

Adams County Fruit Farm And Market Emphasizes Ag Education

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"We also like to put a face with the produce they are purchasing," she said. "When they purchase their next apple, they can remember the person who gave them the tour."

Many of the school children travel from the Mechanicsburg and Harrisburg areas. However, local children also come to tour the farm.

"It amazes me how little these children know about agriculture and fruit growing," said Hollabaugh. "It's really important to get local kids to see where their food comes from."

Another way the Hollabaughs educate the community is by hiring young people to work at the market.

"We had a girl working for us since she was 14 who is now a sophomore in college," said Hollabaugh. "This year will be the first summer she hasn't worked on the farm, and she said she would really miss it. If she wouldn't have been exposed to fruit farming here, she would have never known about it."

The Hollabaughs stress customer service and home-grown produce in their marketing tactics. They emphasize that customers are coming to a working farm to buy their produce. They require their employees to keep a smile on their face and to be willing to help customers with their questions and needs.

"Now, with the education room, we can take customers who have a lot of questions back there and show them the observation hive to explain fruit growing," said Hollabaugh. "Customers know that when they come here, they're coming to growers who can answer their questions."

The Hollabaughs advertise their market and its events through direct mail, along with newspaper advertisements and cable television ads.

"We have a database of about 5,000 people that we mail direct mail pieces to several times throughout the year," said Hollabaugh.

Two years ago the Hollabaughs launched their own Website, www.hollabaugh-bros.com, which allows their customers to place orders on line.

"The website has really helped to expand our gift box business," said Hollabaugh. They sell tray-packed gift boxes in 10 different varieties.

"Our claim to fame is that we grow everything that is in the box," said Hollabaugh. "A lot of area businesses order them for their customers and clients."

The Hollabaughs host fruit festivals to bring in new customers and educate them about fruit growing. In August, they conduct a two-day peach festival. Then, during the second weekend in October to tie in with the National Apple Harvest Festival in Ardentville, they host an apple festival.

This year will be the 10th year for the peach festival. "When I became actively involved in the farm, it seemed that people just naturally came here because it was apple country," said Holla-

baugh. "But I wanted them to know that it was peach country, too."

The event started as a Sunday event and has grown to a two-day event with live entertainment, free wagon tours, and a variety of peach samples. The festival usually draws several thousand people.

"We don't charge for either of our festivals," said Hollabaugh. "But we do accept donations for the Hospice of the Good Shephard in Gettysburg. That has gone over surprisingly well with our customers."

This year the Hollabaughs will be part of the State Horticulture Association of

Pennsylvania's (SHAP) annual summer orchard tour July 18-19. The tour features different farms and facilities in Pennsylvania with fruit growers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and other states invited on the tour.

The Hollabaughs will also be the hosts of this year's Adams County Farm City Festival Sept. 9. This event typically draws 1,000 people and educates visitors about agriculture practices in Adams County.

As current ag committee chairperson for the Gettysburg/Adams Area Chamber of Commerce, Hollabaugh was approached by the Farm

City Day committee early this year.

"We're still in the planning stages," said Hollabaugh. "But we're planning to have wagon rides, tours, and apple picking. The committee will also be bringing in animals to educate guests about animal agriculture."

"Whenever we get someone in our market who is really interested in learning more, I just talk and talk," said Hollabaugh. "I get really excited about educating our community. Our customers know they can trust us — we'll give them honest answers about our growing practices and any food safety issues that arise."

Irrigation Supply Company: 1999 A 'Great' Year

MECHANICSBURG (Cumberland Co.) — Last year's drought brought a couple of observations on sales figures for one irrigation supply company: "fabulous" and "great," said Jay Watson, president of Watson Irrigation and Contractor Supply, Inc.

The company, starting its eighth year, employs four full time. Watson supplies residential lawn sprinkling and water gardening systems to landscapers. The company also supplies reels and center pivots and portable irrigation systems to the agricultural market.

Watson also supplies dust control equipment used to wet down roads in construction and other sites.

About 70 percent of Watson's market is in residential and commercial turf management companies, with the remainder in agricultural supplies, noted Watson. Watson handles Hunter, Toro, and Rainbird for residential irrigation.

Nelson Big Gun sprinklers and Rainbird sprinklers are the major agricultural sprinklers, according to Watson.

The company distributes equipment made by Kifco Ag-Rain, Havana, Ill. and

Hobbs Reel-Rain, Suffolk, Va., for agricultural irrigation needs.

The company services about 300 customers all within a 100-mile radius of Harrisburg, said Watson. The largest sales volume includes Toro irrigation equipment for landscapers.

Last year proved memorable for the company, with good sales throughout the drought for both aspects of the business. Sales slowed only when lawn watering restrictions went into place. The restrictions "definitely affected everybody's business as far as irrigation," Watson said.

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