



Hort Headlines

January 6, 2006

- **New \$7.63 Minimum Wage Rate Now In Effect** - Washington's minimum wage increased 28 cents to \$7.63 an hour beginning January 1, 2006. The Department of Labor and Industries recalculates the state's minimum wage each year in September as required by Initiative 688, which Washington state voters approved in 1998. That index rose 3.8 percent during the 12 months ending Aug. 31, 2005. Free minimum wage and worker rights posters are available from any L&I office or by calling 1-866-219-7321 or downloading from the [L&I web-site](#).
- **WSDA Scraps Half-Mile Pesticide Notification Rule** - As reported last week in a WSHA breaking news alert, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) will **not** adopt the proposed rule that would have required pesticide applicators to provide two days written notice before applying certain pesticides within a half-mile of select community facilities. WSHA opposed the rule because it was arbitrary, had no scientific justification and because laws are already in place that adequately regulate pesticide spray applications. WSDA withdrew the rule on the basis that they received very little input from local schools and hospitals that would have been impacted by the rule. Another reason for the withdrawal was that WSDA was concerned community facilities may be exposed to liability if they did not adequately pass on the information to their members. Although the rule has been withdrawn, WSDA Director Valoria Loveland said the department will consider proposing a pilot rule similar to that which has been withdrawn to test in a specific geographic area of the state.

- **WSHA Meets With Legislators To Discuss Tree Fruit Priorities** - With the short 60-day legislative session beginning Monday, WSHA got a jump start conveying tree fruit industry issues to 12th district legislators Senator Linda Parlette, Representative Mike Armstrong and Representative Cary Condotta at pre-scheduled meetings. Issues discussed centered on water and labor management and included minimum wage, unemployment insurance reform and L&I agency accountability. WSHA also made a budget request of \$800,000 for support of the Ag WeatherNet system that is extremely valuable to tree fruit producers who depend on accurate weather forecasting. Similar debriefing meetings are planned with legislators from the Yakima-area in the coming weeks.
- **Tree Fruit Day Set For January 31** - WSHA's 4th Annual Tree Fruit Day is scheduled for Tuesday, January 31 in Olympia. The one-day event will include visits with key legislators and agency officials. Tree fruit industry gift boxes will also be distributed again this year to all legislators and their legislative assistants. Visit the WSHA web-site to [view Tree Fruit Day photos and information from last year](#) and [download a registration form](#). Questions? Contact Darby Jones with WSHA at 509-665-9641.

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Zirkle Settles Job Suit - William Zirkle has agreed to pay \$1.3 million to settle a lawsuit accusing him and two other executives at the Selah-based fruit company of conspiring to hire thousands of illegal immigrants in order to keep wages low. The executives admitted no wrongdoing in the settlement. The corporation, Zirkle Fruit, was not a defendant, according to this article in the [Yakima Herald-Republic](#).

Pear Crop Size Back - Link to the [The Packer](#) to find out what Northwest pear marketers are saying about this year's crop.

University of Minnesota Introduces 'Managed' Apples To U.S. Growers - For the first time, a "managed" apple tree variety (a.k.a. club variety) developed by the University of Minnesota Horticultural Research Center will be planted in U.S. orchards in 2007. The new variety, temporarily known as Minnesota 1914, is a cross between a Honeycrisp and a Zestar. The university has licensed Pepin Heights Orchards of Lake City, Minnesota to manage the variety. Link to the [La Cross Tribune](#) for more on this new club variety.

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