**Dreaded Peach Tree Thinning Time and Cross Timbers Land Management Program**

A few peach tree varieties may have lost most or all the crop due to the hard freeze we had in early March, but most varieties are loaded with peaches. Peaches will often set more fruit than what is needed for a good crop. While that is a good thing, it can present problems if the trees are not thinned properly. The excess weight can cause limbs to break and trees that are not thinned may also produce peaches that are small and have poor flavor. Production of excessive fruit one year may also prevent the tree from producing well the following year. This is a tedious and disagreeable job, but a very necessary one for any peach tree.

According to Dr. Parsons, 8% of blossom set equals a full crop of quality peaches. That means 92% has to go. Thinning should be done shortly after fruit set, but later is better than never. Fruit should be thinned to 6” intervals on twigs; early varieties are best thinned to 10” because of the short time the fruit have to mature. Do not look down when thinning as it may scare you into thinking you are removing too many peaches. It is best just to stay on task, never looking down. Remember that it takes 191 peaches that are 1 3/4” in diameter to equal a bushel, while it only takes 79 peaches that are 2 ½” in diameter to equal a bushel.

When thinning, be sure to remove all culls, this includes small, misshapen, or double fruit. Again, this year there are a good many double peaches on the trees. This seems to happen when flower buds for this year’s crop (that were initiated last summer) sustained high temperatures during the flower initiation stage, which caused the production of multiple pistils. This results in double or even triple fruit after pollination; these need to be culled.

On small acreage farms with the right soil and adequate water, peach production is a very viable enterprise. You better be ready to work since the management and labor for this crop are very intensive. Risk due to late frost is also a challenge, but any crop has its risk. On the other hand, few crops offer the income potential that peaches do per acre. The demand for locally grown food and especially quality peaches seems to be a growing trend; this is certainly the case in more metropolitan areas. Marketing opportunities for Comanche County grown peaches should only increase in the future. If you have a location, enjoy working outside, and can stand a little risk, perhaps you should consider a peach orchard. If all that work and worry are not for you, then just purchase some good Comanche County grown peaches and enjoy without all the work and fuss.

**Cross Timber Land Management Symposium**

As everyone already knows we are facing many challenges. Some areas have received some rainfall, but we are still well behind where we need to be and moving closer to the heat of summer every day. Many factors are out of our hands but there are some management decisions that can help you to at least slow the bleeding. We will be having an excellent program to provide you with some tools and ideas to make those decisions. The Cross Timbers Land Management Symposium will be held Friday, April 28th from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research Station in Stephenville.

There will be 2 CEU’s, 1 IPM and 1 general available for pesticide license holders. There will be a $20.00 charge and lunch will be provided. If you have questions or want to pre-register, call the office at 325-356-2539.