

Five Elements Harvest SPC (Michael DeGolyer)

As one of the earliest adopters of biochar making with a flame capped kiln in WA, our experience has been the following. First, since quenching the char requires significant amounts of water, locating the kiln near water sources vastly reduces any danger of fire escaping the kiln. Also, feeding the kiln is a constant process during a burn--any chance of untended fires springing up is highly unlikely with the constant attention needed.

Second, the wood burnt needs to be dry enough to reach at least 800 degrees F. Burning at a high temperature is critical to making the best char. So constricting biochar burning to pre and post burn ban highly complicates, if not negates, the ability to make the most effective use of the wood due to wood being too wet to burn properly until just before the ban begins (normally 15 June). In La Nina years biochar burns would be very difficult to be done successfully.

Third, biochar making is an effective way to sterilize wood pruned from fruit and fruit bushes that may be diseased. But, in the coastal band from Vancouver BC to just below Portland, pruning is best done after fruit harvest, at the height of summer. Disposing of or sterilizing that pruned wood is critical to be accomplished before rains begin in fall. Again, the burn ban until 15 September normally highly constricts the ability to sterilize the pruned wood due to rain beginning again during September.

Biochar making on farms is one of the most climate friendly ways to deal with agricultural burning related to disease suppression. But forcing biochar making to fall outside the burn ban period really complicates this necessary task being done in the most effective, efficient, and climate friendly manner. Biochar burning is not at all like burning a field, and has nowhere near the danger of getting out of control as field burning. But field burning is permitted during burn bans due to agricultural necessity. The same logic even moreso applies to biochar making, with far lower risk than field burning. Biochar making should be permitted during the burn ban period, particularly since biochar itself should be applied to the fields and orchards during the fall, before the rains make the fields inaccessible to tractors.

Thank you,

Michael DeGolyer
Five Elements Harvest SPC
9498 Stein Road
Custer WA 98240