

February 2009

NHC NEWS

A Monthly Bulletin of the Northwest Horticultural Council

WAL-MART

H. Lee Scott, Jr., the retiring chief executive of the world's largest retailer, has acted to change the direction of Wal-Mart's image to being one in tune with activist environmental movement. "Sustainability" is now the buzz word at corporate headquarters. The apparent goal is to both lower internal business costs and encourage, if not mandate, practices by its suppliers that are environmentally sensitive. *The New York Times* quotes Mr. Scott as saying, "Let me be clear about this. There is no conflict between delivering value to shareholders, and helping solve bigger societal problems."

Is this an honest conversion of attitude or merely an effort to modify a poor public image? A public image of a low-wage paying, mega-retailer expanding aggressively into small communities and, by doing so, swamping local small businesses. A negative image that is balanced by the widely accepted reality that Wal-Mart has made useful goods readily available to ever more consumers at ever better prices.

Setting aside questions on Wal-Mart's motives, a serious public policy concern arises from the public activist role now undertaken by such a dominate player in our nation's economy. Is the board room of Wal-Mart the best place to set complex standards for its suppliers on "sustainability", or "food miles", or "carbon sequestration", or other such "green" concepts? Standards that can become *de facto* public ones given the size and scope of this giant company's dominant purchasing power. Should not such standard-making decisions be made by government subject to an open, democratic process?

It might be beneficial to reflect back in time. Suppose a retailer existed in Bentonville, Arkansas in 1861 and that same retailer was sincerely active in the social policy issues of its time and place. Might not it have demanded of all suppliers--as a condition of doing business--solemnly affirm they were not Abolitionists?



LABELING

The proper labeling of containers of fruit sold into interstate commerce is a prosaic but essential task of each packer/shipper in our industry. To help in this regard, the Northwest Horticultural Council provides information on the legal requirements touching on labeling in its "Fresh Fruit Labeling Manual", which can be found on our Web site at www.nwhort.org. The manual covers such labeling issues as organic, post-harvest chemical, nutrition, retail packs, and country of origin labeling (COOL).

We work with federal agencies in the attempt to provide clear, accurate advice on matters associated with the words that need to accompany a carton of fruit to market. The Food and Drug Administration has the lion's share of responsibility for overseeing labeling, but USDA has a role as well. As an example, this past month the NHC worked with a cooperative and knowledgeable Martin O'Connor, Chief of the Standards, Analysis and Technology Branch at the Agricultural Marketing Service in Washington, D.C., to fine tune some NHC advice contained in our manual on the final rule recently issued by USDA on COOL.



Travel

Christian Schlect

February 3-7 – Annual meeting of the National Council of Agricultural Employers, Washington, D.C.

February 24-27 – Annual meeting of the Minor Crop Farmer Alliance and United Fresh Produce Association's Government Relations Council meeting, Washington, D.C.

Mike Willett

February 2-6 – Meetings with USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service and Foreign Agricultural Service, Washington, D.C.

February 12-13 – Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission's NW Pear Research Review, Hood River, Oregon.

February 18 – Speaker at Wilbur-Ellis grower meeting, Chelan, Washington.

Mark Powers

February 1-6 – Annual meetings of Freshfel Europe's Import and Export Division and the World Apple and Pear Association. In addition, attendance at Fruit Logistica's Fresh Produce Forum, Berlin, Germany.

February 7-13 – Travel to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia with Washington Apple Commission.

As for the cider-making, the Norman terms could not displace the old [English] words *apple* and *orchard*, but *cider* itself was Norman, and so was its pear-based cousin, *perry*.

Henry Hitchings
The Secret Life of Words

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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