



## **Sustainability Is More than the Latest Buzz Word** ***A Primer from Washington's Red Raspberry Farmers***

Washington raspberry growers care for the natural resources they are privileged to manage. There's a very limited amount of land that's rich and sufficiently drained in a climate with a long, cool growing season to satisfy commercial growing of raspberries. Growers must take care of their soil and water because their very livelihood depends on it.

The perennial nature of the crop rewards good stewardship. Successful raspberry growers follow practices that don't deplete the soils of nutrients or allow erosion to carry it away. The land growing our berries is some of the richest, most valuable farmland in the world. Odds are that it has also been nurtured by a grower whose family has been living on it and growing raspberries for two or three generations. Sustaining their land equals sustaining their way of life and that of their community.

Economic sustainability goes hand in hand with environmental sustainability. What are some of the specific sustainable practices Washington's raspberry growers use to maintain their farming system?

- **Long term planning:** Crops are rotated on 5-10 year cycles. There's no room in this system for quick fixes or short term perspectives.
- **Soil management:** This is the foundation of sustainability. Continual monitoring and maintenance of nutrient levels, moisture levels, organic matter, and soil tilth are an accepted part of the job. Normal industry practices include adding compost, cover cropping between plantings and annual disking of old canes back into the field to recycle their organic matter and nutrients.
- **Water management:** Producing quality raspberries requires a consistent supply of quality water throughout the growing season. At the same time, the soft, fragile fruit needs to be kept as dry as possible during ripening and harvest to prevent fruit mold and other diseases. This rewards implementing efficient, water-saving drip irrigation systems that allow precision regulation and measurement of water use. Accurate placement of the water where and when it is needed not only helps minimize the application of fungicides, it minimizes water waste and can improve fruit quality.
- **Pest management:** Integrated pest management monitoring and decision making processes are routine raspberry growing-farm practices. Continual, ongoing education is both accepted and expected from our growers. Being a relatively small specialty crop encourages a spirit of collaboration and sharing. Growers keep in close touch with each other and often share pest management options that reduce pesticide use and improve the bottom line.
- **Laying out the roadmap to the future--Investing in innovation and supporting research:** The world of agriculture is changing rapidly. For raspberry growers, sustainability involves not only taking care of what they have but planning and investing in where they need to be in the future. Through grower organizations and in cooperation with the USDA, Washington State University and private researchers, the industry supports a vibrant and active R & D program leading to continually improving pest management and land stewardship practices.