

Volume XV, No. 2

Winter 2011

McIntosh News



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Photo by Russell Powell



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McIntosh News is published by the New England Apple Association and distributed free to apple growers, policymakers, agricultural organizations, and other friends of the New England apple industry. The nonprofit New England Apple Association is a grower-funded organization charged with raising awareness of apple varieties grown in New England.

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Grant funds web projects, 2012 calendar

A \$13,150 Specialty Crops grant to the New England Apple Association from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets is funding a project to help growers enhance their presence on the Internet, redo the site's education section, and produce a 2012 New England Apples calendar. The web project has been underway since the fall, while the education phase will unfold this winter. Quantities of the calendar are expected to be made available to growers during the month of August.

"We are grateful for this grant from the Vermont department of agriculture," says Russell Powell, executive director of the association. "It will have a significant impact as we continue to pursue ways to make our website a more effective marketing tool for our members, and a more useful resource about New England apples for consumers and educators."

The web project's primary goals are to:

- Ensure that growers are fully and accurately presented on the association website, www.newenglandapples.org. While member orchards already can make changes to their web listing from their farm, in many cases the sites have not been maintained adequately due to a lack of time or expertise. Visitors to the association website, for example, can search for particular apple varieties, but if a grower has not listed all of their varieties, they will not turn up in the search.
- Add reciprocal links between the orchards and the association website. This is an easy way to improve the search engine optimization (SEO) of both the association's and member's sites, since search engines like Google evaluate the quantity and quality of links to a site in determining how high to rank it.

- Provide technical assistance to orchards to strengthen their websites. In many cases, modest changes to an existing site can produce dramatic increases in its effectiveness.
- Assist growers with marketing ideas that take advantage of free or low-cost services currently available on the web. A Google business listing, for example, makes it possible for someone using a smart phone to locate an orchard when they are traveling or away from their computer, and it is free.

Christopher Weeks began contacting orchards in October, and will continue the project through the winter, or as long as is necessary to gain full participation. With the association website growing to more than 650,000 hits in 2010, a 13 percent increase over 2009, the site is becoming a greater factor in teaching consumers about apples, raising awareness of varieties cultivated in New England, and directing people to orchards that have the apples or agricultural products they seek.

The grant project, combined with SEO work being done by Right Angle, the firm that has developed the current website, about how the site's pages are labeled and tagged, is expected to spur additional traffic to in 2011.

The second major aspect of the grant is a reworking of the website's section on education. Since the website was created, the association now has short video programs on educational topics such as pruning and pollination, as well as still photographs illustrating grafting techniques. The text in the section "Teachers," however, is in need of rewriting to make it more suitable to the web, and more useful to teachers and students seeking information about how apples are grown, harvested, and processed. The education section of the website will be totally revamped this winter, incorporating the videos and photography and reworking the text to make it more effective.

The glossy, four-color wall-sized calendar will expand on a pilot project developed in 2010. That project featured a photograph and description of a different apple variety each month, and included a recipe, but it was printed modestly with colored copies, and it was produced too late in the year to enable growers to share it with customers. The new calendar will be comparable in quality to any commercially produced product, and will include additional photographs from the region's orchards and interesting apple facts. By producing it before the 2011 fall harvest, growers will have the opportunity to use it as a promotional item during their busiest season.



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New weblog draws regular attention to apple news

The association launched a new weblog, www.newenglandorchards.org, in August, to great success. Published weekly until Thanksgiving, the weekly posts featured a New England apple variety or two and a recipe. The blog is circulated via the association's Facebook page, and through email to members of the media, member orchards, friends of the apple industry, and government officials. All told, the posts are distributed to nearly 2,000 individuals.

During the fresh harvest season, the posts were made Wednesdays to maximize its influence on people's weekend plans. In many ways, the blog posts have supplanted the traditional press release, and it has been used to draw attention to special events like the New England Apple Harvest Kickoff and the Eastern States Exposition.

"We can do so much more with a blog post than with a press release," says Executive Director Russell Powell. "We can include photographs and video, as well as hyperlinks to our web page. More importantly, we can target the posts to those people who are most influential and most likely to respond to it. The blogs are also interactive, and we have gotten feedback and ideas for future posts from a number of sources."

"We can do all of this at no cost to the association other than the time and expense needed to create the content."

The blog has also been used to launch the re-release of the association's video series. A three-week blog series on apple pie-making just before Thanksgiving, for example, included videos on the subject featuring Andrea Darrow of Green Mountain Orchards in Putney, Vermont.

The blog will continue through the winter and spring on at least a monthly basis.

If you are not already receiving the blog, visit it at www.newenglandorchards.org.



Save
the
Date!

Annual meeting: June 14

The annual meeting of the New England Apple Association will be Tuesday, June 14, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon at J. P. Sullivan

Co. in Ayer, Massachusetts. For space purposes, please let us know if you are planning to attend by emailing Russell@newenglandapples.org or calling 413-247-9966.

Association reaches more consumers than ever with fall events

This fall the New England Apple Association met with more consumers than ever before. The association made direct contact with people through the second annual New England Apple Harvest Kickoff with Massachusetts Commissioner of Agriculture Scott Soares, a record year at the Eastern States Exposition ("The Big E"), and participation at two fairs in central Massachusetts. Several additional apple promotions were conducted by Soares' staff at the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR).

Despite four days of rainy weather during the final week of the 17-day Big E, the New England Apple Association booth in the Massachusetts Building managed to finish slightly ahead of last year, resulting in an all-time high for customers. In addition to its tremendous promotional value — the fair begins in mid-September, at the height of the fresh harvest — the Big E has now become a reliable source of revenue for the association to supplement member dues.

"It's a great place to get people's attention and talk to them about apples, and in particular the new crop," says Russell Powell, executive director. "People come to the booth from throughout New England, and beyond. It's a wonderful educational opportunity."

The booth featured a newly designed banner this year and educational signage, and shared a single entrance with the Massachusetts Farmers Market Federation. The product mix was similar to last year: cider, cider donuts, apple pie and apple pockets (like a turnover), apple crisp, and, of course, several varieties of fresh apples. Booth manager Bar Weeks also experimented with a new display of apple butter donated by Red Apple Farm. On the cooler and rainy fair days, a new homemade hot mulled cider recipe was served.

Thousands of the newly revised brochure/poster, "New England Apples," and recipe cards were passed out to fairgoers. Each of four index-sized cards featured a different recipe provided by a member orchard and included the association website on the back.

The quantity and quality of the apples supplied by growers was exceptional, says Powell. "Fresh apples from across the state were on display, and they were outstanding in size, appearance, and flavor."

Atkins Farms (Amherst), Breezlands Orchards (Warren), Carlson Orchards (Harvard), Cold Spring Orchard (Belchertown), Hamilton Orchards (New Salem), Nestrovich Fruit Farm (Granville), Pine Hill Orchard (Colrain), and Red Apple Farm (Phillipston) all supplied apples to the fair, Pine Hill and Nestrovich for the first time.

The varieties included both all-time favorites — McIntosh, Cortland, Macoun, Empire, Gala, Ginger Gold, Golden Supreme, Honeycrisp, and Jonamac — as well as a few harder to find gems — Red Gravenstein, Rhode Island Greening, Silken, Snow (aka Fameuse, a parent of McIntosh), and Suncrip. "It's a good mix of the old and the new," says Powell. "People are always interested in learning about new varieties or swapping stories about heirlooms."

Powell says the fair is "both energizing and exhausting, and Bar Weeks did a great job in her second year managing the booth — she was there all 17 days!"

Fall fairs

In addition to the Big E, the association staffed a booth at the three-day Sterling Fair in Sterling, Massachusetts, as part of the 2010 Fall Apple Harvest Kickoff with Massachusetts Commissioner Soares. On September 10, Soares visited J. P. Sullivan and Co. in Ayer and Carlson Orchards in Harvard, and his aides visited Red Apple Farm in Phillipston.

The kickoff event was an improvement over the first one in 2009, and resulted in some good press beforehand and from the Phillipston visit.

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Current phase of video project now complete

With the release this month of a video program about how New England apples are processed, a 14-part series about apple growing is now complete. The new video made its official premiere on the association's weblog, newenglandorchards.org, and it appears on the home page of the association website, newenglandapples.org, and the social media site YouTube.

The seven-minute program about how apples are handled in the packing house features footage taken at Sunrise Orchards in Middlebury, Vermont, and J. P. Sullivan in Ayer, Massachusetts.



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There were state legislators at each of the three locations, and Ned O'Neill (J.P. Sullivan), Frank Carlson (Carlson Orchards), and Al Rose (Red Apple Farm) concisely described their operations.

Looking ahead to 2011, Soares and Powell will work to involve the other New England commissioners of agriculture in a similar celebration to launch the apple harvest, so that the kickoff will be truly region-wide, not just a Massachusetts event.

The Sterling Fair coincided with the kickoff, and at it Powell gave a presentation on varieties that Sunday morning, assisted by Mary Jordan, director of agricultural development for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR).

The association also participated in the 27th Annual Applefest at Mount Wachusett in central Massachusetts, for the first time. In addition to an apple tasting on the first Saturday of the two-weekend event, Powell served as a judge for a pie-making contest organized by Mount Wachusett.

The Massachusetts DAR organized several other promotions in the last month at which they promoted local apples: at the Solomon Pond Mall in Marlborough, in late August (for which they purchased apples); the Boston All Local Food Festival October 2; and the Cranberry Harvest Festival in Wareham, October 9.



The other programs in the series are:

- A three-part series on apple pie-making on the "Recipes" page features Andrea Darrow of Green Mountain Orchards in Putney, Vermont.
- A three-part series about New England apple varieties (with Chuck and Diane Souther of Apple Hill Farm in Concord, New Hampshire, and Greg Parzych of Rogers Orchards in Southington, Connecticut) can be viewed from the "Apple Varieties" page.
- Videos on pruning (two parts), and grafting are narrated by Mo Tougas of Tougas Family Farm in Northborough, Massachusetts, and are found on the "Teachers" page.
- A program on how to prepare to visit a pick-your-own farm was shot at several New England orchards, including Lyman's in Middlefield, Connecticut, and Stow Farm in Stow, Massachusetts. During the fresh harvest, this video will move to the home page; off season it can be viewed at the main "Orchards by State" page.
- A video describing cider-making features footage from Carlson Orchards in Harvard, Massachusetts. Frank Carlson narrates a program about the role of pollination in producing a good apple crop. Both programs currently are on the home page; the pollination video eventually will be moved to the education section.
- A short program on proper storage of apples is now on the home page.

All the videos are accessible from both the association website and from YouTube.

The video project took two years to complete. It has been a regional effort, funded with Specialty Crop grants from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, and a grant from Northeast Farm Credit's AgEnhancement Program.

Executive Director Russell Powell produced and directed the video series. Associate Director Bar Weeks wrote the majority of the scripts. John Browne of Stow, Massachusetts, was the videographer and editor for the series.



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Apple recipes rereleased

We're always on the lookout for new apple cookbooks, and three came across our desk this fall. They are not exactly new; one is a 2010 reissue of a 1992 book, another a 2007 revised edition, the third from 1996. They are functional, no-frills books, and useful additions to any apple recipe collection.

Two of the three are by Midwest writer Lee Jackson. From the Apple Orchard: Recipes for Apple Lovers (Imaged Unlimited) originally was printed in 1984; this second edition came out four years ago. It's a low-budget, spiral-bound collection of recipes with no superfluous text aside from a one-page introduction.

Jackson's Apple, Apples Everywhere: Favorite Recipes from America's Orchards (Images Unlimited) was published in 1996. It includes short introductions about the farms that supplied the recipes, taken from around the country. It's a nice idea, but feels a little outdated 15 years later (several of the New England orchards featured, for example, are no longer in the apple business). There is no information about the recipes, such as how and why they were chosen.

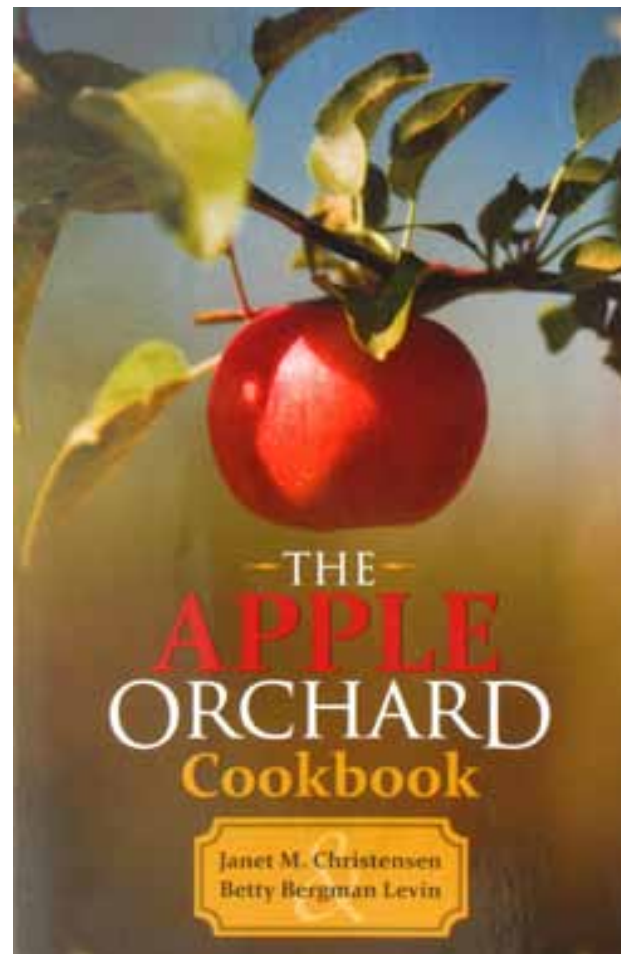
The same can be said for Janet M. Christensen's and Betty Bergman Levin's newly reissued The Apple Orchard Cookbook (Countryman Press). It's thoughtfully done, and has lots of information about apples that Jackson's volumes lack, but once you get to the recipe section it's all business. We trust that the authors have made good choices about what to include,

Association partners with juvenile diabetes foundation for third year

For the third year, the New England Apple Association partnered with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF), supplying apples to its fall fundraising walks.

Participating orchards were Apple Hill Farm in New Hampshire, Carlson Orchards and Tougas Family Farm in Massachusetts, Hill Orchards in Rhode Island, and McDougal Orchards in Maine. Connecticut's apple marketing board arranged apple deliveries for the state. In Vermont, the annual fundraising walk is held during the spring, so no apples were needed this fall.

In addition to supporting a worthwhile cause, the partnership includes some promotional considerations for the association and participating orchards, such as the use of the "Seal of Good Taste" logo on JDRF printed materials and T-shirts, and reciprocal website links.



but the stories about how recipes come into being and get passed along can be as interesting as new or heirloom apples, and Levin and Christensen are good writers.

But the lack of detail about the recipes does not diminish from an otherwise fine book. Authors Christensen and Levin are New England natives and veteran food writers, and it shows. They come across as knowledgeable and sincere, and we'll be trying out some of their recipes over the coming months.

If, in addition to recipes, you are interested in learning about different varieties, nutritional information, and a host of useful preparation hints (including how to microwave an apple), The Apple Orchard Cookbook is a good choice. The recipes are straightforward and easy to follow, and most pages include a quotation or fact about apples, such as this useful tidbit: "One pound of apples is equal to about three medium apples, and yields about three cups of sliced apples."

The circumstances around the reprint prevented the authors from making many changes this time around, although they were able to substitute oil for lard in one recipe to make it healthier. All three cookbooks, which were first published 15 years ago or more, tend to be heavy on fats, sugars, and white flour. Substituting some whole-wheat flour, reducing the sugar, and using applesauce in place of some of the fat are all ways to make the recipes healthier.

Here's a healthy recipe from The Apple Orchard Cookbook that uses applesauce and substitutes (canola) oil for butter:

Raisin Spice Oatmeal Bread

- 1½ c flour
- 1 t baking powder
- 1 t baking soda
- 1½ t salt
- 1 t cinnamon
- ½ t nutmeg
- ⅔ c brown sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 c applesauce
- 1 c quick or old-fashioned oats, uncooked
- 1 c raisins
- ⅓ c vegetable oil

Substitute vegetable oil or canola oil for butter!

Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and spices. Add brown sugar, eggs, and applesauce; beat until well blended. Stir in oats, raisins, and oil.

Fill a buttered 9x5-inch loaf pan. Bake at 350° for about one hour.

Remove from pan immediately; cool. For ease in slicing, wrap cooled bread and store for one day.

Harvest New England marketing conference starts March 1

Growers from across the Northeast will convene for the Third Bi-Annual Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference Tuesday, March 1, through Thursday, March 3. The event will be held at the Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center in Sturbridge, Massachusetts.



The conference targets New England farmers interested in learning new ideas and fine-tuning their marketing strategies. Five tracks with more than 25 workshops will be offered, covering a range of marketing and business planning topics, including social media, funding, customer relations, value-added products, and agri-tourism.

The tracks are:

- “Growing Your Business,” about new ways to diversify a farm business;
- “Funding Your Business,” on finding and applying for grants and loans, and how to use benchmarks to increase profits;
- “Selling Your Product,” about new ways for producers to sell their products in the off-season or through nontraditional avenues;
- “Marketing Your Product,” exploring the uses of social media, traditional media, and new communications technologies;
- “Adding Value to Your Product,” a look at pricing, labeling, and other branding techniques that can increase sales.

Pre-conference workshops include GAP training and a New England farmers’ market manager’s workshop. Conference speakers include retail marketing expert John Stanley, the only speaker to be invited back to North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association’s annual conference for three consecutive years. Stanley will share profitable ideas for merchandising and display, and provide practical tips on how to increase sales.

Vermont farmer Ben Hewitt, author of *The Town That Food Saved*, will address conference attendees Thursday, March 3. Hewitt will discuss the potential for producers and farms to revitalize communities and keep money circulating locally.

A trade show with nearly 100 vendors will provide information on the latest products and services for the agricultural community.

The conference is sponsored by Harvest New England and all six New England state departments of agriculture, in cooperation with the Cooperative Development Institute, Connecticut Cooperative Extension, Federation of Massachusetts Farmers’ Markets, Rhode Island Center for Agricultural Promotion, and Education University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

Harvest New England is a nonprofit cooperative marketing program created by New England’s state departments of agriculture in 1992. Its initial purpose was to support the sale of New England-grown produce through supermarket channels. The program was subsequently expanded to all New England food and agricultural products.

For the latest conference updates and to register online, visit www.harvestnewengland.org.



Microloan applications due January 28

The Carrot Project announces a January 28 microloan deadline for Massachusetts and Vermont farmers. The Maine Farm Business Loan accepts applications on a rolling basis.

Massachusetts and Vermont Winter Microloan

The Strolling of the Heifers Microloan Fund for New England Farmers and the MassDevelopment/Strolling of the Heifers Small Farm Loan Program serving residents of Massachusetts and Vermont will be accepting prequalified applications for its winter deadline for loans of \$15,000 or less.

For more information, visit www.thecarrotproject.org/farm_financing or contact Dorothy Suput at 617-666-9637 or at dsuput@thecarrotproject.org.

Maine Farm Business Loan Fund Rolling Application

In partnership with Coastal Enterprises, Inc., the Carrot Project offers the Maine Farm Business Loan Fund. Providing loans up to \$35,000 for farm and farm-related businesses, this loan is for businesses that use sustainable practices and concentrate on local and regional markets. The fund accepts application throughout the year.

For more information, visit www.ceimaine.org or contact Gray Harris: 207-882-7552 or ghs@ceimaine.org.

The nonprofit Carrot Project provides financing programs that support profitable, sustainable farm businesses that are unable to find financing, by partnering and leveraging the assets of community-based lenders, socially responsible investors, farm support organizations, and farmers.



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