

Sights, scents and tastes abound at Lerew Orchards

DILLSBURG — Visitors and customers at Lerew's Farm Market and Orchards are treated with at least three distinct sensory impressions.

The rolling countryside provides a panoramic view that sweeps through a three-county area.

Just as an appreciation of this overall view is felt, the immediate surroundings begin to come into focus. Blossoming fruit trees stretch across 260 acres of Lerew Orchards, adding a collage of scents to sights that mix apple, peach, pear, nectarine, tart and sweet cherry trees.

The third and most lasting sensory impression comes from the variety of delicious products available at the Lerew family operation, which is now in its fourth generation. While third-generation representative, Lloyd Lerew directs field activities, daughter Darlene manages the roadside market which offers fresh and dried fruit, nuts, vegetables, bedding plants, fresh bakery goods and other specialty items.

One of these items, a natural for the farm, is fresh apple cider. The Lerews press 3,500 gallons of cider daily, using a majority of apples from their own orchards, with some supplied by the Farmer-Consumer Services Association, Inc. (FCSA).

The cider is sold at the farm market, and wholesaled to local growers. The majority of the cider is sold to a buyer who in turn pasteurizes and bottles the juice. No preservatives are ever added to the cider; it's 100 percent pure.

Extreme care is taken to insure a uniform product of consistently high quality juice. The Lerews start with a good quality apple.

Darlene stresses, "Only top quality juice apples are used. Many are smaller apples that didn't make the size grade."



New shipment of apples arrives at Lerew's Farm Market to be pressed for cider. Some apples are supplied by Farmer-Consumer Services Association, Inc.

Once they acquire the quality apples needed, random samples are taken from the bins and chopped in a food processor. The mix is then tested for sugar and acid content. The mix of apples is adjusted until the proper percentage of brix (sweetened) and acid is reached. Then the cider making begins.

Apples are chopped into pomace and pumped into two large presses, each holding four bins totaling 3,800 pounds of apples. After the pomace is pressed, the juice is pumped through a stainless steel pipeline into two 3,000-gallon holding tanks. Tank trucks pick up the juice two or three times each week and deliver it to the processor. The leftover pomace is used locally as cattle feed.

The amount of juice demands more apples than can be found on the farm's 80 acres of apple orchards. The Lerews turn to other sources to buy the quality apples needed.

One source used for the first time this year was the Farmer-Consumer Services Association, Inc. Just a year

old in May, this was the first season FCSA has sold apples. Between January and May this year, the association has sold more than one-quarter of a million pounds of juice apples to various buyers.

One special quality about the FCSA is that they sell only Pennsylvania grown produce. The apples supplied to Lerews came strictly from Pennsylvania orchards.

"The apples supplied through the association have been of good quality," Darlene said. "We're also

pleased to be buying Pennsylvania grown apples."

FCSA is an experimental farmers association created by the Department to promote direct farm marketing. The association provides an additional market for farmers' produce, provides fresh quality produce to the consumer market and provides an opportunity to increase returns on the grower's product. The association is governed by a board of seven commercial growers from southeastern Pennsylvania.



Freshly pressed cider, 100 percent pure with no preservatives, is available from help-yourself tap at Lerew's Farm Market.



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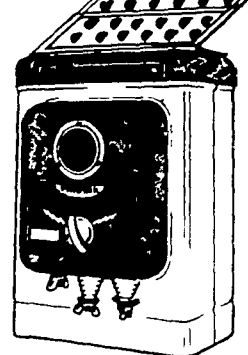
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