

# Apple industry adjusts to markets of future

UNIVERSITY PARK — Every American knows something about apples. Apples appear not only on our shelves and in our refrigerators, but also in songs, poems, legends, and everyday speech. Who does not know the tales of William Tell and Johnny Appleseed? Who has not heard the expressions "The apple of my eye" and "An apple a day keeps the doctor away"? America's love for apples goes back many decades. But apples today are not at all like those grown years ago.

One can only wonder what kinds of apples the early American settlers found along Johnny Appleseed's path. To be sure, they must have witnessed some odd-looking harvests. More than likely, much of the fruit was afflicted with fungal growths and insect infestations. Apples were probably small, too, since fruit was not thinned nor trees pruned as they are now.

Today, apple growers do not plant seeds. Instead, they grow apples from transplanted trees, which are produced by grafting a small part of a branch or bud onto a living root system. The new, young tree has a bearing surface genetically identical to that of its "parent" and produces identical fruit. Thus, grafting ensures that the desirable characteristics of a variety are transmitted from one generation of trees to the next.

#### Adjusting To

#### Consumer Needs

Most changes in apple production and marketing have occurred in response to changes in consumer demand for apples and apple products. As a result, the apple industry is better able to give consumers the kind of fruit they want, when and where they want it.

Developments in storage, transportation, and growing techniques have enabled producers and marketers to adjust to changing consumer needs. While the adjustment process is slow overall, growers can change minor characteristics of their orchards relatively quickly. Major

changes, however, generally require new plantings, which do not bear fruit for four to six years. Fortunately, consumption patterns are also slow to change, so growers usually have enough time to adjust.

#### Trends in

#### Fruit Consumption

Per-capita consumption of fruit has been slowly increasing for a number of years. In the period, 1980-83, consumption was about 225 pounds, up 20 pounds (10 percent) from 1970-74. Possible reasons for the increase include the changing lifestyles and age distribution of our population, higher average incomes, and greater awareness of the importance of fruits and vegetables to a well-balanced diet.

Nearly all of the increase in per-capita fruit usage since the mid-1970s has been in fresh, noncitrus fruits, especially apples. Apples now comprise about 20 percent of all fresh-fruit sales in the United States. Much of the growth in fresh-apple consumption is attributable to the wider use of specialized controlled-atmosphere storages. These storages maintain fruit in a nearly fresh-picked condition for several months, offering consumers fairly large volumes of high-quality fruit in the late spring and summer.

Table 1 shows recent trends in consumption of apples and apple products. Since the mid-1970s, the popularity of apple juice has skyrocketed. In contrast, per-capita use of frozen slices has held nearly constant, and consumption of dried apples, canned slices, and canned sauce has dropped. While frozen apple slices and dried apples offer comparatively few sales opportunities for apple growers nationally, canned apple slices and apple sauce provide extremely important markets. The drop in consumption of canned slices and sauce is particularly worrisome to commercial growers in New York, Michigan, and the Appalachian-Region states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Virginia, and North

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Table 1 Annual per-capita consumption of apples and apple products (in lbs.)

Period	Fresh apples	Canned apple juice	Canned slices and sauce*	Dried apples	Frozen slices	Total
1970 74	16.4	2.73	3.5	0.53	0.10	23.26
1975 79	17.6	3.81	2.6	0.40	0.13	24.54
1980 83	18.1	6.74	2.2	0.37	0.12	27.53

\* Figures in this column are not directly comparable because sample sizes for the three periods differ

Table 2. Fruit produced annually in the U.S. (average of 1981-83)

Fruit	Tons
Oranges	8,119
Grapes	5,200
Apples	3,998
Grapefruit lemons, limes, tangelos,	
tangerines	4,016
Other noncitrus	4,212

Table 3 Apple production in selected states, the Appalachian region, and the U.S. (millions of 42-lb. boxes)

Period	Michigan	New York	Washington	Appalachian Region	United States
1970 74	15.7	21.1	36.4	35.0	150
1975 79	16.0	23.1	54.1	35.6	173
1980 84	19.5	24.7	67.9	38.2	197

Table 4 Selected characteristics of the Pennsylvania apple industry

Characteristic	1972	1982	Difference
Number of growers	715	684	31
Number of large growers (at least 2,500 trees)	170	176	+6
Percent of apples produced by large growers	77	85	+8
Number of acres in apples	34,601	31,072	3,529
Number of apple trees	1,815,608	2,160,471	+344,863
Varieties (% of all apple trees)			
Red Delicious	23	29	+6
York	22	17	4
Golden Delicious	16	16	
Stayman	11	8	3
Rome	11	12	+1
Other	17	18	+1



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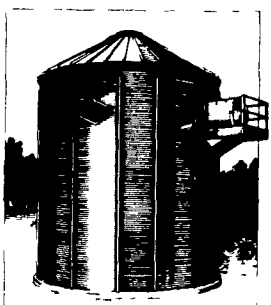
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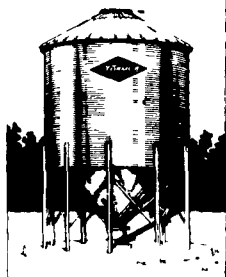
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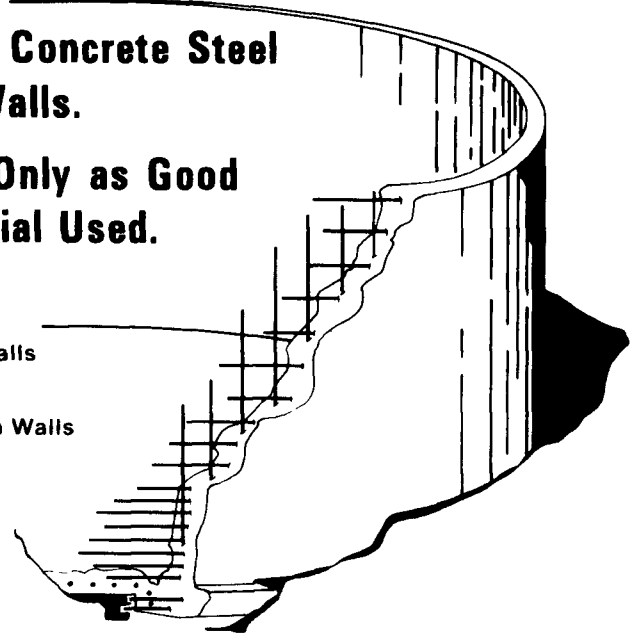
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