A Few Perspectives on the Future of Tree-fruit Production in Northern New Jersey

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Tree fruit production New Jersey is uniquely challenging. Sandwiched between two major cities in the most densely populated state in the USA, growers must be particularly progressive in what they choose to grow and how they market their crops. Fortunately, the proximity of their farms to these cities allows growers the opportunity to market their produce to a large number of consumers with widely varying tastes.

Tree fruit acreage has dramatically increased in northern NJ since 2010. Significant new orchards/farms have and are being established. Over 500 acres of new high density apple production has been established in northern New Jersey (Dean Polk, 2016 RCE Tree Fruit Working Group Report).

As a tree fruit grower, the integration of both new apple varieties and a mix of heirloom varieties will be critical for the vitality of future of apple production in Northern New Jersey. New varieties peak consumers interest, while older varieties will reinvigorate markets.

In addition, the newly emerging hard cider industry has inspired 6 plus new cideries, established or planned in north Jersey, all with new apple acreage or expanded acreage for existing apple producers.

Heirloom varieties have also gained significant attention for their use in hard cider production. I have established two research blocks this spring at the Rutgers Snyder Research and Extension Farm and at Valley Crest Farm and Preserve, Clinton, NJ to investigate the feasibility of hard cider apple production in New Jersey. Keep an eye out for the one-year report on this study in the fall edition of *Horticulture News*.

In addition to expansion and integration of new apple production in Northern New Jersey. Several additional crops including hazelnuts are being researched as lucrative additions to diversified tree fruit farms in New Jersey and beyond.

Hazelnut production is gaining increasing interest as a tree nut crop to grow in Northern new Jersey. With varieties from the Rutgers Hazelnut Breeding program nearing release onto the market. This crop requires less maintenance, fewer chemical and fertilizer inputs than apples and has the potential to be integrated into many value added products. Making this an appealing crop for the future.

Jake Peterson topworks (with bark grafts) 20-year-old Delicious apple trees at Valley Crest Farm to hard-cider cultivars. Note that scions will be shortened to two buds, and ideally, a nurse limb should have been left on the tree. All exposed wood will be treated with grafting compound or paint.