
News from the Orchard

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Hoch Orchard and Gardens

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This newsletter is for everyone! Please print it and share it with your friends and neighbors

New Website and Email Format

It is long overdue but we are finally upgrading. Our newsletter used to be an easy part of our customer communications. I would write an issue, then I would copy and paste it into an email, and then I would put the list in the blind copy and hit send. We didn't even attach it as a separate file when we first started. Back then there were so many different word processor programs that we had no guarantee everyone could open the attachment. That's a long time ago! The last few years it has been getting more and more difficult for us to send you the news from the orchard. Spam filters don't like our email address with the .cc suffix. We also have problems with our server not letting us send group emails, forcing us to create several lists so the group stays under the maximum. Then if we did get the letter sent out of our server, other servers would flag us as spam or individuals spam filters would block us out.

You didn't open this email to hear me whine about electronic communications so I will stop here and just tell ya we are turning it over to the pros. Vision Design in Winona has worked with us for many years developing labels for us. Now they are upgrading our website and are going to distribute our newsletter for us. Hopefully we will have a lot less trouble, and update you more regularly.

2011 Crop

Fruit: We had a nice crop this year. Not huge, but bigger than last year, and no hail damage. Our berry production was up overall, apricots were down, plums, cherries, grapes and apples were up.

Cider: We made lots of cider this year. For the first time this season we offered the juice blends in our 48 ounce jug.

You may have noticed we didn't offer Minnesota's Finest brand cider this year. We buy local apples

for that brand of cider and promote it as a local preservative free cider. We have really been pressured by the MDA Health Division the past couple years and they are coming down hard on us now. Pushing safety standards on our little cider house, that are intended for the biggest juice processors. The FDA has a whole range of suggested safety procedures for all sizes of juice facilities. Unfortunately our local inspectors feel they should impose the strictest interpretation of these rules on us. We have been talking with health division officials up the chain of command, trying to get our inspectors to be more reasonable. I am still waiting for a response from my request to meet with the Assistant Commission of Agriculture.

Because of this increased scrutiny, we decided to stop making cider with other people's apples. This removes some of the procedures FDA suggests when you comingle fruit from other locations. I am sorry we don't offer this lower priced conventional cider anymore. We feel we were pushed out of it. It seems the local inspectors would like to see the small "high risk" processors either get big or get out. We plan to stay in the cider business a while yet, we are not going down without a fight.



We should have our fresh cider available into December. If you want to keep your own stash of our cider to drink through the winter you can easily freeze it. Simply open the jug and pour off about a cup of cider. This will give plenty of space for expansion. Put the jugs in the deep freeze and pull them out when ever you are in the mood for our cider. Be sure to thaw the cider in the refrigerator

or in a sink full of cold water. If you leave our raw cider out at room temperature, the cider touching the sides of the jug will rise to room temp while the center is still frozen. The Ultra Violet light treatment that gives us the USDA required five log pathogen reduction makes our cider safe, but does not kill all the yeast spores the way high temperature pasteurization does. Warm temperature will wake up the wild yeast spores that are in the juice. Unless you are planning to make hard cider or naturally sparkling cider you don't want that yeast starting to ferment your sweet cider.

Sauce: Our apple sauce continues to gain in popularity. Last year we sold out of sauce in the late winter. This year we are going to make a lot more. We plan to build up inventory so we have enough to fill demand until the 2012 apples ripen next August.



Jelly: We are also making a lot of jelly now. We froze our excess berries, plums, grapes, and apricots this summer. Now we are thawing those fruits and blending them with fresh cider to make Jelly. Remember, our jelly is made with only fruit we grew in our orchards and gardens. We don't ship in frozen berries or buy fruit from other farms. If it says "Hoch Orchard and Gardens" on the label the fruit was grown right here. We use Florida Crystals organic sugar in our jelly so all our jellies can be certified organic.

Honey: Grampa Jack's bees really worked hard this summer and we had a nice honey harvest. Mary Ann (Grampa Jack's boss/wife) will have honey at the winter markets. Seward Market in Minneapolis is also carrying Grampa Jack's Orchard Honey.

What's still available?

Our apple crop is just about sold out. You can still find a few of our varieties in your local Food Coop. The Cameron Park Market in LaCrosse closed for the season last week, but there are going to be winter markets at the Three Rivers Waldorf School

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in LaCrosse. Go to the Cameron Park Market web site <http://www.cameronparkmarket.org/home.aspx> to find the time and dates of the winter markets. Mary Ann plans to attend most of them.

From December through April we should have honey, jelly, and sauce available at the coops and markets. Then in May our first berries from the high tunnels should hit the coops. If things go as planned, you will be able to get our organic locally grown fruit products year round from now on!

A New High Tunnel

We put up another high tunnel this year. This one is 25 x 200 feet and a little taller than our first tunnel. We assembled it in May and planted it this spring with strawberries, blackberries, and cherries.



We didn't harvest much fruit in the tunnel this year but we should get a good crop from it next year. The berry plants and cherry trees really grew with the extra heat held in by the plastic. This is a three season tunnel so we will be taking the plastic off soon. We will put the plastic back in March or April giving the plants inside a real head start.



Blackberry plants in the foreground and young cherry trees in the back. The strawberries are already covered with hay for the winter.

All for now,
Harry