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Hello Fruit Growers!

I hope everyone is enjoying the onset of meteorological spring! Your first task of spring is to go out and check your rodent screens or tree wraps. The snow has been accumulating and as you can see in the photo above, the snow has topped some of my 2-foot-high rodent screens. To make sure the critters can't get over the top of my screens, I put on my snowshoes, grabbed a garden hoe, and headed out. The hoe wasn't needed to whack voles, but it is handy for reaching in around the screen to compact the snow using an up and down motion. If your tree allows, you can also just stomp the snow down with your shoes, but most of mine are difficult to get my big feet in close to the trunk during winter.

While I was out, I also compacted and stepped on the snow around the potted trees and bushes sitting in the open. By compacting the snow, it keeps the voles from tunneling under it to the plants. You may also notice the pole in the middle of the photo above. This is where my soil and air temperature loggers are located. The layered plastic at the top is the solar shield for the air temperature sensor, and then below it is the unit that has two sensor leads that are inserted into the soil at 6" and 12" depth.

The loggers are made by [Onset Computer Corp.](#) and I purchased and installed them last summer on the recommendation of Dr. Lisa DeVetter from WSU. A logger is an instrument that records measurements at prescribed intervals. I have the MX2303 and MX2305 data loggers. Although WSU sets their loggers to record every 10 minutes, mine are set up to record temperatures every 30 minutes. In any case, these instruments allow me to capture data and maintain a historical record of the climate in my orchard. I can connect with the devices by Bluetooth, and can download or view the data like in the screenshot of winter air temperature below from my phone.



I can also import the data and work with it in the HOBOWARE plotting software provided by the company. This allows me to focus on particular dates or events. Click the link to [see the graphs](#) showing combined air and soil temperature data, details relating to the peak of summer, the last picking times for apples, and the impact of snow cover on soil temperature.

Recently, I have been ordering supplies and plants for the upcoming season. If you have problems with birds on your crops, this would be a good time to plan your strategies for summer. I personally use netting to protect our haskaps, and so far, do not have significant bird pressure on the cherries or blueberries. My favorite netting is made by [Plantra](#). It is a woven product that has a bit of stretch and is lovely to work with in comparison to the hard plastic square netting you find in local stores. I think we should all adopt Plantra's motto - "Plant like you mean it."

Another option for bird control is a product called [Avian Control](#). This is a spray product that you apply when bird pressure is about to begin. The taste is extremely disliked by the birds and conditions them to leave the fruit alone. After a couple sprays 10-14 days apart, the birds learn that they really don't want to eat your fruit. The company claims there is no effect on the taste of the fruit and that it can be sprayed up to harvest. However, I would recommend a buffer of two weeks from the last spray until harvest to give time for the product to naturally degrade. This may be a viable solution for those who are tired of nets, or have trees that are difficult to cover.

In other assorted news, the Board of Directors purchased [The Illustrated History of Apples in the United States and Canada](#) by Daniel J. Bussey. This is a seven-volume apple reference set with over 16,000 varietal listings, and 1,400 historic life-size illustrations from the USDA's Pomological Watercolor Collection. The collection has been donated to the UAA Consortium Library. I will let everyone know when they have been processed and are available for use.

The Board also awarded Paul Lariviere an honorary lifetime membership. This was in recognition of his many years of work and expertise in helping Alaskans grow fruit, service to the Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association, and his substantial volunteer efforts developing the Government Hill Commons orchard.

For those of you participating in the grape growing trials you may find the following link of interest from the University of Minnesota on [Cold Climate Grapevine Pruning](#). Member Jack Mosby also wanted me to let everyone know that he has some Hopi Pale Gray Squash seeds to share. Here is a [picture of the squash](#) that he says are good keepers and good eating. Give Jack a call at 903-8551 if you are interested.

Finally, please put on your calendar our upcoming March program, "Pollinators and Their Habitat" on Thursday, March 11, 2021 at 7:00 pm. Our presenters will be Dr. Matt Carlson and Justin Fulkerson, M.S. Matt is the Director of the UAA Alaska Center for Conservation Science and Justin is the Lead Botanist for that program. You can join this presentation at 7 pm by clicking the following [Zoom link](#). For those that may want to listen in by phone, click the link for the complete [Zoom invitation](#).

We have often mentioned the importance of pollinators, and the unique roles that native pollinators, honey bees, and blue orchard mason bees serve. So, this presentation will be a fantastic follow-up. All of our orchards and gardens will benefit from learning more about our pollinator friends and how to create supportive habitats for them. I look forward to seeing you on Zoom for this important presentation!

All the best,

**Mark Wolbers**  
**President, APFGA**

