

Tour Berks County

Rodents At Orchard, Aren't Looking Good, Either

The zone system, operated off a transmitter that can carry to 14,500 foot maximum, is buried at various levels on the property. Weaver uses insulated 8-gauge woven copper wire. In some places that get chiseled, the wire is buried two feet or less. In woodland, the wire rests on top of the ground.

There are four zones with two dogs each zone. Some big zones encompass 25-35 acres. The smallest zone is only eight acres.

Weaver believes that the zones are between 90-94 percent effective in dealing with the problem, he noted to members of the tour. The zones have essentially eliminated the groundhog and deer problems. Even the mice are quickly chased down and eliminated by the dogs.

Also at the farm, Weaver uses a special computerized "chirper" that sends out various forms of high squeals to ward off blackbirds and starlings. Speakers are mounted at the top center of cherry and other trees. Cost for two acres was about \$150. Larger systems, encompassing 10 acres, cost \$500, according to Weaver.

Both growers have other responsibilities, in addition to

maintaining systems to keep pests at bay.

Douglas Nemeth, operations manager for Ontelaunee Orchards, Inc., said the orchard is owned by the Walter Pohl Corp. in Leesport. Ontelaunee maintains 1,000 acres altogether in various locations. Of the 1,000 acres, Nemeth noted, only 450-500 acres are used for fruit production. The rest of the land is woodland and leased.

Ontelaunee has five acres of pick your own strawberries. In addition, they grow sweet and sour cherries, and about five acres of pick your own blueberries. The blueberries will be available to be picked at the end of July, including three main varieties: Bluetta, Berkeley, and Blue Crop. The Blue Crop variety, Nemeth said, bear consistently and are bigger compared to the other two.

The orchard also operates a cider press year-round. Most of the pick your own apples are available

from September through December. Also, Ontelaunee has an apple peeling operation using fresh Granny Smith apples, supplying bakeries and restaurants (though they don't grow Granny Smith at the orchards).

Altogether, they produce 800,000 pounds of sliced apples per year.

Ontelaunee has 125 acres of peaches, 20 acres of nectarines, and 260 acres of apples. Of the apple production, there are a wide variety, including Galas, Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Fujis, and others. In a good year, the orchard sells 200,000- 225,000 bushels of apples.

A lot of the fresh picked apples go to Motz.

Blueberries, noted Nemeth, require a very low pH. In years previous the orchard has applied sulfur and fly ash, supplemented with iron, to bring down the pH of the

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Ed Weaver, right, with Justin, who helps feed the dogs.

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