

December 2010

In The Field

Heartland's AGRICULTURE Magazine

Johnny Georges'

TREE T-PEE

An Invention Whose Time Has Come



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Johnny Georges' TREE T-PEE

An Invention Whose Time Has Come

By Jim Frankowiak

Johnny Georges literally grew up in the citrus industry. He and his father, the late Rick Georges, came up with an idea in 1984 that was chuckled at. That didn't get in the way of the Georges since they first heard those laughs back in 1970 when Georges senior invented the micro jet irrigation system. Rick had the last laugh then, however, since his system revolutionized irrigation for the citrus industry.

The Georges invented the Tree T-Pee initially as a frost protection device, but Johnny saw the potential benefits of water conservation early on. Before invention of the Tree T-Pee, citrus growers used the "banking" process to protect trees from freeze damage. "If a freeze was forecast, growers would protect their trees by shoveling dirt along the base of the trunk," said Johnny. "Once the threat of freezing went away, they would return to the grove and remove the banked dirt."

It was at one of these times when Johnny, then a high school student, and a number of his friends were banking 8,000 citrus trees. His dad had the young men measure the height of the banking and then he came up with an average height that was used to develop the first Tree T-Pee. "Frost protection was the goal at that time," said Johnny, "but for me water conservation was the potential benefit

that I saw, and that came to me very clearly in 2002 while I was replacing a shower head with a low-flow model. The replacement unit's packaging compared its water volume with that of the unit I was replacing. The water savings with the new low-flow model were significant. That gave me the idea to apply that same principal with the Tree T-Pee to young trees." And there are other benefits, as well.

The initial product, just like the ones made today, was produced from recycled materials, an immediate benefit to the environment even before they get into the field. With the introduction of the Geor-Jet and its acceptance as the norm for the citrus industry, Johnny felt there was a way to blend micro-irrigation and the Tree T-Pee, saving water along the way. The water shower head replacement incident showed him the way. He altered the original design of the Tree T-Pee and made

the base seven-inches larger so it was able to accommodate micro-irrigation and not only protect trees against freezing, but allowing the Tree T-Pee to stay in place continually, thereby saving vast quantities of water. That also meant the need for less liquid fertilizer since the area being sprayed was focused at the base of the tree and not subject to diffusion by winds.

The 14-inch tall Tree T-Pee is cone-shaped and positioned around the base of young trees. In addi-

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"We highly recommend the Tree-T-Pee. It works great for us with cold protection, keeps fuel costs low and increases plant growth by at least 30 percent."
Ben Norris, 3N Groves



tion to being used by the citrus industry, peach, pecan, jatropha and olive tree growers are using them as well.

While the Tree T-Pee was undergoing refinement, the citrus industry was moving from northern areas of central Florida to the south. The Georges family made the move as well, relocating from Winter Haven to Arcadia in 1988. Johnny and his 14-year-old son John Wesley, known by all as Wesley, continue to reside in Arcadia, which is also home to Johnny's company, GSI Supply, Inc., a pump station building and installation operation that serves growers from Polk County south, including both coasts, as well as the south central portion of the state. "We install the systems that permit growers to use micro-irrigation for their groves and crops. I guess you might say I was born into irrigation and have lived it all of my life."

Though the need for and importance of water conservation was not top of mind when Tree T-Pee was first introduced or even modified by Johnny less than a decade ago, it has become so and a critical consideration for agriculture. And, when we discuss conservation and Tree T-Pee we are talking major savings not only in water, but liquid fertilizer and

fuel, as well. Additionally, the product has a very long life. "Many of our first Tree T-Pees are still in use in the field," said Johnny who speaks of a 20-year life expectancy for the product.

Johnny is conservative when he talks about savings, but the best reports and Tree T-Pee's best salespeople are the growers and farmers who use them and speak from their individual experiences. "Instead of using 10,000 gallons of water per tree per year without the Tree T-Pee, we are now using only 800 gallons per year per tree with Tree T-Pee." Multiplying those savings by the number of young trees in groves leads to some staggering potential water savings.

Freeze protection, the original goal for and driving force behind the invention of the Tree T-Pee, continues to be a major benefit for growers. During the freezes in Florida this past January, temperatures dropped to below 20 degrees in some areas. "The trees with the Tree T-Pee had 40-plus degree temperatures at their base with steam from the 72-degree water engulfing the canopy of the young trees."

But there are added benefits for those who use the Tree T-Pee. In addition to freeze protection and water saving, there are significant fuel (gas, diesel



or electric) savings. "If you are pumping less water, you are using less fuel and when you consider the cost of fuel needed for pumping 800 gallons in a year for one tree, compared to the cost of fuel to pump 10,000 gallons, that's a significant savings and that's just for one tree," said Georges.

Georges cites the example of a 1,750-acre southwest Florida citrus grove where without Tree T-Pee they had to water for six hours and used 15.8 million gallon of water, while with the product installed, they only had to water for about an hour and used 2.6 million gallons. "That represents a saving of more 13 million gallons of water every time they water," said Georges. And there's more.

New trees can be brought into production a full year faster because the concentrated moisture and heat produced by the Tree T-Pee promotes up to a 30 percent increase in new growth. "That figure is mine, but I like to be conservative. A study by the University of Florida estimated 37 percent. It's like a little greenhouse out in the field."

It has been said that the overall power of the Tree T-Pee enables growers, especially grower/managers of large acreage operations, the potential for significant direct and indirect savings, as well the maximization of production.

Georges is quick to share credit for his invention. "I owe a great deal to the growers and farmers that I have worked for throughout my life. Each of them instilled in me the need to work hard, be honest and

law abiding and not be satisfied with anything less than the best," he said. "Living up to their expectations in whatever I did for them made me the person I am today and helped me to work hard and look for ways to improve. I'm happy that through Tree T-Pee I am able to pay them back in a small way by helping them save money and thereby keeping them competitive in a time when costs keep rising. They are also able to save the natural resources that are so critical to their future and ours."

Georges is currently in discussions with water management district officials considering a cost-

sharing program with growers who purchase and install Tree T-Pee due to its proven ability to save significant amounts of water. Owner of the patent, trademark and molds for the Tree T-Pee, he is also in preliminary conversations with a major irrigation company to license/sell the product

through that company's existing sales and distribution network

When not working with farmers and growers and their irrigation system needs, Johnny and Wesley enjoy participating in activities at Pine Level United Methodist Church in Arcadia or hunting for deer or turkey on the weekend.

Once again, it looks like a member of the Georges family will have the last laugh and the world will be a better place.

For more information about the Tree T-Pee, visit www.treetpee.com or call 863-491-9834.

"The Tree-T-Pee is perfect for better fertilizer use, freeze protection, fuel saving, and water conservation. It keeps everything right there on the tree. Good management practice...economically it truly is a smart choice!"

Marlon Pendergrass, Peace River Groves