

Harry Hoch  
Hoch Orchard and Gardens  
32553 Forster Road  
LaCrescent MN 55947  
[Hoch1@acegroup.cc](mailto:Hoch1@acegroup.cc)

## 2008 Farm Plan Update

Our first bearing organic apple blocks should be certified this year. By this summer, four blocks will be at least 36 months since a prohibited substance was applied. These blocks will produce our first MOSA certified apples. The new apricot block has a few fruit buds so we are hoping to also have organic apricots this summer. The old berry beds should be certified this year along with the new berry plantings that are already certified. All our berries should be certified this year!

### **Change in Transition Plan**

We have slightly changed our farm transition plan. Instead of taking several years to begin transition of the orchards, we decided to put the entire farm into transition this year. We do not plan to apply any prohibited substances to the fruit crops this year. In 2007, we found the segregation of transitional apples from the conventional apples took a lot of effort and required a huge amount of extra space. We felt it would be very difficult to segregate certified organic, transitional organic, and conventional fruit in our limited facility.

A second factor in our decision to put the whole farm into transition was the difficulty we had sourcing consistent quality fruit for processing. The fruit we bought had variable quality and we couldn't get enough to fill the demand for our cider. Putting the entire orchard into transition will increase the amount of processing fruit produced on our farm. We do not plan to buy any apples for cider in 2008. All our cider will be either certified organic or made with transitional fruit from our farm.

### **Weed control under the electric deer fences**

We have several thousand feet of slant-style deer fence. This style of fence requires a wide swath of weed free ground. We currently control the weeds using glyphosate (Roundup). We plan to apply this prohibited herbicide under the fence this year and a few more years into the future as we phase out the slant fence. Our new plantings of apples will have an eight foot woven wire fence that is not energized, thus no herbicide is required. We are putting together a plan to replace the electric fences with woven wire fences over the next three or four years.

The fences are twenty feet or more away from the orchards providing a good buffer strip. The herbicide is applied carefully with a backpack sprayer with the wand being aimed down and away from the trees. Contamination of the organic orchards would be highly unlikely and would cause visible damage to the trees if it occurred .

We are also working on a vinegar burn-down herbicide that we are making on the farm. We hope that this experiment will provide a natural herbicide that could reduce or eliminate the use of glyphosate under the fences.

### **Cider Facility**

We produced just over 9000 gallons of cider in 2007. About ¼ of the fruit was purchased from other local orchards. We expect to produce about the same amount in 2008 of which about 1000 gallons should be certified organic. We do not plan to purchase any apples for cider production so all the fruit going through the facility will be from our farm and will have been grown using organic practices. We plan to develop an organic label and get it to MOSA for approval this summer.

Our plan for distribution is to package the organic cider in cardboard cases and send it to Coop Partners Warehouse for distribution. The cider made from transitional apples will be bottled into both

gallons and half gallon jugs and packed into either wooden cases for direct to store deliveries, or packed in cardboard and sent to Coop Partners Warehouse.

### **Inspection and Certification**

About half of our berry production this year will come from older plantings that have completed the transition from conventional production. These plantings need to be inspected and certified before the end of May so we can sell our entire berry crop as MOSA certified. I was assured by MOSA staff that if I got my materials in by early April there would not be a problem in getting an inspection scheduled for early May. If possible, we can inspect all the berries, the orchards, and the processing facility in one visit in early May, even though my anniversary inspection date is not until the late summer.

I have not yet completed the processing application, but I hope to get it to you in the next few days. I felt it was important to get the producer application to you ASAP. I think I have all the forms and background information included; I also included some of the additional records that we developed since last year's application. Also included is the completed User Fee Billing Form.

If you have any questions call or email.

Thank You,

Harry Hoch