Is top-working right for you?

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What is top-working?

• Top-working is the process of changing a tree from one variety to another by means of grafting.
What is Top-working?
Reasons to Top-work vs. whole block renewal

• Changing individual ‘off-trees’ that may have been included with your tree order so that they match the rest of the variety block.
• Changing an entire block of trees to get rid of an unproductive variety or to introduce a better one.
• Creating a variety test area in an orchard.
• Even if there is a reason to consider topworking, you must first weigh the advantages and disadvantages in order to decide whether it will be right for you and your operation.
Advantages

• Replace varieties with better ones.
• Shorter time for trees to come into bearing
• Less costly
• Avoidance of replant problems
• Established root system
• Weed management and irrigation programs are already in-place.
• Grafting is a simple operation that is easy to learn and to teach to others.

Disadvantages

• Stuck with spacing
• Trees need to be ‘healthy’
• Poor site issues remain (drainage, pH)
• Requires unique skill set for success
• Short window to get it done
• Grafts are tender
• ‘Newer-better’ variety could be a dud
• Not a free pass - patented cultivars require propagation agreements.
Considerations and challenges with top-working

- Cost/Economics of topworking
- Planning for the future
- What’s your vision for this block
- Is it worth topworking semidwarf or push out and start over
- Topworking related to nutrition and winter hardiness
- Virus, disease, and rootstock consideration
- Challenges with getting trees
Cost and Economics of Topworking

- Average cost is $1/stick
  - Does not include prep work, topping
  - Does not include nurse limb removal & training
- New varieties on modern HD rootstocks avg $10/tree
- Time to bearing considerations
  - New plantings take time
    - 2 -3 years fallow or alternate crop
    - Replant issues
    - 2 – 3 years to get full crop in HD block
3 Key Factors to Successful Orchard Renewal:

1. Price
2. Yield (When & How Much)
3. Establishment Costs

Orchard Renewal Rate

- 5% per year
- 9 remaining years
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References:
