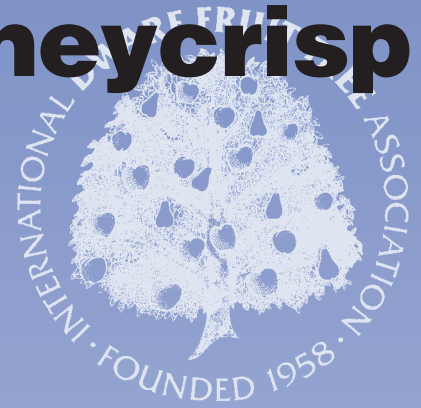


Honeycrisp



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Wood Orchard Market, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin

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We are a 250-acre fruit farm in Door County, Wisconsin. Door County is across Lake Michigan from Traverse City. We have a cool, short growing season and our cherry and apple crops mature about the same time as those crops do in Traverse City and the State of Maine.

My dad founded the business in the late 1950s and now my son has joined us to make three generations growing apples, cherries, strawberries and raspberries.

We have historically been a McIntosh, Cortland, and Red Delicious wholesale grower/packer. Almost 10 years ago, we made a shift in the direction our business was heading. We stopped planting McIntosh, started getting rid of Red Delicious acreage and began planting Honeycrisp. There also was a shift in our marketing strategy from wholesale toward direct marketing. We continue to move in that direction today.

Dad first saw Honeycrisp at the University of Wisconsin Experiment Station in Door County. At the urging of Dick Weidman, station superintendent, and Matt Stasiak, horticulture researcher, we planted our first Honeycrisp trees in the early 1990s. We have been planting them almost yearly since. We currently have about 70 acres planted and hope to finish our goal of about 100 total acres of Honeycrisp planted within the next couple of years.

We started planting Honeycrisp/M.26 combination and discovered that once Honeycrisp starts to bear fruit its vegetative growth really slows down. We also had a problem with a brittle bud union on Honeycrisp/M.26. In an attempt to correct those problems, we have switched to a Honeycrisp/MM.106 combination at about the same spacing (16 x 8 ft) as we were planting

the Honeycrisp/M.26 trees. We have not noticed any brittle bud union on the MM.106 roots but the new trees are too young to evaluate their growth as they begin to bear apples. Maybe we will have to consider Apogee to control an overly vigorous tree on MM.106 roots.

Other issues with Honeycrisp that we are concerned about are that Honeycrisp appears to be a biennial bearer and so far does not produce large yields per acre. Chemical thinning practices, as they are refined, will interest us. Our only experience with chemical thinning is Sevin XLR at 1 quart per acre and then following up with hand thinning. The soft scald and bitter pit that others have mentioned are problems. Regarding bitter pit, in an effort to determine what calcium levels were in the apples, Dad sent some fruitlets to Cascade Analytical's lab in Wenatchee, WA, to have the calcium content evaluated. New for us this year is internal browning as the fruit is stored for several months. There are years when we notice an off flavor in the more mature fruit, and that is a concern we have. I would venture to say that, from our observations, some of these problems are much worse in warmer growing areas.

We are also watching the research that is going on at the Peninsular Research Station in Door County and across the country with ReTain to prevent premature drop and would like to see if Ethrel applications will be useful to get us earlier fruit to sell. We have a lot to learn about growing this variety and are watching with interest research in Wisconsin, Michigan and on the east and west coasts. There definitely are issues where we need help from researchers and other growers to overcome as we grow more of this variety.

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Realizing all these growing and storage issues, selling high quality Honeycrisp is the easiest part of the game. Our marketing experience with Honeycrisp is entirely through our two retail outlets. It is safe to say that Dad, Jeff and I have never experienced, with any other variety, the high degree of consumer acceptance that we have with Honeycrisp.

When we have Honeycrisp for sale and we sample Honeycrisp, we attract young

families that know about or are curious about Honeycrisp. In most cases, it does not take long before they are “hooked.” When we are sold out of Honeycrisp, we lose this clientele. Our McIntosh, Cortland and Jonagold customers are older, many on fixed income, and they tend to look for the cheapest apples in the store. From our limited experience selling Honeycrisp, we feel that if good-tasting, big and red Honeycrisp apples were available to consumers, the per capita consumption of apples would rise. Expanding the demand faster than the supply seems to be a realistic goal if we grow and sell quality Honeycrisp.

Quality is an overused word, but it is truly a key to profitable Honeycrisp marketing.

The key to selling Honeycrisp for top dollar is to provide the consumer with good-tasting Honeycrisp. We have had customers tell us that small green apples that are called Honeycrisp are being offered for sale in upscale markets in Milwaukee. Consumer expectations are high when they see Honeycrisp for sale but, when the apples are poor quality, they are really disappointed.

A group of Honeycrisp growers, researchers and marketers has formed a loosely organized group with the goal of promoting, growing and marketing high quality Honeycrisp apples—high quality apples that consumers will be willing to pay a premium price for and thus return a profit to the growers. We are calling this group Honeycrisp.org. So far I have been sending and receiving information regarding Honeycrisp to group participants via email.

Now, with the help of Pearl Street Design in Eastport, Michigan, we are developing a Honeycrisp.org web site. When this new web site is running, I hope it will be:

- A source of Honeycrisp information for consumers who may be searching the www for Honeycrisp information.
- A link to web sites and/or addresses of Honeycrisp.org participants across the U.S. and Canada where people can purchase Honeycrisp apples.
- And, most importantly, a listserv to provide a more efficient way for commercial Honeycrisp growers, researchers and marketers to share information, ideas and concerns.

This would be the same idea as Win Cowgill and Jon Clements’ listserv on their virtual orchard web site. However the Apple-Crop group has such a wide range of topics and attracts participants in areas of the country and world that cannot grow Honeycrisp, so we are trying to develop a listserv specific to Honeycrisp issues.

We definitely are not trying to promote the planting of more Honeycrisp trees through Honeycrisp.org but we hope to promote the growing and marketing of high quality fruit and work toward maintaining the profitability of Honeycrisp for as long as possible as the crops across the northern US and Canada get larger.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite growers, researchers and marketers to participate in Honeycrisp.org and give me your ideas and comments. You can contact me via email (jwood@itol.com) or phone (920-743-6837).

To conclude, I hope you get the idea that Dad, Jeff and I are very high on growing and selling good-tasting Honeycrisp. At the very least, Honeycrisp has made apple growing and marketing fun again for me.