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2009 Farm Plan Update

Approximately 70% of our apple acreage will be certified organic this season. All of our berries, grapes, apricots, plums, and cherries will be certified this year. We have two blocks of apples on the main farm and one block on the rented farm that are on schedule to be certified next year. This will complete our transition to all certified organic products.

Value-added products

We produced a small amount of certified cider and jelly from the 2008 crop. We plan to increase our certified cider to more than half of the production being certified. All the preserves will be certified this season.

Changes

We are no longer renting a five-acre block of old standard trees. We called this Farm Two Standards (F2S). This block had Fireside, Beacon, and Empire apples. Although well pruned, the trees were very large and difficult to maintain. Hand fruit thinning was almost impossible and thorough coverage of the short-acting organic pesticides was difficult. We will no longer produce the three varieties on that block.

We planted a high-density block last spring, increasing our acreage on the main farm by about 2.5 acres. This planting contains about 900 trees of the University of Minnesota's new managed variety 'Sweetango'. This block is trellis and the trees are on highly dwarfing stock so it will be much easier to maintain organically than the block we abandoned.

We cut down a couple acres of older trees and inefficient planting on the main farm. We also added some Haralson, Snow Sweet, and Keepsake to our dwarf blocks last spring.

This spring we will be adding a couple hundred more grapevines, 50 high sugar (fresh eating) tart cherries, 70 blueberry bushes, and a few thousand more strawberry plants.

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!

Crop

We produced about 8000 bushels of apples last year. With the removal of trees on our farm and abandoning a rented block, we expect our product to drop under 7000 bushels this year. The volume should increase to over 8000 bushels in the next couple of seasons. We had a cold winter again killing off most of the struggling peach trees. The apricot buds were damaged but we have a light bloom taking place now so expect to have a small apricot crop this year. Plum bud set is strong on the older trees and the new block should start producing this year so we will expect a record plum harvest this year. Berry production should be up also.

Deer Fencing

We will continue to use the electric deer fences in 2009. The slant style fencing will be treated with Round up herbicide using a directed spray applied by backpack sprayer. Care to spray in calm

weather and maintaining appropriate buffer strips should eliminate any chance of drift into the adjoining organic orchards.

Our local DNR agent visited the farm this winter and mapped the border of the orchards using a GPS unit. The numbers we sent to another DNR office where they created a fence layout and a materials list using a computer program. We plan to eventually replace the electric fencing with a ten foot woven wire fence. The woven wire is more durable and does not require the use of herbicides to keep foliage off the wires. Unfortunately, the materials for the new fence will cost around \$24,000 and the labor cost should be about the same. The total fence replacement cost will be around \$50,000. We plan to replace the electric fencing over several years. Last year we fenced, block 18 with woven wire. We do not plan any fence replacement this season. I enclosed a DNR fence map and materials estimate.

Labeling and Distribution

We have registered Hoch Orchard and Gardens with GS1 giving us a unique company number for bar coding. We will be registering our organic products so that each product and package size will have its own barcode. We also purchased a thermal printer that can create and print barcodes and black text onto a stock color label. Samples of the label are enclosed. There is space next to the farm address for MOSA info. We are waiting for the final version of the New 'Minnesota Organic' logo to replace the 'Minnesota Grown' logo on our label. The new logo should be available this summer. This stock label will be used on our preserves and our clamshell fruit containers.

The bar coding gives us the ability to distribute our value-added products through Coop Partners Warehouse. Our plan is to distribute a high sugar shelf stable jelly through the warehouse system. We also plan to sell seasonal low sugar preserves as a refrigerated item in the produce departments.

Thank you:

Harry Hoch