

REDUCING COST IN DRIED PLUM PRODUCTION – A CHECKLIST

Maxwell Norton

UC Cooperative Extension, Merced County

Managing credit:

Reduce interest costs by trying to cash flow as long as possible before drawing on production loans. Compare interest rates and utilized least cost alternative. Example: is it cheaper to finance a piece of equipment through your bank or through the dealer?

Do a block by block analysis: Treat each block as a separate enterprise.
Pull out any block that is not profitable.

Pruning:

Get rid of ladders – using pole mounted saws and shears from the ground is faster.
If the trees need to be lowered to reduce shading, a topper ahead of the crew will save labor costs.

Alternate year pruning will not reduce yields but it **may** reduce sizes if the tree over crops.

Consider a consultant for your pest management and fertility programs.

She may be able to find ways you can save on pesticides and fertilizers.

You may be able to shop around for better prices on materials.

Instead of debating if you can afford each spray, sit down ahead of time with your Pest Control Advisor **and develop a strategy for the whole season.**

Discuss the situation – what would be the minimum acceptable program?

Unless you have an aphid problem, consider alternate year or alternate row dormant sprays.
Small amounts of russet scab do not usually affect grades. Do you need to treat if it does not rain during or just after bloom?

Rust sprays are usually not needed if it does not rain in mid-May. If there is no rust 6 weeks prior to harvest – don't spray.

Orchards do not need to be spotless. If the cost of water is not an issue you can tolerate more weeds. However – weeds around the trunk can interfere with harvest and may contribute to a large vole or squirrel problem.

If trees are vigorous you can skip a nitrogen application. Use leaf analysis in July to verify your nutrient needs. Check the NO₃ in well water. Have the lab calculate how many pounds N per acre-foot of water you are applying.

Do not skip on potassium. Deficiencies are difficult to correct.

Do not harvest early. Try to harvest at optimum maturity. Even with some pre-harvest drop, improved maturity will result in better returns per ton and per acre.

Do not pay to dehydrate fruit that will return very little per ton. Use a sizing chain at harvest time to eliminate small, worthless fruit in the field.