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TOP STORY

## First commercial picking of Cosmic Crisp underway

By DAN WHEAT Capital Press Oct 1, 2019 Updated 16 hrs ago

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GRANDVIEW, Wash. — Fresh snow blanketed the Rattlesnake Hills 10 miles to the north, and picking was delayed an hour to let the new Cosmic Crisp apples warm up and lessen the chances of bruising.

One could say what's believed to be the first commercial picking of Washington's signature Cosmic Crisp apple got off to a chilly start.

It was 8 a.m., Sept. 30, at Lyall Orchards in Grandview.

A few days earlier, Tyler Brandt, vice president of Proprietary Variety Management in Yakima, said as far as he knows Lyall Orchards is the first to pick the new variety developed by Washington State University since 1997. They will be headed to grocery stores for the first time in December.

PVM is managing the commercial development of Cosmic Crisp for WSU.

Several weeks of controlled atmosphere storage are needed to lower starch and raise sugar levels to provide the right sweet, tangy taste the industry believes consumers will like better than Honeycrisp and that they hope gives grower good returns.

Industry marketers call it their \$500 million gamble. Millions of trees have been planted. Volume will be 400,000 to 450,000, 40-pound boxes of apples this fall, Brandt said. It is expected to be 2.2 million in 2020 and 22 million by 2026.

About three hours after they started picking, the spirits of Frank Lyall's 14 pickers were rising along with the air temperature. Levity and laughter graced their Spanish banter.

"It's pretty good. It's got pretty good flavor. I like it," Epifanio Delgado, 49, said of the Cosmic Crisp.

Starting when he was 16, he's been picking for 34 years.

He explained the crew was clipping stems to decrease bruising and skin punctures.

His wife, Ines, picked nearby.

Pickers were emptying their bags into common bins because they were on hourly pay of \$14.50. They would have each picked into their own bins had they been on the usually more lucrative piece rate.

Lyall explained he had enough labor and apples on the trees were dispersed enough in the young orchard that it was more efficient to pay by the hour. He doesn't have any H-2A-visa foreign guestworkers. If he did, he would have to pay a minimum of \$15.03.

Lyall planted his Cosmic Crisp three years ago on Geneva 41 and Bud 9 rootstock on 27 acres of what was Concord grapes for juicing. He has more grapes, other apples and cherries on the 450-acre operation there and including his brother's to the north in Mattawa.

Brandt said marketers are likely to start selling Cosmic Crisp in December at Honeycrisp prices. That means more than \$50 per box.

Lyall is hoping Cosmic Crisp proves to be a good return since grapes and some apple varieties are not high-value.

He harvested a few for his own consumption last year and anticipates 15 bins per acre this year, eventually to increase several fold.

"The apples are large and red. They look nice but there is some cracking, some splits. It's hard to say if it grew too fast or has to do with soil moisture from rain last weekend," he said.

"Some say they're not as pretty as Honeycrisp. That Honeycrisp tends to be a little more uniformly shaped and more consistent in color," Lyall said. "But I'm happy the way these are coloring up. Their lenticels (skin pores) are pronounced and there's only a little russet on top of a few."

The apples had a light white film, a recent coating of kaolin clay to prevent sunburn.

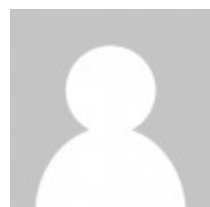
Lyall's nephew, JimRay, 31, polished several for the camera.

Lyall's mother, Donna, 86, was field boss during cherry harvest in Mattawa for 20 days this season and is company bookkeeper.

"I think these are going to be a good apple," she said, holding a polished Cosmic Crisp. "Neighbors all say it's the best apple they've ever eaten."

### Tags

- Cosmic Crisp
- Frank Lyall
- Grandview Washington
- Washington State University
- Apple
- Propriety Variety Management
- Tyler Brandt
- Lyall Orchards
- Economics
- Food
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- Russet



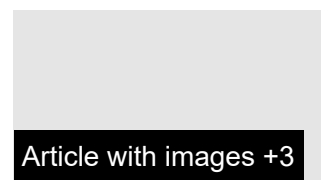
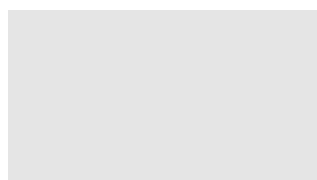
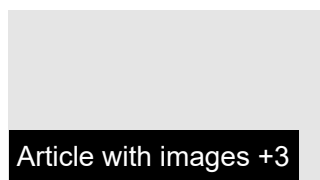
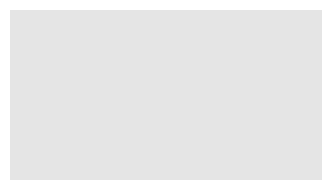
**Dan Wheat**

Central Washington field reporter

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