

The Reestablishment of Small Scale Apple Production in East Idaho

The Situation

East Idaho in the 1940s had 1,000 to 2,000 acres of apple orchards providing fruit for numerous communities and earnings that contributed to the area's economics base. Nearly all of those acres stopped production by the 1960s giving way to large-acre crops like wheat and potatoes. In the 1980s several small orchards planted to non-hardy varieties were killed during harsh winters. However, there still remained an interest in fruit production because of the growing demand for locally grown fruit. Articles published in local newspapers on the feasibility and profitability of apple production drew 300 responses to the Extension office.

Our Response

To establish hardy orchards of good quality fruit, cultivars have to be hardy enough to withstand -40°F and develop good quality in our short season. Cultivar demonstration trials at the UI Aberdeen Research and Extension Center, collaboration with Ricks College in Rexburg, working with local producers and investigating other production areas were undertaken to identify cultivars that will work in our area.

We used the apple tree cultivars that survived a severe winter planted at Ricks College as a basis of cultivars to recommend to new producers.

Other activities and programs Extension has conducted to help develop this new small farm industry are:

- Identified hardy cultivars for small-scale production from other harsh areas (high altitude and short season, excellent eating quality).
- Evaluated available rootstocks for potential use in eastern Idaho.
- Taught cultural practices to new producers through workshops and demonstrations.
- Wrote and published an UI Bulletin called "Growing Apples for Local Markets in Cold Climates" UI Bul 820.
- Helped growers obtain proper apple cultivars for their operations from commercial nurseries.

Achievements

We identified 10 to 15 commercial cultivars with good potential in this area. The Extension apple program in east Idaho is directly responsible for establishment of 10 new orchards that are currently producing and selling these newly identified apples in their local communities. These new orchards are producing quality fruit and creating a demand greater than the current supply.

In 1998-99 five producers sold 2,000 bushels of fruit for an estimated average of \$15/bushel. This is a modest beginning but the production will increase and is significant for the families involved.

The Future

Now that these new orchards are in production, others are being planted and acres are increasing building on these successes. Three producers are interested in forming a storage cooperative because fruit production will increase dramatically in the coming years and apples need storage temperatures of 30-31°F to give maximum storage life and extend the marketing period.

The estimated potential for apples in the next 10 years is 300 acres just to supply the local demand. The potential economic impact of 300 acres of apple production has an estimated annual value of \$3 million.

For More Information

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