
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, neighbors, relatives, and customers

Strawberries are Ripe!

We started delivering strawberries last week. This week the early varieties are peaking and the midseason varieties are coming in big. In the metro area the Seward Coop, the Mississippi Markets, and Eastside Coop are carrying our berries. Closer to home the Bluff Country Coop in Winona is keeping the shelves full of Hoch Orchard berries and the Viroqua is also stocking them. Our berries are not for sale on the farm. I am sorry but we do not have patches set up to pick your own or sales staff in the shed. You have to leave the work to us.

Now that all our fruit is certified organic we are trying to make another push to sell more fruit close to home. Don't worry; we have plenty of fruit to supply our supportive coops in the Twin Cities. Our farm is in the middle of a big fruit growing region where every store stocks local fruit and all the farmers fight for the lowest price. It is hard to keep consistent sales in this environment. There are not many local 'organic' fruit growers so we are pushing again to sell more fruit in our own community. Winona and Viroqua are working closely with us to promote our local organic fruit and working to create enough demand to get orders large enough to merit delivery.

In LaCrosse we are bringing fruit to the Cameron Park Farmers Market on Fridays. We have not had consistent participation in the farmers markets since we lost our sales staff a few years back (our daughters moved on to college). Now Mary Ann Redfearn, the wife of Grampa Jack (our bee and delivery man) is staffing the farmers market for us. So those of you looking for Hoch Orchard Fruit can find it once a week at the Market.

Many customers have been asking us to send our fruit to the LaCrosse Peoples Food Coop. We have sold fruit there on and off for the past twenty

years. We decided to try again to establish regular deliveries there and gave them a local discount for our fruit. I am sorry to report that our first delivery of berries was rejected because the berries looked wet. Our flash cooled berries tend to have water condense on them when delivered on humid days. The organic buyer ordered the berries and the head produce manager sent them back. This may or may not have had anything to do with their shelves overflowing with California berries, or the fact that a couple small scale growers would have considerably cheaper berries coming in soon. As it turned out Winona had sold out of our berries so we took the PFC rejects to Winona and they were able to keep their shelves full. I am sorry that we are not going to offer any more berries to the PFC so our LaCrosse customers will have to get our fruit at the farmers market. We will try again to get Hoch Organic Fruit in the LaCrosse PFC when apples are ready.

Crop Outlook

The Strawberries are looking great. The early variety Northeaster is producing very flavorful early berries for us and the old reliable Honeoye is coming on strong. Jewel will start to produce a little later and take us through the end of the June. We planted a few rows of ever bearing strawberries in our new high tunnel. They should start to bear at the end of June and continue through the summer. This will give us an extra long strawberry season. It is also a bit of an experiment to see how these varieties perform organically under a plastic tunnel.

The Raspberry crop looks like it will be a record for us this year. The early Prelude variety and the Nova summer reds are looking great. The early berries are forming now and the later ones are flowering and full of Grampa Jack's bees right now. We planted some fall bearing varieties outside and in the tunnel so we should have raspberries well into the apple season this year.



Our little Blueberry patch has a nice crop this year. We should have more berries available than we have in the past. They come and go quickly. We have a site prepared for another half acre of blueberries for planting next year.

The Plum crop looks pretty good. The older trees did not set a very good crop and may have to be removed soon. The new plum planting looks good. About half the young trees have fruit and the quality looks good. I have been spraying them with a neem oil and kaolin clay to chase off the plum curculio. There are several varieties producing this year that are new to us. We are excited to taste these varieties and get them to the coops.

The Apricot crop looks phenomenal! The past two years I have been talking about this new block and telling you the trees have set flower buds. But the 07-08 winter and the 08-09 winters were so cold they killed the tender flower buds on the young trees. With no crop the trees have grown like crazy. Now they finally had a reasonable winter giving us a huge bloom, good pollination, and the biggest crop of apricots I have ever seen. The quality looks good right now. Most of the varieties were the result of crosses made right here at Hoch Orchard. These hardy apricots have more acid than drying apricots which gives them a flavor more like sweet peaches. Don't miss these juicy tasty little apricots. We should have them in the coops in late July and August.

The Cherry crop is pretty small this year. The old tart cherries were cut down two years ago but the new sweet cherries have a little crop this year, and the high sugar tarts will produce some fruit too. I am not sure if there will be enough to bring to the coops or if they will all go to the farmers market. The trees are young and the crop should grow each year.

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The Grapes are looking pretty good. The vines have suffered from the transition to organic combined with some hard winters. We cut down a few rows of wine grapes this year with plans to replace them with more table grapes next spring. If we avoid the summer monsoons that cause the grapes to crack on the vine we should be able to pack some wine grapes and table grapes for the coops this fall.

The Apple crop looks good. We had strong bloom with fair pollination weather. The unusual heat after petal fall stimulated a pretty heavy June drop so some of the young trees and new varieties have a pretty light crop. Overall the crop should be bigger than last year and the variety selection a little broader.

Our Block of SweeTango apples flowered and produced a few apples this spring. We will not have many but we are hoping to get a taste of them to the coops this fall. I think we will have the only organic SweeTango in the Midwest.

This is a new variety developed by the University of Minnesota. It may be the best apple they have developed in over one hundred years of fruit breeding. The apple is so good that they were able to sell the rights to this apple to one company. Now one company decides who can grow the apple and how many. This is a very controversial model for an apple developed by a land grant university. Most of the SweeTango sold in metro stores last year were grown outside of Minnesota and brought in to compete with our local farmers.

Hoch Orchard was granted the right to grow 1000 trees and we are restricted to selling them only in Minnesota. The other Minnesota orchards are also restricted to only 1000 trees so they will not be able to compete with the company holding the rights to the SweeTango. Most of the SweeTango are being grown on very large commercial orchards all over the U.S. and in Canada. Most of the Minnesota orchards growing SweeTango will be selling their apples at their apple stands. We don't have an apple stand so we will sell our Minnesota grown organic SweeTango apples to a few Minnesota stores. Most of the SweeTango that you will see in the stores this fall will not be Minnesota grown. Many of our local apple growers are very upset about this arrangement and there is trouble brewing. For more facts about how this apple was released go to our website www.hochorchard.com.

Soccer Challenge

In the last issue of News from the Orchard I mentioned that we had challenged the Pearl Street Brewery to a soccer game. I am sorry to announce that they couldn't make it on the date we set! We are counting this as a win! At least until they get back to us with a new date. The Hoch Orchard Soccer team is now 1-0. At this pace, in three more years we may qualify for the World Cup.

If any of you know of a farm or business ready to put together a team to take on our undefeated internationally recruited soccer phenoms, just let us know!

Wow, what a crew

Dan VonArx and Grampa Jack Redfearn are back for another season at Hoch Orchard. Dan worked part time over the winter helping to overhaul equipment and help out on other projects when needed. Jack has been helping pick up supplies and is busy delivery berries again. He has also increased our apiary to eleven hives now. This is keeping him busy and out of trouble with the wife. Speaking of Mary Anne, as I mentioned earlier she is heading up our farmers market sales.

We have quite crew of interns this year from all over the world, we even found one from Northern Minnesota!



Front row: Abel Caillahua Gonzales (Peru), Kamolpatera Kasikan aka Pookie (Thailand).

Back Row: Dan VonArx, Jake Overgaard (MN), Iuliia Antonenko (Ukraine), Patricia Carua Guaigua (Ecuador), Vita Osipchuk (Ukraine), Jackie, Jack Redfearn

Birds!!!

We have a few winged workers this year. We have 53 Freedom Ranger chickens, 16 Muscovy ducks with 15 Guinea hens on order. Here are a couple pictures!

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Check out Hoch Orchard on facebook!

Save the date for a big celebration August 21st.

We will have an open house and farm tours to celebrate the completion of our organic transition. In August the entire farm will be certified organic.

That's enough for this issue.

Harry