



## Inflation Cometh to the Farm

Posted by [Brittany Kordick](#)

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[Brittany Kordick](#)

[Inflation Cometh to the Farm](#)

February 22, 2022 03:46AM

Registered: 4 years ago

Posts: 211

We finally got to the point of being ready to put in a large spring order for orchard inputs, and no surprise, prices are jumping, but just wanted to put the word out that, holy !@\$%, are some prices jumping, and according to Seven Springs Farm, where many of us purchase at least some supplies, prices are rising daily. We were encouraged to order as much as possible on extended credit terms so that they would be able to honor as many prices as possible and lock in the rest before they increase even more.

Even so, I'm sitting here comparing the spring catalog price of \$53 for a 5 gal bucket of blackstrap molasses to the \$74 price we'll now be paying for it. Um, ouch (apparently, this has more to do with last year's hurricanes wiping out a lot of the Gulf's sugarcane crop, rather than outright inflation). Not all items are anywhere near this drastic, but just thought I'd put the word out for anyone else who hasn't gotten around to spring ordering that most prices in the Seven Springs paper catalog that was sent out last month anyway can be expected to be at least a few dollars higher per unit, and some others, well . . . so you probably want to place those spring orders. Guess our apple prices will be going up daily, too, huh?

FYI,

[Kordick Family Farm](#)

Westfield, NC

Zone 7a

Edited 3 time(s). Last edit at 02/22/2022 04:24PM by Brittany Kordick.

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[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Inflation Cometh to the Farm](#)

February 23, 2022 07:43PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

Brittany, I know this is intended to be about pricing specifically but I would love to open discussion on something that has been tugging at me lately: how much are we willing to pay and how far are we willing to go to grow this fruit. Or more directly, how little can we do to actually grow things in a responsible fashion. I toggle back and forth between a perfectly managed tree with healthy (and hopefully attractive) fruit and the costs it incurs. That cost I might add really should be expanded to the impact it has on the earth in its entirety. (This is the point at which Michael will want to stick this into a different thread). I will limit my opinions until others chime in, but I am increasingly becoming concerned for the inputs and types of systems that are happening in both organic as well as so-called conventional operations. We all need to use products to compete in markets, but I think we need to discuss balance between a product and its true sustainability. The increase in the cost of materials and shipping charges is a good impetus. IF it turns out that we cannot grow healthy food with a particular species in a particular place without backfeeding it indefinitely, we have a cause for concern. I think that folks in this forum for instance are at their cleverest when they come up with a way to eat, sell and enjoy without needing to overdo the nuance, overbuy, or rely on the likes of Dow chemical to perform. On and off on our farm I buy and use a lot of material, some good, some bad, and making the planet just a little bit crappier for future generations. Organic and similar current systems I see as not better, but rather less worse if you catch my meaning. We won't be perfect, but perhaps we might discuss some of the decision making involved in a truly sustainable system. I love growing apples, and almost every aspect of it. I find the healthiest and purest examples I see are in clients of mine that are cute homestead operations that have a nearly complete closed system and often zero pesticides. Those families eat incredibly healthy diets, and have the richest ecosystems. If us commercial operations have to continually water down practices and ethics we need to do more homework. Maybe we'll find that tree fruits won't work according to each of our respected ethics and we will have to grow something else. I hope not, farmers can be a smart lot so most of us will find the right balance. This is just a reminder that cost is only one factor when judging materials (be that pesticides, paper traps, compost or amendments). Mining, manufacturing, shipping, company ethics and practices, finite resources, and environmental impacts generally should all be considered. The type of system we set up will also influence the need for inputs as well (a permaculture type design versus monoculture for instance will have widely varying needs and ecosystem impacts). The other elephant in the living room has to do with what I call the "advanced systems vulnerability". This is where, by adding more and more controlling (or nuancing) adjuncts to a system it increases its vulnerability to changes or shortcoming in the system itself, usually through supply chain factors. So, if we set up an orchard that is arranged to function only with the continual input of spinosad, cheap mulch, clean water, whatever and one component fails, we will have a disaster. Its the house of cards model, and it is

worse every year in almost every human system. Sustainability means just that, and everything brought into the farm should be vetted based on all these factors, not just short term effectiveness and cost. Finally to reflect Brittany's frustration, there is a point at which we say screw you I am not paying THAT much, now I need to figure out how I (and my friends in the orcharding community) can learn to live without it.

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[Mike Biltonen](#)

[Re: Inflation Cometh to the Farm](#)

February 23, 2022 08:38PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 298

But Todd, you know how apple growers just "love" to nuance the heck out what they do. I jest of course. But your statement: "Or more directly, how little can we do to actually grow things in a responsible fashion" was exactly the reason I started my Apostrophe Orchard. How little was just enough, how much was too much....where is the sweet spot? Masanobu Fukuoka (Mr. One Straw Revolution) had a "do nothing" philosophy of farming. Of course, he didn't mean do nothing, just do as little as is needed to grow healthy food and nourish the earth. Leave time for hiking, meditating, writing haiku, etc. is all a part of the farming life we've in general long forgotten. Biodynamic farming has a closed system farming philosophy (others do as well I know) where we try to keep what's created on the farm, on the farm. We always lose something and this is where inputs are needed, but when is enough enough? And how can we change or adapt our practices so that our farms are closed loop systems? This is something I used to not understand enough especially in my early years. The ivory tower institutions and the agricultural industries promote consumption rather than conservation and this goes for the service business that manufacture products or provide lab tests or what have you. Not that there isn't something to be learned from these products or service providers, but the question really is what can we borrow from them and create systems "on the farm"? When do we just look at the big picture vs count the number of angels dancing on a pin? I am not blameless, that's for sure, in nuancing the heck out of things. But the older I get the more I realize much of it is unnecessary and costly to our pockets and the earth.

[Mike Biltonen, Know Your Roots](#)

Zone 5b in New York

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[Brittany Kordick](#)

[Re: Inflation Cometh to the Farm](#)

February 24, 2022 04:46AM

Registered: 4 years ago

Posts: 211

Hear, hear, Todd. I'm glad if my post helped birth this new vein of conversation, though neither that nor a general pricing discussion was my intention. I just know that everything happens a bit earlier, fruit-wise, down South (oh, my god, we're at silvertip today -- not yet, not yet!), and surmised that while we feel late as far as doing any spring ordering, it may not even be on you Northerners' radars yet, and just wanted to give anybody planning to purchase . . . anything . . . a heads-up that you may be in for a rude surprise when you do.

We struggle, actually, almost daily with the questions you pose, and there are echoes of this many of my most recent posts, from considering whether plant sap analysis is for us to deciding to bite the bullet and spring for targeted beneficial fungi of the month. The orchard-related things we spend most of our time doing, and most of our money on, are not at all geared toward what we best enjoy and can best afford. For my part, I am not such a huge apple fan (I often threaten to grow pineapples, since they surely must be easier to grow) that I couldn't live without growing them; it has often seemed to me that if it is so very hard to grow an apple (and I refer to the days and nights spent struggling to understand and address EVERYTHING . . . I'll use 'cultural' as an umbrella term to cover physiology, nutrients, pest, disease, etc., hoping it's understood that we actually enjoy apple culture and the actual work of it very, very much . . . and the days and nights struggling to get the elusive timing of that EVERYTHING CULTURAL right) in our neck of the woods, if it costs us (literally, financially, plus figuratively, physically, environmentally, quality of life-wise, etc) so very much, then perhaps we ought not grow apples in our location/climate. Pineapples, my boy . . .

But . . . we do love our trees and we don't generally give up on things, so we try. It's not that this understanding/addressing everything apple culture-wise is not our forte -- OK, one of us came close to flunking Chem 101, but the other started with a Chem degree and went on to a day job career in scientific research. And my god, our orchard is, to all appearances other than fireblight time and when the fruit starts rotting on the trees, in fantastic shape; the environment that we've fostered is in fantastic shape. It may be that the answer is to downsize in order to manage things even better, ie, actually get all our pruning done (yes, 18 acres of MM111 is almost too much for just two people trying to grow holistically, but we do a hell of a job, and we improve every year as far as managing the orchard better and catching up with regards to things like pruning. . . but yeah, at what "cost"?), but is it more sustainable to remove established trees from our orchard? Maybe. It may be that the answer is to pull out all those varieties that "cost" so much more to maintain because they require more intervention and maintenance and general care with regards to attempting to keep them free of, say, fruit rots. The conventional answer would be to unquestionably pull out trees and re-plant with those we know do well for us with the least amount of "cost" . . . but it's not ours, so we keep trying.

It's especially frustrating when our customers or laypeople don't understand the myriad costs of our way of apple-growing, nay, agriculture in general. We do our best to educate them, but our prices will never come close to break-even point (again, on so many levels). On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have friends and customers who grow apples recreationally and truly believe that nothing should ever be done to their orchards, ideally, beyond the occasional pruning, that the costs of intervening are too high. And some of them are fortunate enough in their varietal choices/inheritances, as well as climate and location, that that does seem to work out just fine for them, at least in the short-term. The middle ground must be out there somewhere over the rainbow, and we're looking hard for it. We were recently reminded that we hadn't yet taken the time to do our HON profile, and sometimes revisiting big, broad questions like those found in the profile questionnaire and your above post are helpful. We love the idea and practice of keeping our farm as closed-circle as possible . . . but we can only be experts in so many cottage enterprises without them becoming draining costs in and of themselves, and we love when we can support and depend on anyone more expert than we in certain regards. Seeking and striving for an orchard so in balance that it requires as little intervention from us as necessary to produce halfway decent fruit is absolutely the goal here; we can only do so much, and we only

want to do so much . . . but we make exceptions for fireblight and fruit rots. On the one hand, can we, should we, spring for bigger commercial sticks? On the other hand, we can't afford not to, if we want to have an orchard to keep caring for.

That's probably enough to convey, I hear you, brother.

[Kordick Family Farm](#)

Westfield, NC

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Edited 4 time(s). Last edit at 02/24/2022 06:16AM by Brittany Kordick.

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[Brittany Kordick](#)

[Re: Inflation Cometh to the Farm](#)

February 24, 2022 07:11AM

Registered: 4 years ago

Posts: 211

Oh, man, I had completely forgotten a post intended for a thinning thread until reflecting on my above ramble just now. So I'm catching up on reading the other day, and the latest Good Fruit Grower has a very typically modern ag article about using agricultural drone sprayers in orchards for more efficient spray coverage. Now, I'm someone who doesn't have a cellphone, and who often considers unplugging the landline, too. But I'm reading this article bemusedly and it hits me that one of these newfangled drone sprayers could work really well to solve the problem of thinning tiny blocks of trees in an orchard like ours, where there might be 5 of this variety that need thinning today, 15 of another variety that need thinning in 2 days, and 35 of another variety that need thinning in a week. Program that drone with its tiny reservoir to knock out the daily thinning that could never be kept up with otherwise. I was so dead serious that I emailed Agri-Spray Drones for a quote on one of these bad boys: "For your operation, I would recommend the T10. It is our smallest drone but would work great for this operation. You can set it up into "orchard mode" where the arms point at a different angle to cover certain trees in the best way possible. The total price for a T10 package is \$22,000. Please let me know if you have any questions."

Um, yeah, one: are you telling me I actually have to get a cellphone in order to run this thing? Hell with that.

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Edited 2 time(s). Last edit at 02/24/2022 07:13AM by Brittany Kordick.

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