

# Fruit Grower Ready As Festival Kicks Off Apple Season

**ANDY ANDREWS**

**Lancaster Farming Staff**  
**IDAVILLE (Adams Co.)** — Years ago, when fruit growers experienced a drought, there weren't inexpensive lightweight irrigation pipes with portable gas pumps available to draw water out of a nearby creek.

Nearly 60 years ago, Fremont Kuntz, of Kuntz Orchards, used a one-horse plow, digging up ground around trees. To irrigate, he lugged a barrel filled with water up a ridge, dumping it on tree after tree.

Adams County orchardists have come a long way since. Technologies have improved. But fruit growers face the same adversities — particularly the weather, which, in the past few years, has been uncooperative to say the least.

From working on a fruit farm in Bendersville managed by his father to purchasing his own

orchard in 1941, Kuntz has been able to keep his 600-acre apple growing operation thriving and fruitful.

### Launched Festival

Kuntz served as president of the Adams County Fruit Growers Association and helped launch the annual Apple Blossom Festival in 1955. This year, the festival, featuring a wide array of activities for the family, begins today and lasts through Sunday at the South Mountain Fairgrounds in Arendtsville.

Kuntz and sons Jairus "Gerry," 52; Louy, 48; Dean, 42; and daughter Carol Lobaugh (who does the bookkeeping) manage a total of six orchards in a three-mile area near Idaville and Bendersville. Kuntz purchased the original 66-acre farm in 1941 and expanded the acreage in 1956, 1963, and 1983. The orchard was

incorporated in 1982.

In the beginning, Kuntz planted 40 acres of peaches, 35 acres of pears, and several acres of cherries. But he quickly switched to an all-apple orchard after suffering through a blight of stem pitting and other problems from his peach trees and pears.

Kuntz Orchards' 600 acres of processing apples includes the varieties of York (about 55 percent of the total acreage), Golden Delicious (30 percent), and the balance in Red Delicious and Rome Beauty.

### Provides good fruit

Kuntz said the land provides good fruit and the varieties he uses are hardy for the area, despite some of the dry weather in recent years, including a statewide drought in 1988, a spring freeze in 1989, and a central Pennsylvania drought in 1991.

The 1991 drought was the most severe he's ever seen.

"We had some damage last year, on the ridges where the rock lays high, from dry weather," said Kuntz. "That's the driest I can ever remember, and I was born and raised on a fruit farm."

Kuntz said he is particularly concerned about this year — if there is another drought, the impact on his fruit crop could be devastating.

### Lost trees

"I'm concerned if we have another dry year. The subsoil is very deficient in moisture," he said, especially the high ridge areas. Many orchardists who did not irrigate the ridges lost a great deal of fruit trees.

Kuntz Orchards irrigates the trees with an overhead sprinkler system purchased in 1966. Kuntz said that, using farm ponds, they place about six inches of water on about 150 acres last summer. (However, according to Kuntz, one large farm doesn't have a pond and cannot be irrigated.)

But the conditions are right for a good fruit crop, provided there is enough rain this year. The only "benefit" the drought may have brought is the fact that, because of the fruit stress, more blooms are appearing this year on the trees.

"My father always said, 'Anything that shocks the tree, they form fruit buds,'" said Kuntz. "We had a very dry season last year, and that tends to be a shock

on the trees, and they develop a nice set of buds."

### Need moisture

"I think it looks pretty good all over," he said. "We need the moisture now to produce them."

Kuntz Orchards sprays to thin the fruits. Kuntz said the spray thinning is necessary to provide a larger, more profitable fruit size, and saves on labor. "That's where the money is," he said. "The larger the apple, the better."

He also said that by reducing the load on the trees, "you set fruit buds for the next year. If you let them all on, it's very hard to get a nice crop every year."

Also, the farm is using a new semidwarf variety. Half the acreage is in semidwarfs because orchardists can grow more per

acre, the trees don't take as much pruning, they're easily sprayed, and the ladder size is smaller, said Kuntz. "They're a lot nicer for picking during harvest," he said.

### Uses fertilizer

Kuntz uses a 10-20-20 fertilizer broadcast between the rows.

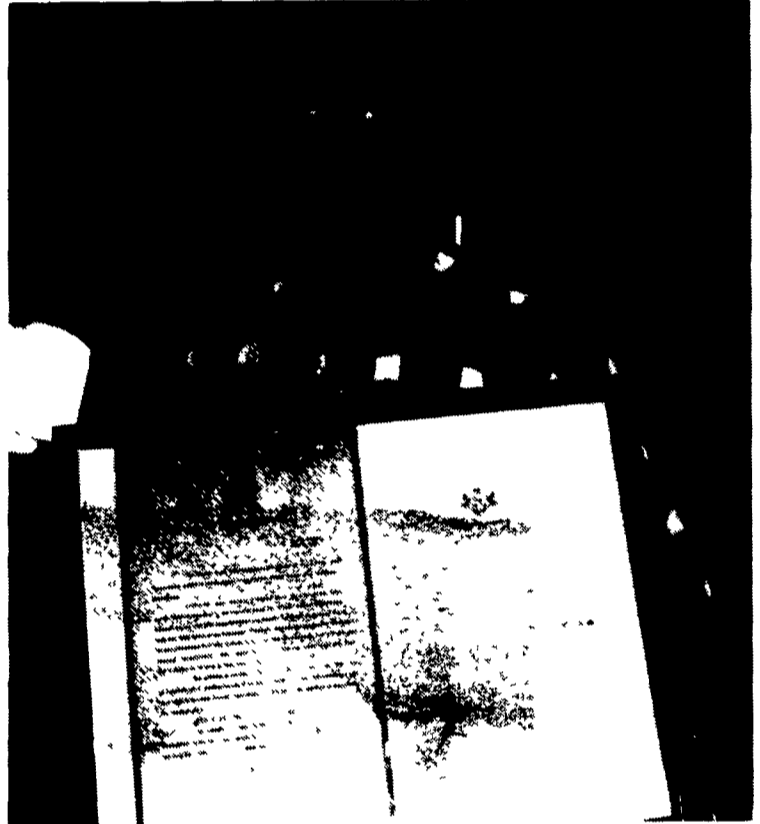
During the season, the trees are carefully monitored for moisture needs and sprayed for the control of insects and disease.

The harvesting season runs right after Labor Day in early September to about November 10. Kuntz Orchards hires about 45 pickers during harvest.

According to Kuntz, many orchardists have survived the winter without a quick, early warmup that could have threatened fruit  
 (Turn to Page A21)



From working on a fruit farm in Bendersville managed by his father to purchasing his own orchard in 1941, Fremont Kuntz has been able to keep his 600-acre apple growing operation thriving and fruitful.



Fremont Kuntz served as president of the Adams County Fruit Growers Association and helped launch the annual Apple Blossom Festival in 1955, for which he received a special citation. This year, the festival will be held today and Sunday at the South Mountain Fairgrounds in Arendtsville.



Fremont Kuntz purchased the original 66-acre farm in 1941, and expanded the acreage in 1956, 1963, and 1983. The family manages a total of six orchards in a three-mile area near Idaville and Bendersville. On tractor is Louy, 48. From left, Jairus "Gerry," 52; Dean, 42; and Fremont Kuntz.



Kuntz stands next to special 25-bushel bulk bins used on his orchard.