

*Citrus Industry Magazine- UF/IFAS SWFREC Citrus Mechanical Harvesting Program
“What’s Shakin” column*

December 2013

Apples and oranges have a lot more in common than most realize. Growers of both crops would like to be able to mechanically harvest their fruit. One interesting technology that is being explored among Michigan and Washington State apple growers is a vacuum assist harvest aide. One of the developers of this machine is Phil Brown, owner of Phil Brown Welding, in Conklin, Michigan. In a YouTube video, Mr. Brown asserts that the number of labor hours to harvest fresh market apples could be cut in half with his machine. A self-propelled platform positions four pickers along the trees’ canopy surface. Harvesters pick fruit directly into a vacuum tube which, in turn, moves each piece of fruit to a central collection area where the fruit can be sorted and gently placed inside a bin. By eliminating ladder time and the need to empty full pick sacks into fruit bins, it is estimated that a conventional apple picker can increase his or her actual picking time from 30% to 60%. Phil Schwallier, a MSU Extension Agent, offers some thoughts on the positive impact this machine could have on the apple industry. Please watch this video at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5JBJUdfn0&list=PLg3r_ZcNJh5Cxkff4qD9_GKfjkeYhjmNw.

Please visit our website at: <http://citrusmh.ifas.ufl.edu>