

Organic Prune Grower Discovers New Tools to Increase Production

“When I became a Simonian, I never worked this hard,” laughed Patty Simonian. “My husband used to do the tractor work, along with the irrigation and farming of our operation, while I raised the kids, and handled the harvesting and the packing.” Patty, of P. Simonian Farms, grows 25 acres of organic prunes in Fresno, California.

Patty also remarked on the rarity of finding female organic prune growers in California. The number of female growers, however, is steadily rising. The 2002 USDA Census noted approximately 27.2 percent of the United States’ total farmers were women -- the increase of women farmers between 1997 and 2002 jumping 13.4 percent. The most recent census also notes Texas, California and Missouri as the top three states with women as principal operators. Texas had approximately 27,192 farms; California, 12,615; and Missouri, 10,818 farms. Tennessee and Oklahoma came in fourth and fifth with a total of 9,413 and 8,720 women-run farms, respectively.

“I consider myself a strong woman,” said Patty. “I’m 66, and I’m outside working, irrigating and doing everything that’s necessary on the ranch, with the help of my children.”

Patty also discovered another key to effective organic farming: a strong organic nutritional program. She is in her second year of using Organic TRIGGRR® and Organic BioLink® products on her organic prunes. Organic TRIGGRR® is an auxiliary soil and plant substance designed to increase nutrient and water uptake through enhanced root growth; it’s also designed to improve plant vigor and development. “With Organic TRIGGRR®,” said Patty, “the results I immediately saw were that they were larger and they came off the trees two weeks earlier.” She ex-



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Patty Simonian

plained the screen regulations for prune growers that

measure prune size – ranging from largest to smallest, A-D: “A year prior to Organic TRIGGRR® I was typically getting ‘B’ screens,” remarked Patty, “This year, I had 52% of my prunes as ‘A’ screens.”

Organic BioLink® and Organic TRIGGRR® are manufactured by Westbridge Agricultural Products, a company established in 1982 and located in north San Diego County. Westbridge offers a line of products for organic growers, and an alternative for conventional growers who are considering transitioning to organic.

Patty noted, “When you do prunes, you get it in one shot. You harvest it, get it off the trees, and start the next year. Organic TRIGGRR® progresses the cycle much faster. We plan on applying more Organic TRIGGRR® post-harvest to see what it does, because I understand that helps set next year’s crop.” Dr. Larry Parker, Westbridge Director of Research & Development, explained the benefits of post-harvest applications for growers.



Patty Simonian stands by her trees at P. Simonian Farms in Fresno. Patty is one example of a steadily rising number of female organic growers in California.

“With post-harvest applications of the Organic TRIGGRR® and Organic BioLink® nutritional program,” explained Dr. Parker, “There is an increase in root growth which improves root uptake of fall fertilizer applications.”

Dr. Parker, who received his Ph.D. from Colorado State University in Agronomy with a specialty in Soil Microbiology, explained more about the post-harvest application of Organic TRIGGRR®: “Organic TRIGGRR® and Organic BioLink® increases root vigor. Increased root vigor will mean more energy stored for next spring’s bud break, which will help reduce alternate bearing.”

Patty also noted a yield increase in her organic prunes, and she compared her yield with another relative who also grows prunes: “He’s a traditional, conventional grower and he got one dried ton per acre. I got two dried tons per acre,” remarked Patty. “I consider myself very lucky and attribute it to the Organic TRIGGRR®.”

Along with Organic TRIGGRR®, the organic products of choice for P. Simonian Farms include Organic BioLink 3-3-3®, Organic BioLink Cal Plus®, and BioLink Spreader-Sticker®.

The third-generation family-run farm located in Fresno was passed down from Patty’s grandfather, to her father and uncle. Her sons handle equipment repairs, and her daughter is a certified PCA and checks the field for pests, writes application recommendations, and also works on the tractor. Patty began focusing on organic prunes in 1995. Prior to that, in 1985, the family grew vegetables. The prunes, however, are Patty’s main focus, and they’re currently converting another 25 acres of land for organic prunes.

Many conventional growers now use Westbridge Organic BioLink® and Organic TRIGGRR® because they find they grow better quality fruits and vegetables; this gives them confidence in organic products, and helps them transition from conventional to organic growing. To find out more about Westbridge Agricultural Products, call (800) 876-2767 or visit their website at www.westbridge.com.