

Replacing Bud Failure Trees

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Bud failure (BF) in Carmel almonds was prevalent this year. Bud failure (or “crazy top”) is not a disease but a genetic trait of some almond varieties that is expressed in the spring following stress that occurred during a critical point in bud development the previous summer.

There is no question that severely affected trees will have reduced yields. The question is, at what point do you remove BF affected trees? In order to justify removing and replanting a tree, the tree must produce long enough to recover more than the removal & replacement costs plus the value of yield loss during the development period.

It takes many years to make up for yield losses incurred from removal of even severely affected BF trees. Under good conditions, a replanted almond tree might produce about 10% of a crop in the third year, 25% the fourth year, 50% the fifth year, 75% the sixth year, and 100% the seventh year. A study conducted in Fresno County several years ago showed it would take thirteen years for a replanted tree to pay for the cost and loss of income from removing a severely affected BF tree estimated to produce only 60% of a normal yield at \$1.00 per meat pound. Most bud failure trees produce more than 60% of a crop. We can see from this study that replacing BF affected trees involves a long term commitment with only very long term gains. In addition, replanted trees are often very difficult to get established in mature orchards making this a questionable practice.

In summary, growers should be very selective this fall when deciding to replace BF affected trees. Unless the bud failure is very severe or the orchard is very young, it is probably best to live with the crazy top.

Should growers continue to plant Carmel? In my opinion, Carmel is still one of the best pollenators to plant with Nonpareil in our area, despite the possibility of bud failure. If you are planning to plant Carmel, ask your nursery specifically for the “FPMS #1” selection of Carmel which has been shown in University of California trials to have very low potential for bud failure.