

# Organic producers find alternative solution

The organic farming trend is no doubt a growing phenomenon. But farmers who convert from conventional practices are struggling to produce a well-qualified and competitive fruit, under heightened restrictions. While conventional growers are using Gibberellic Acid (GA) to help them achieve desired fruit set, organic growers struggle to obtain the same end result, without the use of conventional chemical treatments.

Over the last 25 years, Allan Nazaroff has been farming Thompson seedless grapes for raisins in west Fresno. Three years ago, he converted to organic production, expressing a major concern with his ability to attain a quality grade for his grapes. Without GA, he explained that he wasn't able to stretch the bunches. "With the size of



Allan Nazaroff on his farm in west Fresno, Calif.

the crop, we were worried about the quality," he said. That was before he was introduced to the Westbridge organic product line.

## A friendly solution

Nazaroff and his two brothers now farm 100 acres using the Organic TRIGGRR®, Organic BioLink® 3-3-3 and the Organic BioLink® Cal Plus, a program offered by Westbridge. "What we're happy about is being able to use products that we weren't able to use before," Nazaroff said. The program has enabled his berries to size up and he made note of the the overall improvements he experienced.

The program "stimulates root growth and the maturity of the grape and vine itself," he explained. It helps stretch the bunches, allowing more room for the berries to mature. The "quality and berry size came out great," Nazaroff said noting that they had close to three-ton



Mowing the cover crop to delay exposure of Nitrogen to the vines



After migrating from Russia in 1918, the Nazaroff family began their farming legacy on the same land they farm today.

raisins after implementing the program. “A lot of people had bad grades and our grades were real good.”

Aside from the size of the berries, Nazaroff explained that the sugar content was higher, the vine was greener and lusher and it displayed a higher resistance to disease. A stronger and healthier vine resulted.

Nazaroff said that he has received the best results by observing three of the application timings recommended with the program. At 5-inch growth, the first foliar spray application is administered to “help stretch the berries,” Nazaroff explained. Two weeks before bloom, the second is applied to aid in the maturity of the cluster. The final application is applied at one percent berry softening and helps with the sugar content, giving the grower more weight for his grapes and ultimately a better quality grade. All three products in the program are utilized at each application.

Nazaroff’s ancestors were peasant farmers from Russia who immigrated to the United States in 1918. They “came to the richest fertile soil of the world—the bread basket of the world,” Nazaroff said. “It’s like it was meant to be.” He grew up on the very same piece of land he farms today and has plans to retire there.

As third generation farmers, he and his brothers have split the land into two 25-acre parcels and one 50-acre parcel. Each brother farms individually, using the same exact techniques. “They all have good results too,” Nazaroff said

of his brothers using the Westbridge products. “It’s a good program, he concluded.



Mike Jerkovich on his farm in Kerman, Calif.

### M-C Farms concurs

Nearby, Mike Jerkovich, a third generation farmer from Kerman, Calif. also farms Thompson seedless grapes for raisins at M-C Farms. In 1920, his ancestors immigrated from Croatia, later settling in the Kerman area. In 1955, Jerkovich began his farming career and has been at it ever since.

After producing organically for two years, Jerkovich decided to run a test plot on his 60 acres four years ago, using the Westbridge Raisin Grape Program. His results were similar to those that Nazaroff experienced. On one ten-acre plot, he used the complete pro-

gram—Organic TRIGRR®, Organic BioLink® 3-3-3 and Organic BioLink® Cal Plus. On another 10-acre plot, he used only the Organic TRIGRR®. The remaining 40 acres were farmed without applying any of the Westbridge products. In the plot that was being nourished by the complete program, Mike saw a “10 percent increase in weight per tray and the quality was way better,” he said.

Since then, Jerkovich has been using the program on his farm and may also incorporate the Biolink® Zinc. Before he began farming organically, he always used a zinc supplement when the berries were starting to form and he would have better results after applying it. He recently submitted a soil test to find out what he was deficient in. After he receives the results, he plans to incorporate the Biolink® Zinc into his rotation for next year’s crop if the soil shows a deficiency.

Jerkovich has recommended the Westbridge product line to others in his area. He said there has been about 800-900 more acres in his area that have been exposed to the program since he first implemented it.

The results that Nazaroff and Jerkovich have experienced in their observance of the program are further supported by tests conducted by Westbridge. Westridge has shown that their Raisin Grape Program improves root and plant vigor, leads to earlier maturity, increased size, greater solids, higher brix and a lower green to dry ratio—while adhering to organic standards. ■

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