

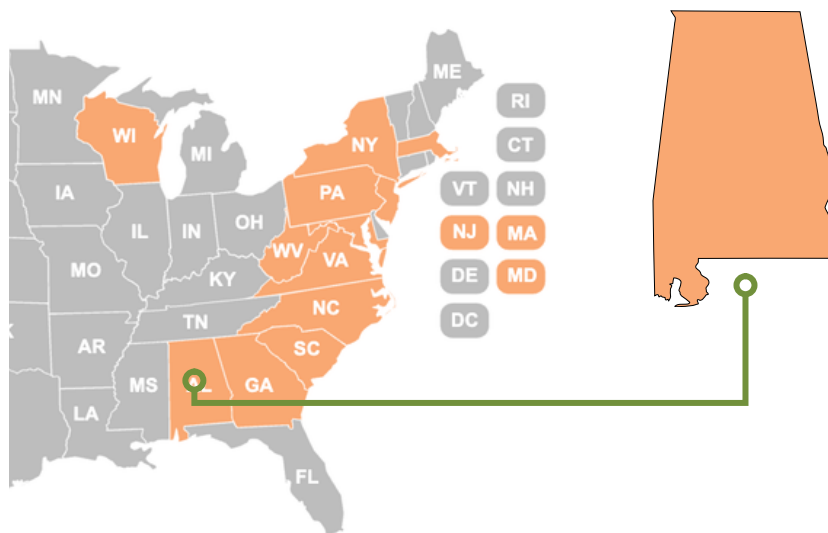


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Listening Sessions on Eastern Tree Fruit Farms: Alabama

Seven listening sessions were held across various U.S. regions in early 2025 as part of a four-year USDA-funded project called, ***Cultivating Tomorrow's Orchard: Evolving and Enhancing IPM in Eastern Tree Fruit Systems***. Each session focused on gathering the experiences, challenges, and needs of orchard owners and managers regarding pest management, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) adoption, regulatory constraints, economic pressures, and weather pattern impacts. This fact sheet summarizes results from the listening session that took place on January 24, 2025, with orchard owners and managers in Alabama, primarily growing peaches, along with Extension specialists. Most participants were engaged in wholesale operations.



Key Pest Challenges

- Spider Mites
- Ambrosia Beetles
- Peachtree Borers
- Bitter Rot
- San Jose Scale

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Special thanks to the
growers who participated
in the listening sessions.

Challenges in Pest Management

- **Regulatory Constraints:**

- Frequent removal of effective pesticides (e.g., Lorsban, Diazinon) by EPA regulations.
- Growers highlighted the economic and operational challenges posed by restricted pesticide availability.

- **Weather Pattern Impacts:**

- Unpredictable weather patterns, including fluctuating temperatures, complicate crop management.
- Inadequate chilling hours affect crop viability, particularly for peaches.

Pest Management Practices

- **Chemical Usage:**

- Heavy reliance on insecticides and fungicides, with economic preference for lowcost options like Lorsban over more expensive methods (e.g., pheromone traps).
- Blanket spraying remains a common practice due to its affordability and simplicity.

- **Integrated Pest Management Strategies**

- Use of pheromones and mating disruption methods for Peachtree Borers, though adoption is limited by cost and neighbor (grower) cooperation.
- Winter oil applications and careful monitoring during critical growth phases

Economic & Social Challenges

- **Economic Constraints**

- High costs of IPM tools, such as pheromones (\$75 per acre), compared to traditional chemicals (\$5 per acre).
- Labor and time-intensive nature of IPM practices discourage adoption among smaller farms.

- **Social Pressures**

- Consumers prioritize lower costs over environmental or pesticide concerns.
- Isolation in rural areas sometimes helps limit pest pressures, but lack of neighbor collaboration reduces IPM effectiveness.

Research Needs & Opportunities

- **High-Priority Areas:**

- Alternative management tactics for San Jose scale, including mating disruption and entomopathogenic fungi.
- Advanced research on ambrosia beetles and effective prevention strategies.
- Development of peach varieties with reduced chilling requirements to mitigate freeze damage risks.

- **Erratic Weather Pattern Adaptation:**
 - Strategies to address fluctuating temperatures, including the efficacy of sprays like Oxidate in preventing frost damage.
 - Improved decision-support tools (e.g., degree-day models) for better timing of pest control actions.

Preferred Communication & Collaboration

- **Preferred Communication Channels:**
 - Strong reliance on local Extension services for advice, solutions, and updated research.
 - Peer networks, chemical representatives, and cooperative meetings serve as key information sources.
 - YouTube videos and the MyIPM app are popular for learning and practical guidance.
- **Extension Support:**
 - Participants expressed gratitude for accessible and responsive local Extension teams.
 - Recommended continued investment in Extension services for timely research dissemination and practical support.

Overarching Concerns

- **Regulation & Policy:**
 - Growers fear that regulatory changes may further limit available tools, increasing costs and operational challenges.
 - Need for better coordination between regulatory agencies and growers to address practical concerns.
- **Sustainability & Innovation:**
 - Interest in sustainable alternatives to traditional pesticides, though affordability and effectiveness remain key barriers.
 - Support for cross-regional collaboration to share best practices and adapt innovations to local needs.

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