

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*

## Growing with conservation: Orchardist reaps CSP rewards

The super market customers who buy Jesus Limón's apples and cherries will probably never walk through his orchards to see his micro irrigation system – a system controlled by state of the art electronics and embedded soil moisture monitors. They will probably never know that he performs annual soil tests and leaf tissue analysis to help him add just the right amount of nutrients for his apple and cherry trees – saving water and improving water quality in the process.

But those consumers will see and taste the difference in the quality of fruit that end up on their tables. For Mr. Limón and his fellow orchardists in central Washington, it's that quality that can make the difference between success and failure in the increasingly competitive, global consumer market.

"You have to be an above average producer to make it in today's market," the 47-year-old producer from Orondo, Washington says. Many varieties of fruit

are color sensitive, he says, and that means managing the resources to control the growing conditions that will yield the color, texture and tastes that consumers prefer.

Not surprisingly, that careful resource



*Jesus Limón grows apples and cherries in his orchards in Orondo, Washington.*

management, is also good for the environment.

As a result of his land stewardship efforts, Mr. Limón is now among more than 250 agricultural producers in Washington who have qualified for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Security Program (CSP). The program, which provides producers with annual contract payments, is de-

signed to reward producers for historic stewardship activities on working lands and to provide enhancement payments for producers who agree to implement additional conservation measures.

As a result of his conservation management and practices on some 40 acres of orchard, Mr. Limón will receive an annual financial reward from the NRCS. Because he has addressed three resource concerns on his 40-acre operation, Mr. Limón has qualified as a Tier II participant, and will receive approximately

\$2,000 annually for his conservation activities and enhancements.

Increasing competition, low apple prices, and increasing production and labor costs are squeezing many

local producers who are struggling to stay in business. As a result, the CSP payment is a welcomed one, Mr. Limón says. "CSP is the best news in the apple business in a long time," he says.



NRCS Resource Conservationist Mark Bareither says that under CSP, Mr. Limón currently has 8.5 acres meeting the state organic crop certification requirements, and will add to that in future years. He is also applying integrated pest management on 37 acres.

"Perhaps more importantly," Bareither says, "by getting into the program this year, Mr. Limón can perform additional conservation enhancements and

could qualify as a Tier III participant, which would likely increase his annual payments."

CSP represents the latest chapter in conservation programs for Mr. Limón, who began farming in 1988. In 2004, a cost-share agreement through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program helped him convert 31 acres of his orchard from an impact sprinkler to a micro irrigation system.

Mr. Limón says the system has resulted in a more even distribution of water to his trees – resulting in a more consistent crop and even tree growth throughout the orchard.

In addition, Mr. Limón is saving time and money as a result of the system installation. "Before, I had to buy extra water, which could cost up to \$500 a year," he says. "Now, I won't need that water, and the irrigation system is a lot easier to use," he says.

A husband, and father of four, Mr. Limón has managed to make time to be an active participant in a Hispanic growers' education effort, sponsored by the Center for Agricultural Partnerships. His farm has been the site of several nutrient management and irrigation water management workshops, which are tailored to address the needs of the producers within the Hispanic community.

"Mr. Limón is an innovative producer," NRCS' Bareither says. "And when CSP was offered in the Upper Columbia-Entiat watershed, I knew it would be a good fit for him," he says.

With more than 250 producers in 12 Washington watersheds qualifying for the program this year, CSP is a good fit for an increasing number of agricultural producers.

*Ron Nichols, NRCS Washington  
August 2005*

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