

ASK ALBERT!

Albert has relinquished this edition's "Ask Albert!" to a machine topic discussed on two recent farm walks.

Carey Hunter, Pine Stump Farm, Omak, WA

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LISTEN TO THE GROWERS

The April discussion around resistant germplasm highlighted the complexities of this issue and the challenge posed to NOSB members who typically do not have the technical background to understand it. The board members, all volunteer, are confronted with huge and expanding workloads. They generally do not have the technical expertise to evaluate many of the issues they are deciding on and must rely on expert input, stakeholder testimony, and fellow board member recommendations. They are trying to balance conflicting interests of different stakeholders and support the organic sector. However, it is apparent that the biases of an individual or two on the board can shape recommendations without adequate checks and balances from potentially affected parties. Growers need mechanisms to ensure their voices and concerns are heard by NOSB, something that groups such as Tilt Producers of Washington could help develop.

Organic growers are vulnerable to the particular expertise and biases of the board members, whose decisions can have a dramatic impact down on the farm. Given the recent fire blight experience, the interests of growers need to be better represented in the process and the board should be more pro-active in soliciting representative grower input regarding decisions that could have large negative impacts. The realities of production and the market must be considered by the NOSB and their decisions should allow for growers to make orderly change of practice without undue disruption of their efforts to provide organic foods. While getting involved in the NOSB process is extremely time consuming, the more members of the organic community that do so will definitely help improve the process over time.

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References

Sundin, G.W., Werner, N.A., Yoder, K.S., and Aldwinckle, H.S. 2009. Field evaluation of biological control of fire blight in the eastern United States. *Plant Disease* 93:386-394.

Each season, growers hope their planted crops will prosper and yield bounteous harvests. As a rule, weeds will grow and flourish along with their crops. How to effectively control these weeds is a constant seasonal challenge. I found innovative approaches to combating ever-present herbaceous growth on two of the Eastern Washington farm walks this year (Cloudview in Royal City and Middletons' at Eltopia). The Wonder Weeder, made here in Washington and used by Gary Middleton, caught my eye.

GETTING TO KNOW THE WONDER WEEDER

Not only is Gary Middleton of Eltopia dealing a blow to rampant weeds on his farm with his Wonder Weeder, he is turning the greens under and mulching them, thereby improving the tilth of the soil. The Wonder Weeder is made right here by Jerry Harris in Burbank, Washington, some sixteen miles from Gary's orchard at Eltopia. Harris began an organic orchard in 1998 and needed to address weed control without the use of herbicides for his certification. Over the course of three years, he developed the Wonder Weeder to control the weeds in his own orchard.

The Wonder Weeder attaches to a tractor and can be operated at 3 to 6 miles per hour. Gary finds the wide straight swath that it cuts works well in his orchard. There are a couple of models to choose from: a three point front mount, standard or telescoping bar, orchard or vineyard models. The equipment can be front-mounted to function simultaneously when the same tractor is mowing with a rear-attaching mower. The front mounts also allow the user to see ahead of the tractor, therefore better able to operate the weeder accurately and avoid a sore neck from constantly looking back to see what they're dragging.

Wonder Weeder rotating tines attach to a hydraulic telescoping arm, increasing accuracy in orchard weed tilling. Photo by Wonder Weeder

