

NHC NEWS

A Monthly Bulletin of the Northwest Horticultural Council

PASSENGER AIRCRAFT CARGO SECURITY

For those of us that travel, the security screening of airline passengers and their baggage is a reminder that we live in a very different country than prior to September 11, 2001. While passenger airline security screening has become a fairly routine, albeit somewhat begrudgingly accepted practice, many passengers give little thought to the screening of commercial cargo that travels in the same airplane they are boarding. The potential threat that unscreened cargo may pose, and many other national security issues, were addressed by Congress when it passed and President Bush signed into law the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. One section of this law requires that one hundred percent of cargo loaded on board commercial passenger planes be screened by August of 2010. Fifty percent of the cargo must be screened beginning in February of 2009. The responsibility for administering and enforcing this law lands squarely on the Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

Our sweet cherry industry is heavily reliant on passenger aircraft for transporting its highly prized fruit around the world. This past season 96 percent of the cherry exports, not including those destined for Canada and Mexico, were shipped via aircraft. Roughly half are placed on dedicated cargo planes, such as operated by FedEx, and the other half on passenger aircraft. In a "typical" two month Pacific Northwest cherry season some 1.3 million cartons valued at \$50 million is exported via passenger aircraft.

How then will the Pacific Northwest cherry packers or their agents comply with the screening

requirements while maintaining high quality fruit as a result of a demanding 24-to 48-hour pick, pack, refrigerate and export cycle? In mid-October TSA officials traveled to Yakima for a meeting with members of our cherry industry, the second such visit this year, to try and answer this question.

Congress has not funded TSA to screen cargo and as a result TSA will not screen air cargo as it does passengers and their baggage. The regulated entities, those ultimately responsible for securing the cargo, are the air carriers. With many air carriers unable or unwilling to screen cargo, TSA has developed a voluntary Certified Cargo Screening Program (CCSP). CCSP will allow freight forwarders and shippers to screen and secure cargo and therefore avoid potential delays and missed flights when tendering cargo to a carrier.

The implementation and compliance challenges associated with CCSP are enormous. TSA has yet to publish the rules under which a shipper might screen product. Protecting the chain of custody from the packing house to the air carrier; ensuring employee and facility security; and adhering to phytosanitary protocols for countries such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan are all major concerns. Technology based screening solutions remain in test mode, removing the option for companies to purchase these costly but labor saving machines. Finally, the financial obligation to screen cargo will ultimately fall on shippers, or--in the case of the cherry industry--growers, as it is hard to see such costs being passed on to customers under the current economic environment.

Cherry shippers are evaluating their options in order to make a very difficult business decision; who will screen their valuable and very perishable fruit? Does a fruit packing company decide to

manage this business risk by bringing the security screening in-house or will that firm trust that a freight forwarder or air carrier will get the job done?

The Northwest Horticultural Council has been and will remain active in gathering information from public and private sources so that the exporters in our industry are in a position to make informed choices for the looming 2009 cherry shipping season.



Travel

November 17 – NHC Science Advisory Committee meeting, Yakima, Washington.

Mark Powers

November 18-21 – U.S. Agricultural Export Development Council's annual workshop, Baltimore, Maryland

Deborah Carter

November 11-13 – Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health (PNASH) conference on Health and Safety in Western Agriculture – New Paths, Cle Elum, Washington.

November 17-20 – National Organics Standards Board Hearings, Ethylene for use on organic pears, Washington, D.C.

Mike Willett

November 18-19 – Panelist at the NAFTA Technical Working Group meeting, Scottsdale, Arizona.

[Disraeli] wrote to MPs demanding their presence in the House for the crucial debates. 'I write to you with deep emotion, for I know how much is at stake,' he told them. Sir John Trelawny recorded that 'the Tories seem jubilant – and quite ready for office', but asked: 'Is the pear ripe?'

Richard Aldous
*The Lion and the Unicorn:
Gladstone vs. Disraeli*

The Northwest Horticultural Council represents the deciduous tree fruit industry of Idaho, Oregon and Washington on national and international policy matters of interest to growers and shippers. Its full and associate members are:

- *Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers*
- *Fruit Growers League*
- *Idaho Apple Commission*
- *Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission*
- *Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service*
- *Washington Apple Commission*
- *Washington State Fruit Commission*
- *Washington Tree Fruit Research Comm.*
- *Wenatchee Valley Traffic Assn.*
- *Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Assn.*

The NHC also advises the Fresh Pear Committee (Portland) on certain issues related to food safety, crisis control and international trade.



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