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Why is Preaching Necessary?

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Research and Extension workers are frequently chided about too much "preaching" on certain phases of agricultural production. In the case of Pomologists a grower may wonder why these fellows are always "preaching" about use of magnesium limestone, boron, or how to prune, or any other of the many recommended fruit growing practices? It does seem unnecessary to have to continually remind the commercial grower to do certain recommended practices in his orchard from which he gets his livelihood. However, it also seems foolish to have to continually Train the motorist about taking foolish chances when his own life may be at stake.

The author will admit that for a lot of growers the "preaching" is not necessary but there are still too many growers that are apparently failing to use certain practices considered essential for profitable fruit growing. The following are examples illustrating the point which the writer is trying to put forth.

This fall the writer saw some beautiful hand picked McIntosh apples being taken to the cider mill. The reason for these apples being marketed this way was quickly determined by cutting them open. These apples showed symptoms of boron deficiency. It was said that the apples in one block of McIntosh trees were thus affected. There are enough factors beyond the control of the grower that can cause him to lose money, without losing money by neglecting to apply borax as recommended.

Some growers failed to apply a fungicide for late season and storage scab and thereby got a lot of pin point scab. It certainly seemed a shame to have so many otherwise good apples become culls this late in the season.

A survey was conducted in 1953 in order to obtain data on the nutritional status of commercial orchards in Massachusetts. The analysis of leaf samples taken from 30 McIntosh orchards revealed that magnesium was below the desirable range in 40% of the orchards. "Calcium was below in 37.3% of the orchards followed by nitrogen and potassium with 20%." That too many of our orchards are not receiving enough magnesium lime was further evident this fall when the fertilizer programs were obtained in orchards from which leaf samples were taken. Some examples of these are the following:

Farm A - Orchard last limed in 1945

Farm B - Orchard last limed in 1937

Farm C - Orchard last limed 8 or 10 years ago.

Farm D - Orchard last limed in 1952 at the rate of one ton per acre, soil test taken this fall showed pH to be 4.7.

Another phase of orcharding that our preaching hasn't seemed to do much for is the pruning of young apple trees. In too many of our orchards the young tree is truly an orphan when it comes to pruning. In many ways it is just as important to prune the young tree as it is the bearing tree. It is from these trees that the grower will derive his future income, thereby, it is important to develop a strong framework that will support the bearing portions of the mature tree in later years. A little corrective pruning on the young trees is a sound investment.

The various topics presented in this article partly illustrate why it is necessary to continually stress basic cultural practices so essential for a profitable fruit-growing enterprise.