Guard against bitter pit

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
GUARD AGAINST BITTER PIT

Warning for apple growers . . .

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Two seasons ago bitter pit caused heavy rejections of apples for export overseas and bad trade publicity. To avoid a repetition of this, precautions should be taken against bitter pit on all susceptible varieties.

THE 1964 apple season was notable for the low incidence of bitter pit. There were very few rejections for export and only occasional reference in overseas written reports.

On the local market some early Cleos pitted quite badly but generally pit was not a problem. This is in distinct contrast to 1963 when pit was very serious and caused considerable rejections for export and unfortunate repercussions overseas.

While several factors contributed to the improved position this last season, it is quite evident that the very extensive use of calcium sprays on Cleos and Granny Smiths played an important part. In an experiment conducted with young Granny Smith trees at Donnybrook quite extensive pitting occurred on fruit which was not sprayed. Calcium sprays effectively reduced pit and the minimum number of applications for useful control was three.

It is always difficult to make worthwhile forecasts of likelihood of pit before the period for applying calcium sprays.

However, the previous seasons of severe pit incidence in 1959-60 and 1962-63 were characterised by delayed blossoming and this year blossom development for the coming crop on apples was later than normal. When this happens it is likely that the fruit will be more immature at the start of harvest and therefore more prone to pit.

Remembering past hazards of pit, growers would be well advised to continue with the recommended calcium nitrate spray programme in the coming season. The material is not expensive and can be quickly applied.

The recommendations are:—

1. VARIETIES TO BE SPRAYED:
   • All cleos.
   • Young Granny Smiths.
   • Older Granny Smiths, particularly where irrigation is practised or where trees have had a previous record of pit liability.
   • Golden Delicious.

2. Apply at least three sprays—more where previous experience has indicated that pit is very troublesome. Apply first spray early in December and space subsequent sprays to conclude in early February.

3. Use calcium nitrate at a concentration of 10lb. per 100 gallons of water with the addition of a wetting agent.

4. Don’t mix with other spray materials or injury to foliage and fruit may result. For the same reason the sprays should not be applied under conditions of very slow drying and saline water should be avoided.

NOTE.—A more detailed article on bitter pit will appear in the December issue of this Journal. In the meantime, assess your requirements for calcium nitrate and place your order.