



[Advanced](#)

Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab

Posted by [Michelle and Chris McColl](#)

[Forum List](#) [Message List](#) [New Topic](#)

[Michelle and Chris McColl](#)

[Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

January 21, 2013 02:59PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 49

In the past couple of years, Michael has shown it is possible to grow scab free apples without the use of sulphur in a high rainfall district. Since we really don't like spraying sulphur (especially lime sulphur), we decided the time has come to start weaning ourselves from allopathic sprays. After very disappointing results using compost tea for two years about five or six years ago, we had retreated to the safety of early copper followed wettable sulphur and the occasional lime sulphur if things got out of hand.

In the current season (Southern Hemisphere), on about 10% of our orchard we have tried the "four holistic sprays of spring" from September to November 2012, without any copper or sulphur sprays. We are yet to do a proper assessment of the results compared to those blocks sprayed with sulphur, but the results appear reasonable on some varieties and very encouraging on others. We will post the results here in the next week or two.

Has anyone else out there been comparing holistic and organic programmes for scab control?

[Reply Quote](#)

[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

February 17, 2013 12:53PM

Moderator

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

Growers here in the states are working on it, Chris and Michelle. I admit to that very common orchardist surety . . . where recognizing such-and-such as good for fruit production leads me to doing right for each and every tree. Many of you understand this, no? I know of several growers this coming year who are agreeable to creating trails in different orchard blocks in order to compare the two methodologies. I hope others feel equally inspired to ask these sorts of questions. I can't stress enough that accounting for [biological transition](#) must be reckoned in any early year comparisons. I'm moving on from "sulfur trials" myself to further zone in on optimal nutrition for a healthy tree ... as this is truly the holistic basis for resisting disease from within.

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/19/2013 04:31PM by Michael Phillips.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Brian Caldwell](#)

[Re: Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

March 05, 2013 02:57AM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 69

I strongly agree with Michael. We need to treat some trees differently to make progress with this. To see whether a new practice works, there always has to be some sort of comparison to a "control"--be that normal practice or no treatment. The results may not always agree with our preconceptions. After good results against scab with 4 "sprays of spring" (see the Holistic Orchard) on 3 trees in 2011, we tried it on about a third of our trees in 2012. The results last year were not nearly so good (compared to our normal sulfur program), so we are scaling back. We have not given up on the more holistic approach, but will try variations of it on a few trees to try to understand it better.

Best wishes to you all,
Brian Caldwell

[Hemlock Grove Farm](#)

Zone 5 in New York

[Reply Quote](#)

[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

March 05, 2013 08:45PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

We are one of those farms that have set out to do a comparative study. Beginning last year we set aside a block for a holistic spray regime, another with sulfur for scab control along with some natural foliar treatments (no oil), and some areas with absolutely nothing. The results were to be expected, no scab in the sulfur block, no apple without scab in the other blocks. We do not, make no mistake, expect any

positive results in the holistic block for many years. Interestingly, I would say we lost on the sulfur block and screwed up the ecosystem a little more, and did better in the other areas. Why? Because after adding up the zillion hours of labor spraying, cost of spray materials, damage to the ecosystem, and health effects of likely breathing in some of that sulfur. (To add insult to injury we had to process all our fruit due to hail damage). This is the point on which many will differ from us in opinion, because the outcome in terms of pounds of FOOD was equal in all blocks. Not dessert fruit marketable fruit, just food. The way, and I feel the only way for a holistic approach to be successful is to change the threshold in the assessment of fruit damage. My understanding is that the market threshold for scab for instance is less than 1% damage. Good luck. The only thing that approaches that in all my research is a gut wrenching chemical onslaught. We can get in the ballpark with a very very strict cleanup paired with holistic spraying and the like, but to get grocery friendly fruit is likely only going to mean fungicide heavy organic or non organic. What is possible is either through a cultural shift, or through processing of the end product, we can have a farming protocol that we all feel a lot better about. We are debating whether or not we will sulfur spray the one block, since we know it will probably work. It is becoming difficult to take the moral high ground (pitching the sale of fruit with terms like sustainability and organic for instance) when we are undermining system health with the allopathic approach.

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/10/2013 06:16PM by Todd Parlo.

[Reply](#) [Quote](#)

[Tim Bates](#)

[Re: Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

March 14, 2013 04:00AM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 58

Great dialogue going on with my my favorite bugaboo--Scab. I had the worst 2 years in a row of damage (11 & 12), 2 very wet Springs. I have been doing a long term compost tea trial on around 4 acres since 08. The result kinda sorta (no science just observation and grocery store % fruit) was even though the Tea block showed the worst scab earlier than the "sulfur" blocks, the result was about the same amount of damage by harvest time. Go figure. I don't really believe that sulphur doesn't work, but that just, maybe, the tea does help enough to not be the worse case scenario except for the "control" block. Anyway, I am willing to forgo any sulphur in my tea block this year in favor of pure neem oil and fish hydrolysate and seaweed, using my tea as a sub for EM with a few extra tea applications. I hope and pray Michael is really onto something here--BUT that neem sure seems so expensive. I dream of all kinds of trials as I go up and down the rows of trees but always way more than I can implement. PS. I have a hard time doing a "control", truth be known.

As for worrying about the "quality" of the fruit (which is in the eye of the beholder), I have weaned most of my direct customers from "perfect" looking fruit. Some even seek "ugliness". My personal problem is ugly trees riddled with scab. Also, we here do not sell any "cannery" apples unless for trade to other farmers for varieties we need for cider and juice. This does not apply to everyone, but we were the right size (15 acres) to start on farm processing (first, of course I wanted to make fermented cider--which lead to vinegar as those first barches were pretty undrinkable) and a cannery making pasteurized juice with our apples with our label. Also make cider syrup which now sells like crazy. The balance is 60%-40% or 40%-60% depending on fruit "quality" of fresh pack to Juice for products. Got to go for now. Let's keep talking you all. Tim

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 06/05/2013 04:35AM by Michael Phillips.

[Reply](#) [Quote](#)

[David Doncaster](#)

[Re: Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

March 14, 2013 08:59AM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 50

Well guys heres my two cents worth . When I took over the farm I knew that apples grew on trees and you ate them . The people I was helping were all succumbing to pesticide-related diseases, the farm had not been looked after properly for a few years. Looking for something different I read , *The Apple Grower* , and jumped in both feet and head first.

2005 was the last I used the old chemicals .

2006, dormant oil and surround, (there's a story here but don't want to get to far off topic) good clean crop . (dropped my codling damage to about 1%)

2007, introduced neem into the system. used lime sulphur once, for both scab and thinning. good clean crop. it was a wet spring.

2008, fairly dry start to the season, used only neem oil and surround.

2009, again a wet spring, used kumulus once at the beginning of the season. added in EMs , hydroslate, and kelp to the surround and neem . nice clean crop .

2010 and 2011, reasonably dry starts , used only neem, EMs, kelp, hydroslates, teas of nettle and comfrey. nice crop again .

2012, a little wetter start, sprays were ill timed. I now know what scab looks like. I would say about 1% of the crop affected mostly about the size of a dot from a pencil. many times we thought they were codling stings. The largest scab spot was about the size of a pencil eraser .

comparing this to my neighbours who were picking the fruit off in august because they were so badly infected .

Knowing its here 2013 could be a telling year for me .

I've done the same as Tim, my customers know they may not get prefect looking fruit but they will get perfectly good fruit. No complaints even with the small scab spots.

[Hillview Heritage Farm](#)

Zone 5*in British Columbia

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/17/2013 06:50PM by Michael Phillips.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Tim Bates](#)

[Re: Comparing Holistic and Organic Programmes for Scab](#)

March 24, 2013 10:59PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 58

Fascinating notes, David. I envy you only recently finding out what scab looks like! Curious if 2008 crop got the "nice" rating. If I could keep scab to 1 or even 10% with Neem etc. I would consider me the winner. This will definitely be a telling year at my farm. Ah, the Okanagan. I draft dodged in BC for 2 years in the 70's. Barnaby and a little time in Kaslo in the Kootenays (sp) which had an apple industry which I ignored--but couldn't believe apples could grow THAT far North. I do take it as ominous that I ended up beinfg fruity and apple-y... eventually. My first pulsing spray was just completed an hour ago---onward into 2013. Tim

[Reply Quote](#)

[Newer Topic Older Topic](#)

[Print View RSS](#)

Sorry, only registered users may post in this forum.

[Click here to login](#)

This [forum](#) is powered by [Phorum](#).