

# Okanagan Kootenay



## OKANAGAN KOOTENAY CHERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT PARC CONFERENCE ROOM, SUMMERLAND MARCH 15, 2005

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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- WCB rules apply make sure you are prepared contact FARSHA for help
- US exchange rates are a big issue for us. Present expectations range from \$1.11 to 1.235 by this fall. Be prepared for a volatile year in currency issues.

**1. Chairman's welcome and report:** Chair Greg Norton reflected on the past year's activities of OKCGA. He listed efforts to help with cases before the Farm Practices Review Board, to register Giberrellic Acid as a fertilizer rather than pesticide, to register new chemicals with PMRA for use on cherries, to upgrade the website [www.bccherry.com](http://www.bccherry.com). He praised the executive for its efficiency and diligence in voluntarily carrying on the business of OKCGA, virtually without cost to the members. He plans to attend PMRA Minor Use meeting in Ottawa in March 2005 to press for inclusion of new chemicals to attack cherry pests and diseases.

**2. Financial Statement:** Christine Dendy performed an unofficial audit on OKCGA's books, a statement of which was circulated at the meeting.

**MOTION:** C. Dendy/G. Snow...that the 2004 financial statements be approved as circulated. **CARRIED**

**MOTION:** C. Dendy/G. Nelson ... that effective in 2006, the membership dues for OKCGA be \$50 per year. **CARRIED**

**3. Reports of "A Year in Review":**

- Brian Mennell reported on research projects funded by OKCGA in 2004 and predicted that OKCGA would spend \$28,000 on research projects in 2005.
- Bill Truscott reported on the newsletter which is prepared 3 or 4 times a year. He asked for email addresses of members, to make distribution cheaper.

- Mike Beulah reported on CFF research in 2004, during which OKCGA funded research by Sue Senger and Dr. Howard Thistlewood, whose work is now complete. A copy of both research reports are available online at [www.bccherry.com](http://www.bccherry.com)
- Clive Sutherland talked of the Mexican Guest Worker Program, about to enter its second year. He told of French societies and work centres, all of which are helping transient workers connect with cherry growers. Greg Brown of B.C. Ministry of Labour reported on changes and standards in farm worker legislation and regulations. Mike Wallis of B.C. Raspberry Growers Association reported details of the Mexican Guest Worker Program. He referred people to [www.sdc.gc.ca/en/epb/lmd/fw/sawpBC](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/epb/lmd/fw/sawpBC) for more details. Brian Mennell reported on the possibility of importing Guatemalan workers through a UN group, International Organization for Migration.
- Graem Nelson reported on improvements of OKCGA's relationship with PICO, and circulated an informal questionnaire to gather information for PICO.

**4. Nominations and election:** David Mikitka conducted the nominations and election of 2005 OKCGA Executive Committee, with results as follows:

- President Greg Norton
- Vice President Glen Wood
- Treasurer Christine Dendy
- Secretary Graem Nelson
- Director Brian Mennell
- Director Dr. David Geen
- Director Bill Truscott
- Director Tim Watson
- Director Ken Witzke
- Director Helmut Arndt
- Director Bill Wolk
- Director Gary Snow
- Director Mike Beulah
- Director Dr. Frank Kappel
- Director Clive Sutherland
- Director Rick Faynor

**5. Program:**

- Joe Lariviere and Bill Truscott – Eurepgap and B.C. EFP
  - Greg Brown and Mike Wallis – Labour laws and migrant worker programs
  - Brian Mennell – GF-120 registration progress
  - Jack Barkwell, Graem Nelson, Dave Geen – Future of B.C. cherry industry
  - Dr. Gerry Neilson – fruit nutrition
  - Robert Quaedvlieg – Trapping Birds the Best Way
  - Jacek and David Stirling – Shooing Away Birds with Falcons
  - Ken Hackwell and James Calessi – PICO testing programs proposal
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## GARY'S CORNER



As we all know the only thing that's for sure is that things are gonna change. Unfortunately that also seems to apply to the cherry business, especially the marketing end of it. In British Columbia we have a climate & geographical location that used to guarantee that we were the only ones in the global pool at the end of the cherry season. That sadly is no longer a given and it isn't due to climate change & global warming.

While we in B.C. have been replanting newer, later varieties at a frantic pace the last several years, so has the rest of the world. Since 1991 we have planted 2125 acres with the assistance of the replant program. More than 1822 of those acres have been planted in the last eight years. At an estimate of 7 tons per acre those 2125 acres should yield almost 1.5 million boxes of cherries per year, with more on the way as these plantings come into full production. That's a lot of fruit. Good for us.

At the same time as we're sticking trees in the ground as fast as we can the rest of the planet has not failed to notice this cherry deal as being a good thing. In 2003 nursery sales in Washington were double that of 1999. Washington nurseries sold 923,000 trees in 2003. At a density of 272 trees per acre that's 3400 acres in one year alone. Forty four percent of these sales in 2003 were Skeena, Lapins, & Sweethearts not to mention the small, unfortunate glitch that caused a fair number of Staccato to go south as well. Estimates are that between 25 & 40% of acreage in Washington is not in production yet.

Michigan, which had been primarily involved in growing sour cherries, has increased their annual yield of sweet cherries from 30,000 tons per annum to roughly 100,000. Shipments of American cherries to Canada are up 25% since 2000 to almost one million cases per year. According to a cherry grower who recently returned from a trip to Eastern Europe reported that there were "millions" of trees in nurseries and already in the ground over there. That's a lot of fruit. Not quite so good for us.

What can we do short of donning camouflage and spreading out all over the world with a huge supply of copper nails & Roundup? Just keep on doing what we are doing, just do it better and smarter. On the whole we produce quality and size in our fruit that so far has been unequaled in the world. Avail yourself of the knowledge and information the Internet and your fellow growers have to offer. Look hard at pruning, nutrition, identifying and treating disease, identifying and dealing with pests of all kinds from insects to mammals to birds. All these are things we've all been doing for years, we just need keep it up and do them smarter. Don't be afraid to ask a neighbor for advice and don't be afraid to give advice. Sure you can keep a secret or two, but bear in mind since your neighbor is on the market when you are and the worst fruit helps to set the market for the best it's in all our interest to have everything we produce to be as good as it can be.

Availability of labor is a huge issue and will only get bigger as yields increase. Don't shortchange your labor force. Pay a decent wage. Don't give away the farm but remember, we do compete for the same labor. Provide a decent place for them to stay even if it's only a nice place to pitch a tent with showers, toilets, and safe water to drink. Referring back to pruning, give them good trees to pick. Give your workers a reason to want to come back next year. A stable, contented work force from year to year is a whole lot easier and cheaper to manage than a crew of surly pickers who are new to your operation every year.

If you are packing your fruit or even if you ship your cherries to someone else to pack, be attentive to the demands of your market. Be ready to provide different sizes and types of containers. Be sure to treat your cherries like the diamonds they are when handling them.

Be sensitive to the worldwide movement for increased awareness of food safety, including that eight-letter word EUREPGAP. Some markets are less demanding in that regard than others right now, but it's coming. Walkerton, BSE, Avian influenza, while not fruit problems they are food issues and we grow food. It's inevitable that we're going to have to address concerns in the market over the safety of our product. We are also just one bio-terror incident with the food chain away from having a whole new huge can of worms opened and dumped all over us as farmers.

Watch your costs. Analyze your blocks and figure out which ones are perennial losers and give serious consideration to replanting to more market friendly varieties.

In spite of the gloom and doom that might seem to permeate the above, it's not a lost cause. We still have the climate and geography that allows us to produce a cherry the rest of the world cannot equal. This is all common sense. We know it. Sometimes we just need a gentle reminder every now and then.

## **The World of Cherries According to Jack Barkwell BCFP**

- Since 1991,  
2,125 acres planted in B.C. with assistance from re-plant program.
- *U.S. Shipments to Canada up over 25% since 2000. Now almost 1,000,000 cartons*
- Washington State Annual nursery tree sales in 2003 were double annual sales of 1999 and earlier  
2003=923,000 trees @ 272 trees/acre = 3400 acres
- Michigan increasing Sweet Cherries production. Now over 100,000 tons. Historically about 30,000 tons
- “Millions “ of trees being planted in Eastern Europe for the late market
- Estimates vary: From 25% to 40% of Washington acreage not yet in Production!

### ***WHAT DOES IT MEAN***

- When competition is stiff: Quality standards go up. Prices go down.
- Produce a clean crop of large fruit.
  - Pruning
  - Feeding
  - Insects
  - Birds
  - Diseases
- Look after your Labour:
  - Accommodation
  - Sanitation
  - Transportation
  - Pay rates
  - Good trees
  - It will be competitive
- MARKET ACCESS
  - Saturated markets.
  - Multiple sizes, grades,  
and packages serve different markets.
  - EUREPGAP.

- **HANDLING & PACKING**

**Capacity.**

**Gentle.**

**Flexible & Low cost**

- **Keep accurate account of your cost of production.**
- **Compare costs with your returns and eliminate unprofitable blocks**
- **It will get tougher, but few if any places in the world can produce the size and quality of B.C. cherries.**



**Are you done yet?**

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*The Newsletter is happy to include articles produced by our members if you have anything to contribute please email or fax us a copy of your submission. Do you want to publish an opinion on an issue facing our industry or do you just have some information you would like to share. Have you been to visit another production region in the world? Please send us your photos and recollections of your visit. This paper is intended as a means of communicating amongst the membership and we need to hear your voice. As always the board reserves the right to edit material that is submitted. We cannot guarantee that your article will be published, however, we will do our best to represent your opinion.*

### Looking Back



Oh what a year it was! 2004 was fraught with difficulties. An early bloom, variable weather and along time hanging on the trees. Most cherry growers experienced difficulty with arrivals and a short shelf life. What caused it? Tim Watson told us at the AGM he had all the answers. Of course his tongue was firmly planted in his cheek at the time. He tells us cherries size best at 26 degrees Centigrade while above 96 degrees F. they just stop growing. Above that temperature the impact on the fruit can be considerably detrimental. While we did have average temps generally a bit lower last year we did see a wealth of extremes. What ever caused it those poor cherries which looked so great in the box when the lid went on were in reality very tired. Greg Norton believes that really there is nothing to learn from last year other than we have to be aware of the length of time our fruit has been hanging on the trees in future years. Personally I think he is right. Other than the hang time we might as well forget last year and charge on ahead with 2005. We can seize on a couple of things, be glad you are a cherry grower, not an Apple grower and be assured 2005 will be very different than 2004.

