



The big year

Posted by [Todd Parlo](#)

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[Todd Parlo](#)

[The big year](#)

December 16, 2015 04:59PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

So, this was a banner year for apples in the northeast, at least. The word comes from just about everyone I have chatted with, but would like to hear what folks have to say about this and see it corroborated.

My real reason for asking is how it panned out in terms of income. In our neck of the woods, as anticipated, it meant a glut, even of organic fruit. The general glut means all yards have plenty for use, conventional fruit prices are dirt cheap, and of course organic "outlets" are very limited. Now, it is great to have abundance, and it is also great to see those growing their own fruit reaping the benefits of good work, so I welcome it in general. What is apparent, I think, and I have repeated this many times, is that the so-called market for healthier and sustainably produced fruit is a whole lot smaller than all the magazine articles postulate. On farm sales and farmers' markets don't cut it for most folks. In our area there are a handful of co-ops that pay well for fruit, but help support only a few growers at best.

In many rural communities more and more young people...and old... are turning to farming, including fruit growing. This is awesome. It does mean, however, that the market "pie" gets sliced into smaller and smaller pieces. The collective farming community, then will have to work together to increase the size of the pie if we all want to continue the venture.

We are in a very positive trend I think, better than in a long long time. Attitudes on health and care of the planet, especially with the younger generation is truly inspiring. The proportion of support of this notion, in terms of dollars spent, however, is meager. Yes, organic sales are up, some years with over a 10 percent increase, but do you know what the percentage of organic is of US food sales overall? Four. That's 4. That means that Americans purchase 96 percent of their food as conventional. The "pie" then is 4 percent, most of which is shipped in as California and overseas large scale production. Our local small stores and coops ship in produce from long distances during our own growing season, making the pie even smaller. Certainly with more new farmers entering the market, and homesteaders producing their own food (we encourage and promote this as a nursery ourselves), the trend will be a tougher and tougher market. Unless. Unless we can get more people to say, drink cider over Red Bull and Pepsi maybe. If even a quarter of the population ate food from organic or small farms, man, that would be a life-saver for us folks working in the dirt.

This is in the Healthy Harvest section, so back to topic. We had the biggest crop ever, in Walden, Vt. We sold what we could, pressed a lot of cider, and sold what we could of that. We also let approximately 10,000 pounds of harvested fruit go into the compost, the remainder we didn't even bother harvesting. To be sure, a lot is marketing naivety. Also, this story is common, and on a larger scale with anyone that has been long in the business. The take-home point is that along with success in growing better food, comes the job of getting more citizens to want that food, and at a respectable price. This is going to require a whole lot more organization than we have already. Working hard to produce a great product is one thing, but meaningless if it never sees a child's mouth. Healthy harvests are sweet, but an income is divine.

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

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[Kevin Frank](#)

[Re: The big year](#)

December 16, 2015 05:54PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 24

Todd, Great comments and questions. I am not a commercial orchardist per se but this year became more of one. Typically we have just shared cider with folks in the community, mostly. A buddy was able to sell quite a few apples to local outdoor market and to a restaurant that does farm to table. We could have done more of this with better planning. I think that although there are many apples in the health food stores and supermarkets, even organic apples, there are scarce local organic apples so it appears the market has yet to be developed in central NH. When I go to VT or coastal ME those markets look much more mature. People in those locations have reason to expect local organic apples and cider that is truly fresh as opposed to flash pasteurized and/or not organic or toxic free.

But what a harvest it was! I was short of easy outlets for my cider due to lack of planning, and also short of gallon plastic jugs. And I let my storage apples get too ripe unfortunately. Like you, nice organic apples were not utilized. This is sad. A sudden larger than normal harvest presents challenges that this year brought home.

Back to the size of the harvest: Has anyone identified the multiple factors that led to such a robust number of apples, everywhere in NH at

least as far as I can tell? There's the bounce from the 2013 cold June that led to poor bloom in 2014 which Michael brought to our attention. What else?

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[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: The big year](#)

June 14, 2016 03:47PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

The year after the big year. The general agreement has always been the predicted bust after a banner year, particularly with those with less than stellar early thinning. My nonscientific assessment here is that things look fine. Sure, the typical biennials are pouting, but I think we will see a fine crop, even after some major thinning neglect last season. Curious to hear what everyone is seeing out there this spring.

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[Claude Jolicoeur](#)

[Re: The big year](#)

June 14, 2016 04:43PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 226

Here in Quebec, I also had my biggest crop last year. This year bloom was quite average. Although I had this big crop last year, some trees were in their off year, and those bloomed profusely this year. And the trees that had large crops last year had only slightly reduced bloom this year - so no problem there. Up to now, this is looking like an average year. But things can change during the season!

Claude

[Jolicoeur Orchard](#)

Zone 4 in Quebec

Author, [The New Cider Maker's Handbook](#)

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[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: The big year](#)

June 22, 2016 03:33PM

Moderator

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

I'll confirm we all saw decent bloom this year, surprisingly so given the heavy crop year in 2015. I've just posted about "[blossom reversal](#)" to zone in on the lack of fruit set despite how promising things looked a few weeks ago. It's fair to say I'm looking at a 20% crop, if that. This Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde approach to orcharding is going to push me back into making most of our living off the farm once again, dammit.

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

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[Zea Sonnabend](#)

[Re: The big year](#)

June 26, 2016 07:13AM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 58

Meanwhile on the left coast, last year was the worst year any of the old timers could remember and this year might be the biggest crop. The small crop was due to not enough winter chill hours so that bloom was weak and protracted. We had about a third of the yield of 2014. This past winter we had enough chill, enough rain, and a very vigorous bloom. The crop looks outstanding. That brings its own issues with it though because we have had to spend tons of money on thinning, and still will have too many small fruit. We are also very concerned about breaking the alternate bearing cycle and so have a diligent foliage feeding program to build up the buds for next year.

The apple market is very strong right now, especially for utility and cider fruit. Those of you with surplus should be contacting regional hard cider makers and should never have to throw away fruit. We are getting about double the conventional price for organic varieties that are good for hard cider. And we could sell twice as many as we have now at the high price.

[Fruitilicious Farm](#)

Zone 9b in California

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