ASSESSMENT OF HARVEST TIME FOR RED DELICIOUS CV. THOUGH HARVEST INDEXES IN ALBANIA

P. ICKA and R. DAMO

University Fan S. Noli, Department of Agronomy, Bulevardi Rilindësit 11, Korca, Albanian

Abstract

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The apple fruits are one of the most profitable crops in Albania. The increase to the number and surface of orchards during last decade is accompanied by storage problems. One of the major problems in apple storage is the determination of optimal harvest time. The traditional maturity indicators do not give the clear situation of maturity processes, for this reason usage of maturity indexes contribute in the determination of optimal harvest time for apple orchards. Calculated values of the indexes Streif (0.075 - 0.10), De Jager (5.0 - 6.0), FARS (0.2 - 0.3) and Thiault (150) indicate that the optimal harvest time for Red Delicious apples in Korça region is from 20th September up to 1st October. This harvest time is indicated also by the proposed Ripening index (-1 - 1), while Sugar/acidity ratio (40 - 50) and Perlim index (4.3 - 4.6) give an approximate harvest time but these indexes show the trend of fruit maturity.

Kew words: apple, Red Delicious, maturity index, harvest time, Ripening index

Introduction

Apple (*Malus* × *domestica* Borkh.) belongs to the main fruit species and they are the most important fruit in Europe (Patzak et al., 2012), and one of the most consumed in Albania with 19 kg/year/capita (USAID, 2008). Korça region produces almost 70% of the apples grown in Albania, with approximately 40,000 tons fruits per year. Therefore it is very important to evaluate and to suggest the harvest indexes in accordance with consumer's tastes and preferences.

Apples are subjected to major quality loss during harvest and postharvest treatments (Ozturk et al., 2012). Storage conditions determine the longevity of storage life of apples (Blažek et al., 2003), and to ensure maximum storability, apples should be picked when mature, but not fully ripe. Later picked apples often are over mature and all physiological processes are underway what complicate storage, even under optimal conditions (Kviklené et al., 2008). Apples picked at right stage have the organoleptic qualities, which enable them to survive more than six months storage. If the optimal harvest period could be predicted well prior to harvest, it would also allow the grower to maximise harvest labour use efficiency (Peirs et al., 2001).

Establishing the optimum harvest date is an important factor in obtaining quality fruits. The best way to provide customers with good quality apples is to select the most appropriate harvest date to guarantee consumer acceptance (Streif, 1996; Peirs et al., 2001; Molina et al., 2006). Quality of apple is consisted of a combination of visual appearance, flavor and texture (Ozturk et al., 2012). The maturity level, color, size, mechanical defect (Ozturk et al., 2012), and firmness (Ozturk et al., 2011; Ozturk et al., 2012) are important factors for apple marketing, because in apples, fruit appearance is very important factor (Kacal and Koyuncu, 2012.). Measurements of soluble solid content and titratable acidity are often included in assessments of the postharvest quality of apples (Goliáš et al., 2008). Therefore it is necessary to assess the quality of apple fruit picked on different dates. It is hoped that these findings will help the apple growers a lot to pick their fruits at proper time and store them in cold storage with minimum losses to present the fruits of best qualities to consumers too (Ullah et al., 2004). The determination of optimum harvest date has become more severe since storage facilities are getting precisely controlled requiring adequate fruit material (Zude-Sasse et al., 2000).

Maturity is the harvest index most widely used in fruits. However, physiological maturity needs to be distinguished from commercial maturity (Camelo, 2004). The most widely used maturity indicators for apples include flesh firmness, starch content, sugar content (°Brix), fruit colour, and internal ethylene concentration. The following attributes are also used as supplemental maturity indicators: titratable acidity content, days from full bloom, and temperature accumulation. Fruit harvested at optimum maturity and handled properly has good storability and good eating quality (Bai et al., 2009).

To stabilize the best harvest date it is good practice to refer not only on one indicator, but to consider different at the same time. Some indicators may be combined together to obtain the harvest indexes (Bufacchi et al., 2000). Among these the most important are: Streif index, De Jager index, Thialut index, FARS index etc.

In this study we have measured four indicators, total soluble solids (TSS), titrable acidity (A), starch degradation (S) and firmness (F), to compute six indicators for the optimum harvest date determination as well as prediction of fruit quality in Red Delicious apple.

Materials and Methods

Korça Field is located in South East of Albania with an altitude 820 - 950 m above sea level. It has a Mediterranean continental clime, with dry and hot summer and cold and wet winter. It is the driest (760 mm rainfall per year) and coldest (up to -27° C) region of Albania.

The orchard in the study is located 3 km on south-west of Korça city (40°35'35'' N and 20°45'52'' E) with an altitude 885 m above sea level. The soil texture of orchard is clay and soil quality index according Visual Soil Assessment is 18, classified as moderate (Damo and Icka, 2011). According the Standardized Precipitation Index evaluation the hydrological situation during the study period is mainly a normal situation except the year 2009 that is characterized by rainfall events (Icka et al., 2011).

The major apple cultivars growing in the Korça region are Red Delicious 52% and Golden Delicious 42% of apple orchards (USAID, 2008), for this reason it is very important to determine the best harvest time using the indexes for Red Delicious apples in this region. The evaluation of indicators to calculate the indexes was made during three years period study 2007 – 2009, for each estimated harvest date, 1st September, 20th September and 10th October. At least 40 fruit of Red Delicious are analyzed for four indicators:

Starch iodine test (S) indicates the gradual change of starch into sugars in the fruit. The starch iodine index was

determined according the EUROFRU with 1-10 score comparing the iodine treated fruits with the given figure. The iodine solution is prepared according Chu, 2000.

Total soluble solids (TSS), are determined by using the WYA-2W ABBE refractometer at room temperature (20°C), the TSS is given as °Brix.

Flesh firmness (F) of peeled apple tissue is measured on both sides of fruits with Effegi penetrometer (FTX 30) fitted with 11 mm diameter probe, the F is given as kg/cm².

Acidity (A) of fruit juice (given in g/L malic acid) is determined by titration of 10 ml apple juice with 1.0 M NaOH at pH=8.2.

Evaluation of the harvest time is made by using six harvest indexes that combine the above indicators:

Streif index (Streif, 1996; Hägg et al., 1999; Zude-Sasse et al., 2000; Peirs et al., 2001; Ullah et al., 2004; Alegre et al., 2006; Róth et al., 2007; Kviklené et al., 2008 ; Kviklys 2012) Streif index = _____

TSS
$$\times$$
 S

De Jager index (De Jager, Roelofs, 1996; Bufacchi et al., 2000; Molina et al., 2006; Alegre et al., 2006):

FARS index (Alegre et al., 2006; Molina et al., 2006):

FARS index =
$$\frac{F \times A}{TSS \times S}$$

Perlim index (Hägg et al., 1999):

Perlim index = $(F \times 0.5 + TSS \times 0.67 + A \times 0.67) - 10$

Thiault index (Hägg et al., 1999; Bufacchi et al. 2000; La Iacona et al., 2009):

Thiault index = $TS + A \times 10$

TS (Total Sugar) = (TSS×10,6) - 20,6

Total Sugar/acidity ratio (Bufacchi et al., 2000; OECD, 2005, 2009; Molina et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2006; Skrzyñski et al., 2006; Dhatt et al., 2007; AA. VV., 2010):

Total Sugar/Acidity ratio =
$$\frac{TSS \times 10}{A}$$

ANOVA was performed on the results of calculated indexes to determine the harvest time, and Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) intervals, at 95% and 99% confidence limits, are computed for each parameter.

Results and Discussion

During three harvest times are evaluated the four indicators: total soluble solid (°Brix), acidity (g/l), starch iodine (1 - 10 scale) and firmness (kg/cm²) to calculate the indexes. The values of calculated indexes are given in Table 1.

Streif index values (Table 1) show a decrease during the fruit maturation and ripening, from 0.350 on the 1st September, 1.104 on 20th September and 0.048 on 10th October (**P < 0.01 = 0.017). According the recommended values 0.19 -0.47 (Bufacchi et al., 2000), 0.11 - 0.12 (Ullah et al., 2004), in our case this values are achieved between firs harvest date, with the average value by 0.350, and second harvest date with the average value by 0.104. While Wilcke et al., (2002) recommends as an optimal value of the Streif index for Red Delicious by 0.06 and Veschugin, (2008) recommends that the index value should be between 0.069 - 0.072. Based on the results obtained after 120 days storage on refrigerator conditions (analyses for quality, oganoleptic and storability, parameters that are not object of this paper), from this study and according the conditions of Korça region we recommend that the optimal value of the Streif index for Red Delicious should be in the interval 0.075 - 0.100.

Reduction of **De Jager index** values from 8.975 in 5.992 and 3.468, in three respective harvest dates (**P<0.01 = 0.557). The diminution of this index values indicate the advance of ripening process. According Bufacchi et al., (2000) and Veschugin, (2008), for Red Delicious apples the best picked is when the values of De Jager index is within 6.0 and 4.2. These values in our study are achieved between 20th September and 10th October. Since the value of this index in 10th October is too low (over mature fruits), we recommend that for our case the values of De Jager index should be 5.0 - 6.0.

FARS index is the only index that uses four harvest indicators to be calculated (Firmness, Acidity, Total soluble solids (**R**) and Starch index). The values of this index, also, are fallen from 1.231 in the first picked date to 0.328 and 0.127 in other two picked dates (**P<0.01 = 0.110). Recommended values according Alegre et al., (2006) are within 0.45 and 0.75, values that are achieved between first and second harvest date. But the fruits picked in this period are not mature, and according this we recommend that FARS index value for a good Red Delicious apple storability should be 0.2 - 0.3.

Perlim index values (Table 1) for each picked date are 4.930; 4.646 and 3.658 (**P<0.01 = 0.758). Prolongations of the period that apples stay at the tree give over mature apple fruits and a decrease the index value. Wilcke, (2002), Wilcke et al., (2002) and Lafer, (2003) recommend for Red Delicious that Perlim index value should be within 3.0 and 5.0, but these values include a wide period of harvest, from the first harvest date to the third harvest date. In this condition we recommend that the value should be 4.3 - 4.6. Regardless this recommendation, for assessment of an optimal Perlim index value probably will need further studies.

Thiault index is one of most used index for evaluation of harvest time. According the statistical analyse the values of this index at second date (149.11) and third date (153.53) have significance difference with the index value at first date (137.21) for **P < 0.01 = 7.239, while between values of Thiault index at second and third date the differences are significantly for *P < 0.05 = 4.375. This index show that maturity of Red Delicious apple in Korça region is faster between 1st and 20th September, as the fruit matures, the values of this index are increased slowly. According the Thiault index, a fruit can be consider ripped when its value is between 160 -178 (Wilcke, 2002; Wilcke et al., 2002; Lafer, 2003; Regolamento (CE) n. 510/2006 del consiglio «Mela Val di Non»; La Iacona et al., 2009) values that extend over the 10th October. While D' Aquino et al., (1997) indicate that optimal value of Thiault index for the Red Delicious is 152, this value is more acceptable for our study, and in this case we recommend that optimal value of Thiault index for the Red Delicious in Korça region is 150.

Calculated values of **Sugar/acidity ratio index** are: at 1st September 33.01, 20th September 41.53 and 10th October 52.44 (**P<0.01 = 2.544). This index indicates that fruit become sweeter as it is become mature and over mature. According Wilcke, (2002) and Quartin, (2004), in the harvest time the ratio TS/A should be between 15 and 20, values that are too low to be considered in our study. The value recommended by PTFPG, 2010-2011 for e mature apple fruit should be TS/ A>40, values that in our study are reached after the second

Table 1

The mean	n values	of indexes in	three harvest	dates for t	he Red Delicious	Annle
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	Streif index	De Jager index	FARS index	Perlimindex	Thiaultindex	TS/A index
1-Sep	$0.350{\pm}0.059^{a}$	8.975±0.917	1.231 ± 0.226	4.930 ± 0.383	137.21±4.631	33.007±1.662
20-Sep	0.104 ± 0.013	5.992 ± 0.608	$0.328 {\pm} 0.052$	4.646 ± 0.486	149.11±6.646	41.526±3.444
10-Oct	0.048 ± 0.006	3.468 ± 0.494	0.127 ± 0.018	3.658 ± 0.373	153.69 ± 4.544	52.437±5.282
*P<0.05	0.01	0.336	0.067	0.458	4.375	1.538
**P<0.01	0.017	0.557	0.11	0.758	7.239	2.544
204 1 11 14						

^a Standard deviation

harvest date. According our conditions we recommend that the value for TS/A index should be 40 - 50.

Evaluation of harvest time according the harvest indexes show that the optimal period of harvest for Red Delicious in Korça region is between 20^{th} September and 1^{st} October, which coincide with 150 - 160 day after blooming. The values of indexes Streif, De Jager, FARS, Perlim and Thiault, show a harvest time limited close the 20^{th} September, while TS/A index indicate a wider period. The total sugar/malic acid ratio can be used to determine the trend of fruit ripening, but cannot be used as a single index for evaluating the harvest time for apples.

The proposed harvest index

As far as the maturity of apple fruits are accompanied by the diminution of firmness values and by incense to the starch degradation values, we can put this data in a graphical situation to get the break point of the starch degradation (I_a) and firmness (F) curves (Graphic 1). This break point in our study case is around 7 – 8 days after the second harvest date 20^{th} September. This is the optimal harvest date estimated by the indexes above for the Red Delicious apples.

Table 2

Recommended maturity indexes values and harvest time for Red Delicious in Korca region

-	0		
Indexes	Red Delicious		
Streif	0.075 - 0.10		
De Jager	5.0 - 6.0		
FARS	0.2 - 0.3		
Perlim	4.3 - 4.6		
Thiault	150		
Sugar/Acidity	40 - 50		
Ripening index (I_p)	-1 - 1		
Recommended harvest time	20 September – 1 October		



Fig. 1. Graphical presentation of firmness and starch degradation relationship

If these two harvest indicators are given as their difference, we can reach a new harvest index, the Ripening index (I_p) . As the values of firmness decrease and the starch index is increase, in one given moment the difference of these values is zero (in the breaking point). This value should be the best harvest time according the I_p index. This alternative index can formulate in the following expression:

- I_{p} Ripening index
- I_a Starch index (1 10)
- F Firmness kg/cm²

A single value of the index usually is not easy to be estimated for the optimal harvest time, for this reason we propose that the interval of I_p value for a mature Red Delicious apples should be -1 - 1. This is an easy index to calculate because it takes only two simple indicators to be evaluated. For this region the Ripening index should be one of the most used harvest index in Korça region and further.

Conclusion

Using the maturity indexes (Streif, De Jager, FARS, Thiault, Perlim, sugar/acidity ratio, Ripening index) is the best way to determine the harvest time for apples due to the consideration of two or more indicators for the calculation. According the values of calculated indexes the optimal harvest time for Red Delicious apple in Korça region is from 20th September till 1st October (Table 2). Sugar/acidity ratio and Perlim index are indexes that can be used to determine the maturity tendencies and the consumption maturity of fruits.

The proposed Ripening index may be one of most practical index due to its easiness on measuring and calculation. However this index should be studied to have the right values for harvest time in Korça region. For a continuous evaluation of the maturity indicators and indexes during the maturity period it is necessary to determine the right harvest time. This will help for a good storage and good practices on the orchards.

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