New Jersey News

Joe Nichols
Distinguished Service to Agriculture

Joe Nichols Received the 2024 Distinguished Service to Agricultural Award from the Gloucester County Board of Agriculture.

Joe owns and operates Nichols Orchards in Franklinville on Royal Avenue Joe acquired ownership of the farm in 1985, age 26, a few years after graduating from Rutgers University, Cook College (1981). He purchased the farm under generous terms from his uncle, Chet Nichols Jr. (Uncle Bud). Joe's farm is just down the road from the original Nichols homestead and apple orchard, which operated from 1900 to 1965 under Joe's great-grandfather William until 1921 and then his grandfather Chet Sr. until 1965. The house and orchard at this location are long gone. The farm Joe operates was began in 1951 by Joe's uncle, Chet Jr. Chet Jr., struck off on his own after working for his father at the original Nichols farm. Joe's father, Francis (Teen), and his Uncle Jack also worked at the first Nichols farm.

Photo – From Left to Right – Joe Nicoles, Bob Muth, President, Gloucester County Board of Agriculture, Joel Voevreck, VP Gloucester County Board of Agriculture.

When Joe bought the farm from his Uncle Chet, it mainly had apple orchards, but Chet had also started planting peach blocks in the 1960s and 1970s. Joe became interested in horticulture from a young age, influencing his approach to orchard practices, and began working for his Uncle Chet around 1969. After taking over, Joe gradually increased peach acreage and decreased apple acreage as the years passed. Today, peach acreage is about 30 acres, and apple is about 17 acres. Some of the orchards is on rented grounds. From 1984 to 2006, Joe planted a few trees in Pittsgrove Township on land belonging to his brother Chris and wife Dale.

In 2000, Joe moved from the Pittsgrove site to a new plot of land next to the main farm in Franklinville. In 2008, Joe and his wife Vicki protected their farm through the State Farmland Preservation Program. This allowed them to use the funds to build a new packing house and cold storage, making the farm more efficient. In 2014, they bought a large portion of the land they were renting, including their home, thanks to the financial benefits of preserving it.

Joe and Vicki will celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary on November 6. They have a son, Frank, who is 18 years old, and a daughter, Frieda, who is 17. Having a family intertwined with the farm and sharing in the life of the farm with the years rolling by indeed has added satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment to the experience.

Joe markets most of his apples, peaches, nectarines, and a few pears at the farm. His customers are primarily small produce markets and farm stands that sell local produce. Several are fellow farmers who supplement their crops with tree fruit in their retail market. Many of these customers have been coming for decades. A small percentage of the crop is sold retail at Nichols Orchards, along with a few pick-your-own apples. He strives to pick mature fruit to offer a good flavored product to his customers. With peaches, it is difficult to consistently harvest mature fruit of good eating quality that is still firm enough for the buyer to handle and get it to their customer unbruised. It is difficult to achieve that balance consistently, but that's the goal. With most fruit, most of the time, it entails multiple pickings, so immature fruit can be left behind for later harvest.

The 2024 season is Joe's 40th season operating his farm and almost certainly his last. He is content and grateful for the experience. It's been quite an adventure. Some degree of retirement lies ahead now, but the exact nature of what that will be is yet to be worked out.

Walker Brothers, Inc. Receives the Special Service to Agriculture Award

At the recent Gloucester County Board of Agriculture, NJ banquet & business meeting, the Walker Family was honored for their innovation and selling their asparagus around the globe.
The were presented with the Special Service to Agriculture Award and recognized for their outstanding contributions to agriculture in Gloucester County, New Jersey, and beyond-both nationally and internationally!

We are deeply grateful to the Board and look forward to continuing our work to support and advance agriculture in the years ahead.

Photo- the Walker family received the award from Bob Muth, President, Gloucester County Board of Agriculture, on the right.

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