

Drape Net adds layer of protection

By Tom Burfield

It was about 17 years ago that an Australian company, Drape Net, was formed by a third-generation orchardist to provide a solution to help growers protect their apple trees from hail damage.

Today the company has distribution centers in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, South America and Chazy, N.Y., that ship several versions of the company's tight-weave protective netting that also has been shown to protect trees from sunburn damage, pest infestations and birds, said Dean Benson, who handles West Coast sales out of Washington.

Drape Net has had a presence in the U.S. for seven years and added 50 new customers in the Northwest alone this year, many of whom are large growers with high-value crops, Benson said. U.S. locations also serve Canadian customers.

Although the Drape Net material was developed to protect apple trees, the company has come up with a modified netting and added weaves and styles for cherry trees, Benson said. The netting also has been used with pear and seedless citrus

trees and even with grape vines.

The material is simply draped over trees, and hail bounces off it, he said.

"You don't have to have a structure to support it," he said.

Drape Net comes in several designs that provide varying degrees of shade protection ranging from a 15% to a 24% UV shade factor, he said.

Drape Net also has been shown to eliminate codling moth problems for organic growers who can't use traditional sprays to fight the pest, Benson said.

The netting is secured under the trees to keep the codling moths out.

"It's been amazing," he said.

Most recently, the netting system has been modified so that it can be rolled up and attached to a center wire and is ready for redeployment in the spring with no need to completely remove it over the off-season. This slashes labor costs by about 30% and eliminates the need for machines to redeploy the netting each season, he said.

The system can be pricey, but Benson says it can pay for itself by protecting an orchard from a single major hailstorm and/or insect infestations or sunburn events. **P**



Above: Chazy, N.Y.-based Drape Net has come up with a way to roll up its protective tight-weave netting material at the end of the season for easy redeployment when the next season kicks off, says Dean Benson, who handles West Coast sales. Photos: Courtesy of Drape Net

Left: Drape Net has developed a tight-weave netting material that can protect apple and other kinds of trees from hail, birds and insect damage, says Dean Benson, who handles West Coast sales.



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