

Mickey Plants Apple Trees, Others, In Family Orchards

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Franklin Co. Correspondent
CHAMBERSBURG (Franklin Co.) — Dwight Mickey's favorite saying is, "If I knew the world would end tomorrow, today I would plant an apple tree." (Author unknown)

While Mickey doesn't profess to have any inside knowledge of when the world will end, he certainly has planted apple trees. And peach trees. And pear, cherry, apricot and plum trees.

Mickey, 33, along with his parents, Jack and Wilma Mickey, operates Shatzer Fruit Market and Orchards just west of Chambersburg. In addition to the 40 acres of fruit trees, the Mickeys have 10 acres of sweet corn and two to three acres of pumpkins. The farm has been in the family since 1932.

The Mickeys won 92 ribbons at the Farm Show this year, including 23 first places. "The competition was much stiffer this year," Dwight Mickey said. His family has been the overall prize winner in the fruit division for the past four years, he said. "I don't look at it that I'm competing with other growers. I compete with myself and try to do better each year. It's my report card for the year."

Mickey invested a lot of time preparing to win all those ribbons. He spent 10 days going through 120 bushels of apples in his cold storage building to get 30 bushels for his display. "I spent a whole day just on Yellow Delicious. The challenge is to find 88 apples all the same to put in a bushel," he said. The judges look for uniformity and finish.

He also worked in the apple and cider booth in the Food Court.

Proceeds from the stand are used to fund research projects in Pennsylvania's fruit industry.

A highlight of his week was giving a presentation about apples to the non-farm public in the Family Living Center. About 150 people attended. He spoke about several new varieties of apples, such as Fuji, Gala and Ginger Gold, then focused on pest management technology such as pheromone traps and mating disruption. People asked questions afterwards. "No one was critical about spraying," he noted. "The questions were pertinent to anyone who has a couple of (apple) trees in their backyard."

Mickey had a brief foray into the world of broadcast journalism at this year's Farm Show. At the request of Greencastle radio station WKSL, he gathered news of Franklin County participants and award winners. His report was recorded over the phone each evening for broadcast.

He has attended Farm Show every year since he was 4. "It's tiring, but I enjoy every minute of it," he said.

Uses New Technology

A 1981 graduate of Shippensburg University with a degree in Business Management, Mickey makes use of the new technology that is available to the fruit industry. His hydrothermograph keeps track of temperature, leaf wetness and humidity, allowing him to predict disease conditions.

He also uses Integrated Crop Management, which involves the use of beneficial insects such as the ladybird beetle, praying mantis and ladybug, to help to control harmful insects.



Dwight Mickey with bountiful apple harvest.

Mickey determines the population of harmful insects with insect traps. Depending on the numbers found, he may stretch his spray interval from seven days to 10.

"With new technology, I feel that by 2000 insecticides in the orchard will be pretty well finished and replaced with biological controls," he predicts. Diseases of fruit trees, however, are a different story, he said. "The only way I foresee no spray at all is through the development of disease-resistant strains of fruit."

Penn State's Extension Agent for Fruit, William Kleiner, has worked with Mickey on new projects for about five years. He said Mickey is open-minded and willing to learn about new technology.

"He's a good cooperater. He's willing to try things even though not everything is going to be adaptable to his operation," Kleiner said.

Strategy for Survival

Mickey hires one to four part-time employees during the busiest seasons.

"Labor is an increasing problem, one that is of great concern to me if I'm going to survive over the next 20-30 years," he said.

Another factor involved in the survival of small orchards is overhead.

"The price of chemicals has doubled in the last 10 years. The price of a tractor has quadrupled in 20 years," Mickey said. "We're getting the same price for apples as we did 15 years ago. What laborer is getting the same at his

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