

IMPACT

Agricultural and Natural Resources

Virginia Winter Fruit School Impact

Tree fruits are important to the agricultural economy in Virginia. The commonwealth ranks sixth in the nation in apple production, with a crop valued at more than \$68 million, and 20th in peach production, with a crop valued at \$4.5 million. Although smaller in acreage, cherries, pears, and plums also play an important role in some areas of Virginia. These fruit crops are susceptible to an ever-changing array of insects, plant diseases, and weeds, and pest management programs are complex and knowledge-intensive.

Virginia Cooperative Extension specialists and agents conduct ongoing research and educational programs that provide growers with cutting-edge integrated pest management practice options that improve farm profitability and minimize pesticide usage.

Each winter, Extension specialists and agents in fruit entomology, plant pathology, and pomology provide five Winter Fruit Schools located in the major tree fruit production areas in Virginia. Technical issues and original research covering fruit diseases, arthropod pests, and horticultural practices are presented in venues that encourage participation from fruit producers, consultants, researchers, and Extension agents. Growers that account for most of the tree fruit production in the state take part in these educational programs, each of which is usually attended by 150 to 300 stakeholders.

A survey of 103 fruit producers and crop advisors who attended a 2014 Fruit School indicated that

- 95 percent have used information from Fruit School to help improve their application of pesticides.
- 98 percent reported that Fruit School had been helpful or extremely helpful in improving their ability to manage pest problems.
- Several growers noted that they were now rotating insecticide classes to reduce pest resistance.
- Others were substituting insect pest mating-disruption techniques for traditional insecticides or had lowered the rates of insecticides used.
- 74 participants answered the question, “How has using the information from Fruit School affected the profitability of your operation (or the operations of the growers you consult with)?” Of them,
 - 34 (46 percent) reported increased profitability. Thirteen of these growers estimated their additional annual profits due to information they gained at Fruit School; their estimates ranged from \$300 to \$200,000. The increase in annual profits for these 13 growers totaled \$600,600.
 - 39 (53 percent) reported no change.
 - Only 1 (1.4 percent) reported decreased profitability.

This report was prepared by the Virginia Cooperative Extension IPM impact reporting team.



Following are comments from some Fruit School participants.

“Fruit School has helped me balance IPM [integrated pest management], conventional, and organic approaches.”

“I have improved the timing of applications based on information obtained at Fruit School.”

“I now rotate classes of insecticides and fungicides.”



For more information, contact your local Extension office or visit us at www.ext.vt.edu.