom Tomich UC Davis, director, Agricultural Sustainability Institute; Cindy Wire, EPA, Region 9; Parry Klassen, executive director of the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES); Ed



Nick Gatzman

Burton and John Beyer, both with the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service; and, David Smart UC Davis Dept. of Viticulture and Enology.

Also present at the event were industry equipment representatives aiding in the effort to reduce dust, and increasing air quality with the use of chippers. The companies included Flory Industries, Exact Harvesting, JackRabbit, and Vander Muelen, Inc.

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