

# McIntosh News



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agricultural chief Kenneth Ayars**

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*The Seal of Good Taste*

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# Rhode Island's Ayars considers state's size an asset

By BAR LOIS WEEKS

**THERE ARE ADVANTAGES** to being small, says Kenneth Ayars, chief of Rhode Island's Division of Agriculture, in the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). "I think it is easier to put forth a cohesive, collaborative team effort, as I can network with people from other agencies within the DEM to deal with the complexities of modern agriculture."

Ayars also provides Rhode Island's agricultural sector with continuity. He has been in the job since 1998, making him the longest currently serving head of agriculture among the New England states. His circumstances are unique among his peers, who are commissioners of agriculture appointed by their governor; in all but Rhode Island, whenever a new administration takes office there is the potential (and often the reality) of a new commissioner being named.

As a civil servant in Rhode Island, Ayars' position is not subject to the winds of political change. Similarly, Rhode Island is the only New England state with a division of agriculture rather than a department, and Ayars believes this promotes easier access to the members of each division of the Department of Environmental Management that might have interest in solving an agricultural problem, such as water quality or regulatory issues.

Born in Brunswick, Maine, Ayars' family moved every few years as he was growing up, as his father was in the military. His southern New Jersey relatives had a mixed farm of dairy and field crops, which fostered his strong ties to farming.

Ayars graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1983 with majors in agriculture and resource technology, and a master's degree in plant sciences.

His work at the DEM began in 1987, and for eight years he headed the department's farm ecology and pesticide sections and served as a field inspector for pesticides and animal health.

Rhode Island agriculture is growing in both the number of farms and total acreage. The farms are mostly small, with an emphasis on retail. The top five agricultural products in Rhode Island are greenhouse and nursery products, sweet corn, dairy products, potatoes, and livestock. Since the recent real estate market slump, says Ayars, sod farmers have had to diversify into other crops. Many now sell their products in the state's more than 40 farmers markets. Some farmers, says Ayars, participate in 10 to 12 farmers markets every week.

At their best, he says, farmers markets encourage interest in local agriculture, and they allow farmers to personally meet their customers. But Ayars says the added staffing demand that farmers markets place on farms may limit the growth of this retail channel.

There are about 22 apple orchards in the state, primarily selling directly to consumers through pick-your-own orchards, farmers markets, and farm stands. Ayars sees opportunities for growth in the wholesale market, though, and in food service, especially in institutions like hospitals and colleges. Currently, every public school district in Rhode Island participates in the Farm-to-School program, the only state in the country where this is true.

Local agriculture can play an important role in reducing our carbon footprint and in increasing our food security, says Ayars. The fact that California supplies 50 percent to 60 percent of the region's produce is not sustainable given the cost of fuel, he says, "and it leaves us vulnerable to disruption in the delivery flow of food." Ayars feels that New England's best strategy is to work regionally to supply more of its own food.

Rhode Island was self-sufficient as recently as the early 1900s, but now it produces only 1 percent of its own food. "A Vision for Rhode Island Agriculture: Five-Year Strategic Plan" published in



Bar Lois Weeks

Kenneth Ayars, chief of Rhode Island's Division of Agriculture, Department of Environmental Management

May 2011, set a modest goal of increasing this to 3 percent by 2016. The Agriculture Economic Impact Study of the New England states has set an even more ambitious goal of increasing local food production to 80 percent by 2030.

Ayars feels that there are many ways to try and reach these goals, some of them small, like his state. "Even the backyard gardener can grow a lot of his or her own food," he says, recalling the Victory Gardens of World War II, when the government encouraged citizens to grow more of their own food.

Ayars points to the strength of the buy local movement, embodied in the division's marketing campaign, "Get Fresh. Buy Local." He also has seen a change in perspective in Rhode Island's farmers over the past decade. "The new generation of farmers has a greater sense of social purpose," Ayars observes. "For them, farming is not just about economics, but about the entire food system, and the strength of our communities."

# 2012 crop smaller and early, but New England avoids a disaster

## Plenty of apples now being picked

THERE ARE PLENTY of apples in New England's orchards this fall, despite a smaller-than-normal crop. The region as a whole experienced some frost and hail damage, but avoided the devastating crop losses resulting from an early freeze in New York and Michigan, the second- and third-largest apple growing states in the country, respectively, after Washington.

The New England apple crop is early, though, by as much as one or two weeks in some areas, so the fall harvest is well underway.

A March heat wave produced early blossoms in much of the Northeast, followed by several nights in April with temperatures in the low 20s. Apple blossoms can withstand temperatures in the upper 20s, but anything lower kills the flowers before they can develop into fruit. The crop loss in Michigan is historic, with as little as 15 percent of a normal crop expected. New York state anticipates that it will harvest only about half of its usual crop.

Some orchards were affected in New England, but the damage was nowhere near as widespread. Several orchards, particularly in low-lying areas, lost significant amounts of their crop to frost. Scattered hail in July further reduced the New England crop. Still,

many orchards are reporting outstanding crops, and it is shaping up as a good season for fresh-picked apples. This is the second time in three years the crop has been affected by an early heat wave; in 2010 unseasonably high temperatures in April forced an early bloom followed by a killing frost.

While there will be plenty of fresh apples this fall, consumers can expect to pay higher prices for fresh cider, since there will be far fewer apples across the Northeast available for processing.

Despite the large losses in New York and Michigan, the 2012 United States apple crop is expected to be only about 10 percent smaller than the 2011 harvest, according to USApple's annual forecast. The 202,114,000 boxes forecast for 2012 is about 10 percent below the five-year U. S. average of 224,284,000 boxes.

New York's predicted crop of 14,000,000 boxes in 2012 is down 52 percent from a year ago and 54 percent below the state's five-year average. Michigan, at 3,500,000 boxes, will be down 85 percent from 2011's crop, and 82 percent below its five-year average. Washington, the nation's largest apple-growing state, estimates a record 2012 crop of 145,000,000 boxes, 13 percent above its five-year average.

### 2012 New England crop estimate (in units of 42-lb boxes)

	2012	2011	change	5-year average	change from 5-yr avg
Connecticut	429,000	524,000	-17%	510,000	-16%
Maine	571,000	690,000	-17%	571,000	0
Massachusetts	738,000	917,000	-19%	945,000	-22%
New Hampshire	335,000	429,000	-22%	667,000	-50%
Rhode Island	57,000	60,000	-5%	60,000	-5%
Vermont	638,000	798,000	-20%	919,000	-30%



Presents....

2012

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# New England Apple Pie Contest



**Saturday, October 20, 2012  
Wachusett Mountain Applefest**

## Prizes

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- ★ **Hannaford Gift Cards**
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## Judging

- ★ Amateur-Only Division!
- ★ Two Pie Categories: Apple Only and Apple & Other Ingredients
- ★ Criteria include: appearance, presentation, crust, texture and flavor!
- ★ Celebrity judges will be on hand, including: chefs, authors and local representatives
- ★ Judging will be at 1 p.m. with results & prizes immediately following

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# 'Big E' bigger and better than ever

## Association doubles its presence at New England's largest fair

THE NEW ENGLAND APPLE ASSOCIATION will have plenty of space at this year's Eastern States Exposition (the "Big E"). Due to a last-minute cancellation the association was able to double its booth size, meaning that there will be greater opportunities than ever before to educate consumers about New England apples.

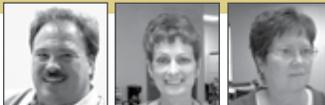
Executive Director and booth manager Bar Lois Weeks says the association will be able to do a better job displaying apple varieties and literature about Massachusetts orchards and the 2012 New England apple crop. Weeks also hopes to sell more apple baked goods, fresh cider and other apple products as a result of the greater visibility afforded by the added space.

This year's 17-day Eastern States Exposition begins Friday, September 14, and 2012 marks the 10th consecutive year the New England Apple Association has had a booth in the Massachusetts State Building. New England's largest fair, which runs through Sunday, September 30, attracts more than one million visitors annually.

In addition to educating consumers and promoting the harvest with fresh apples and baked goods, the association hands out thousands of copies of promotional literature such as the brochure/poster "New England Apples," recipe cards, and brochures provided by participating Massachusetts orchards. The 2013 New England Apples wall calendar is expected to be available before the end of the fair.



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Weeks is managing the New England Apple Association booth for the fourth year, and this fall she is featuring items from a number of Massachusetts orchards and businesses, including:

- Fresh apples from [Atkins Farms](#) in Amherst, [Brookfield Orchards](#) in North Brookfield, [Carlson Orchards](#) in Harvard, [Cold Spring Orchard](#) in Belchertown, [Hamilton Orchards](#) in New Salem, [Pine Hill Orchards](#) in Colrain, [Quonquont Farm](#) in Whately, [Red Apple Farm](#) in Phillipston, and [Tougas Family Farm](#) in Northborough;
- Cider doughnuts from [Atkins Farms](#) in Amherst;
- Cider from [Carlson Orchards](#) in Harvard;
- Apple pies and apple crisp from [Cook's Farm Orchard](#) in Brimfield; and
- Apple butter and preserves made by [Bear Meadow Farm](#) in Colrain.

THE BIG E IS THE ASSOCIATION'S LARGEST PROMOTION, but several other apple events,



A satisfied customer enjoys a cup of fresh cider and a cider donut at the New England Apple Association booth at the Big E.

Bar Lois Weeks

ers' market booths, scenic foliage rides, a barbecue, pony and hay rides, jugglers and magicians, a Birds of Prey raptor show, and an Oktoberfest Celebration with live music.

For more information, visit [wachusett.com](http://wachusett.com)

For the second year, the Association is sponsoring an apple-tasting event at **Franklin County Cider-Days**, November 3 and 4. Now in its 18th year, CiderDays draws aficionados from across the country to celebrate (and sample) apples and apple beverages throughout Franklin County, Massachusetts, with two days of orchard tours, cider making and tastings, workshops, and more.

For more information, visit [ciderday.org](http://ciderday.org).

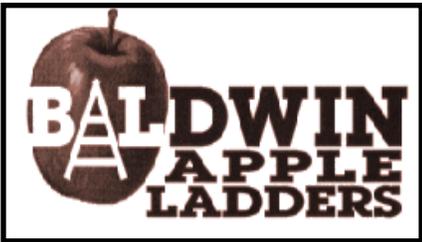
educational programs, and fundraisers are on tap for this fall, including:

For the fifth year, the New England Apple Association is supplying apples to fall fundraising walks of the **Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRC)**. Participating orchards are **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.)

For more information, visit [jdrf.org](http://jdrf.org)

For the third year, the Association is working with the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area in Princeton, Massachusetts, on the **29th Annual Applefest** October 20 and 21. The event features an apple tasting and the Third Annual Great New England Apple Pie Contest Saturday, October 20.

AppleFest features more than 75 craft fair and farm-



**Peter Baldwin, Proprietor**

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# Fourth annual New England Apple Day September 5 officially launches harvest

THE 2012 NEW ENGLAND APPLE CROP was officially launched Wednesday, September 5, as state officials in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont visited orchards, met with growers, and sample fresh-picked apples on 2012 New England Apple Day.

Now in its fourth year, this region-wide apple harvest kick-off event began as a collaboration between the Association and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, and has now grown to include the other New England states. A few of this year's highlights:

In Massachusetts, Governor Deval Patrick and the state legislature declared September "Apple Month." Officials from the Department of Agricultural

Resources visited [Honey Pot Hill Orchards](#) in Stow, [Bolton Orchards](#) in Bolton, and [Westward Orchards](#) in Harvard to present signed copies of the declaration.

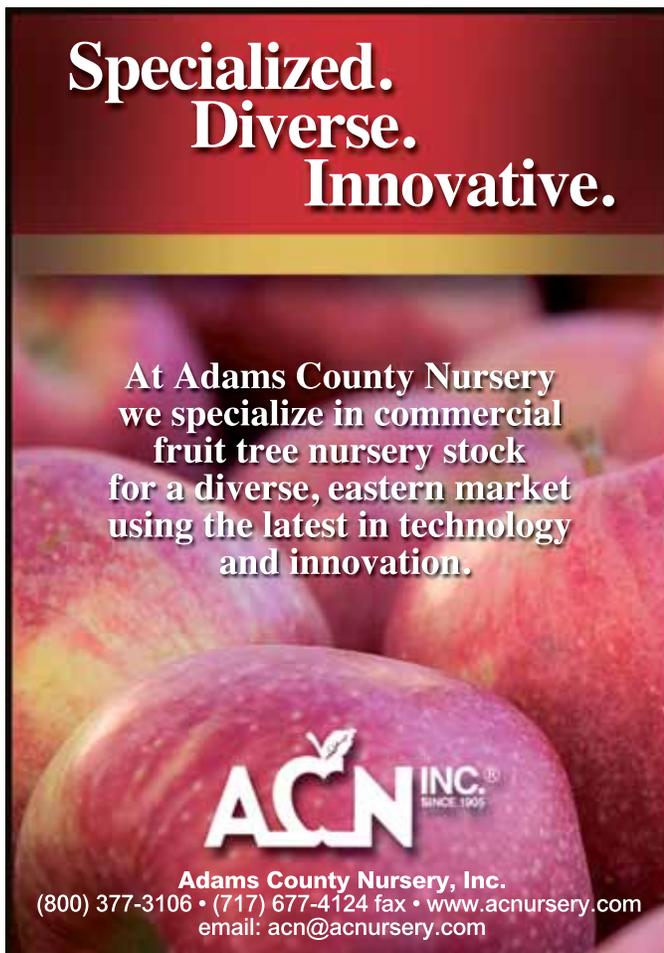
In Connecticut, Agriculture Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky read Governor Dannel P. Malloy's proclamation of September 5, at New England Apple Day at [Belltown Hill Orchards](#) in South Glastonbury. In Rhode Island, Ken Ayars, Chief of Agriculture, presented a similar proclamation at Appleland Orchard in Smithfield. State officials in New Hampshire gathered at [Apple Hill Farm](#) in Concord to show their support and present their New England Apple Day proclamation.

## 2012 web activity on pace to exceed 1,000,000 hits by October

More people are spending more time on the website [newenglandapples.org](#) than ever before. Through the first seven months of 2012, the site received more than 550,000 hits, with the busy fall season just ahead (September's hits have already exceeded August's total of more than 110,000). The total hits are almost double what they were at the same time in 2011, when the site experienced 20 percent growth.

Visitors to the site are also up by more than one-third from 2011. Even the traditionally slow months of June and July attracted more than 2,000 visitors apiece.

At its current pace, the website will pass one million hits for the year by mid-October.



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## 2013 NEW ENGLAND APPLES



# 2013 calendar available soon

**THE 2013 NEW ENGLAND APPLES WALL CALENDAR** is on its way! Featuring new photography of the region's orchards and apples by Russell Powell and Bar Lois Weeks, the calendar will be distributed free to all member orchards. People can also purchase calendars from the New England Apple Association for \$9.95 plus shipping.

Each month of the calendar features a different apple variety in addition to the main image of an orchard.

Member orchards should receive their calendars by the end of September or early October.

# America's Apple



**Russell Steven Powell**  
With photographs by Bar Lois Weeks

“*America’s Apple* is a thorough and informative tour of the landscape of American apples in the 21st century, and a sympathetic portrait of the intrepid New England farmers who grow them.”

— Hannah Nordhaus, author of  
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“If you love apples (and who doesn’t?), this book will interest you. It’s a colorful story about the culture of apples, sweet with plenty of juicy details, a crisp prose style and tart observations.”

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