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## Measures to Pre-Tect

**FAST LTD** has been continuing independent investigations into a new protein-based product called Pre-Tect, aimed at combating cherry splitting.

The firm trialled Pre-Tect in 2007, when over 200mm of rain fell during the UK cherry harvest period.

Don Vaughan, cherry agronomist with Fast's agronomy team, said: "Where no anti-crack measures were taken, the crop was a total write off. "Where alternative materials were used, some reduction in cracking was initially seen, but with continuing wet weather, most fruits finally succumbed.

"However, where a full programme of Pre-Tect was used, virtually no cracking was seen, even with over 120mm of rain falling during the main picking period."

As an illustration, cherries from an orchard where an alternative material plus calcium was applied

experienced 110mm of rainfall. On the day sampled, they were exhibiting 55 per cent cracking. Following another rainfall, the orchard was written off.

In contrast, cherries from an orchard that had a calcium programme plus Pre-Tect applied, and that was exposed to the same amount of rain, exhibited only 2.5 per cent cracking when sampled at the same time. Although further rain occurred, all fruit was harvested with a minimum of cracking.

Henry Bryant from Bryant and Partners in Faversham used Pre-Tect. "Without Pre-Tect, I doubt we would have picked 10 per cent of our cherries last year," he said. "As it was, we picked at least 80 per cent."

The benefits of the defence-stimulating protein element of Pre-Tect are now being trialled on both soft- and top-fruit varieties. ○