

It's A 'Dog' Day For Rodents At Orchard

Apples are pick your own, for the most part. Rootstock used is 111, with a few 26s and some 7As, Weaver noted. In the spring of last year some Pink Lady variety were (Turn to Page A24)

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soil to desired levels.

The blueberries are watered regularly with a traveler broadcast irrigation system, providing one inch of moisture per week, critical to the shallow-rooted plants. Blueberries sell for \$1 per pound, pick your own. Five acres of pick your own strawberries are managed by Ontelaunee, which sell for 98 cents per pound. Pick-your-own sweet cherries go for \$1.25.

The orchard uses water from the Schuylkill River in addition to a irrigation ponds.

At another site, Nemeth showed the tour members the varieties of Red and Golden Delicious apples planted. Red Chief are planted with 111s and 7A rootstock, 18 foot in rows between wide middles. Early on in the growth, the orchard makes use of clothespins and spreaders.

The 111 rootstocks are planted on 18-foot by 10-foot by 10-foot spacings, at 311 trees to the acre. The 7As are on 18- by 10- by 8-foot areas. The triple row 26s are on 18- by 8- by 8- by 8-foot areas at 480 trees to the acre. The 9s are on 18- by 8- by 6-foot areas at 640 trees to the acre, double rows.

This year, Red Chief 111s will start to bear, according to Nemeth.

Weed control is used in the fall or early spring to keep weed pressure, including red root and Canada thistle, low.

Ontelaunee has made use of various staking systems in the past, with little luck. They switched to an 8-foot steel stake, inserted two feet in to the ground, with ties.

At Weaver's Orchard near Morgantown, Ed Weaver manages 100 acres of a diversified group of fruit and vegetable crops. The orchard has been in the business since the 1930s. Like Ontelaunee, Weaver's makes use of seasonal labor, employing about 10 at the peak of harvest.

Weaver's manages five acres of pick-your-own strawberries.

All of the crop is trickle irrigated. Varieties grown include Delmarvel, Sweet Charlie, Early Glow, Raritan, Jewel, Off-Star, Early Glow with Guardian, and Late Glow.

Ed Weaver said, this year, the crop has been "fair," and not a lot has been lost to weather. They overhead irrigate to protect from frost.

A majority of the strawberries and other fruit is trickle-irrigated. Trickle lines are buried in the mostly sandy loam soil. Water is drawn from a 200-foot deep well at 50 gallons per minute. Also, a pond is used to irrigate the crops.

Weaver's sells strawberries at the pick your own for 95 cents per pound. At the height of the season, the price lowers to 80 cents per

pound. Strawberries are sold at retail at \$2.99 per quart.



Rick Keim, left, president of the Berks County Fruit Growers, looks at Golden Delicious apple trees at Ontelaunee Orchards with Harold Hollabaugh, an Adams County fruit grower.



Ontelaunee uses these L-bar iron stakes, placed a foot away from the trunk, on these Gala apples on 26 rootstock planted in 1991. Trees are maintained 8-10 feet high.

Two start an area for an orchard, the ground is first worked and a seedbed prepared. Then the orchard plants a combination of 60 percent hard fescue and 40 percent creeping Red Fescue. The rows for trees are burned off with Roundup.

Tour members visited another site where peaches are grown for the orchard. Peaches are harvested by crews at an hourly rate — not a piece rate, as it is for the apples. The apples, on the other hand, are taken off at a piece rate. Forty-five people are maintained at the orchard's labor camp. At the peak of the apple season, the orchard employs 75-80 people to harvest, many from Reading and "people who drift in," he said.

The apples are brought to the loading area within two hours of being picked. They are placed in a cold air cooling room for a cool-down to 32 degrees.

Trees are pruned and maintained to a target height of 7-7½ feet high. Pruning is paid at a piece rate of \$3.50 per tree.

Ontelaunee hasn't had any problems with brown rot. They use a brown rot control fungicide. Also, control of European red mite has been effective. Also, fireblight has not made a big impact on the orchard.

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