

On Apples And Stone Fruit

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — "It's a rough situation out there, market-wise, for agriculture," said Dennis Mackey, organic apple grower, organic fruit purchaser for Eden Foods, and experimental stone fruit grower.

But Mackey, who hails from Kaleva in lower Michigan's northwest corner, has found a niche for himself in the organic fruit market. He will be on hand at the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's (PASA's) February conference for two workshops to share some of what he's learned about successful growing and marketing.

He's been growing apples organically since the late 1980s, and has an experimental block of organic stone fruit, so he knows the difficulties associated with organic fruit production.

It's because of the length of the growing season, as compared to that of vegetables and other crops, and the pests involved, he said. From April to harvest in October or November, it's a long time for insects and disease to gain a foothold.

"There are a ton of things (bugs and diseases) out there as soon as the first green shows," Mackey said.

For his organic apple growing workshop he will discuss weed and disease control, specific products which can be used,

and give his views on "what I think the market is now." The workshop on growing organic stone fruit will focus on his work with the experimental block of stone fruit and where growers can find information.

Mackey had an experimental block of stone fruit in Wisconsin for several years, where he worked with a variety of sprays

and pruning systems, and tested the hardiness of root stocks. This spring he plans to establish two varieties of white peaches at his family's farm in Kaleva.

Mackey is the first to acknowledge that growing fruit organically is not easy. But he believes strongly in its importance and that of sustainable agriculture practices.

"Basically, the world is contaminated," he said. "But it hasn't always been this way. This is a way of growing fruit like our grandfathers did."

And when the apple scab and insects have been conquered, there remains the complex issue of marketing.

There is a kind of Catch-22 situation out there, he said. Eden Foods, for example, is willing to make organic food-based products but are not always sure they can get the raw materials. But overproduction is not the answer, either.


"People need to be open for new marketing opportunities," he said. As more and more people get into the organic busi-

ness, that will probably even the prices out. Overall (now) there is still a premium to be had in the organic market."

For those interested in producing healthy fruit in a sustainable way, plan to attend Mackey's workshops at PASA's 10th annual Farming For The Future Conference in State College, Feb. 9 and 10.

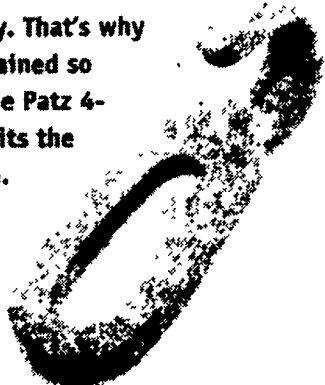
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Where: Bart Fire Hall in Georgetown, Lancaster County, PA

~OR~

When: Thursday, January 18, 2001 9:00 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.
Where: Ez Yoder's Family Restaurant, Mifflinburg, Union County, PA
4 mi. West of Mifflinburg on Rt. 45

AGENDA:

- 8:45 am Welcome! Get warmed up. Coffee, cider and cheese.
- 9:00 am "How Annual Ryegrass/Corn silage can improve profits and help you comply with Nutrient Management issues." By Don Schwartz - Maryland Cooperative Extension Agent
- 9:30 am "The Role and Benefits of Grass in a Dairy Ration" By John Thyssen, Forage Director ~ Barenbrug USA
- 10:30 am Break - Stretch your legs
- 10:40 am "Financial Analysis of Grazing VS. Conventional Lancaster County dairy farms, and how to benefit by putting the two together." By Tim Fritz - Penn State Extension Farm Management Agent
- 11:30 am Lunch (FREE if you register on time). Visit with other farmers and speakers
- 1:00 pm "Annual Ryegrass/Corn Silage - Part 2" By Don Schwartz
- 1:30 pm "Managing High digestibility corn silage from the field to the milk tank" By Dick Baldrige - Agronomist / Breeder Baldrige Hybrids
- 2:00 pm "Selecting the right grass and Alfalfa for your farm" By John Thyssen
- 3:00 pm Questions and answer session with speakers and Aaron King

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