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Hello Fruit Growers,

I had wanted to start this email by wishing everyone Happy New Year. However, as today unfolded and an anxious nation watched an unprecedented assault on our democracy fueled by the delusional lies of a sitting president, to say Happy New Year seemed incongruous at best. Hopefully, our country perseveres through the next two weeks and reaffirms its commitment to the democratic ideals and values that we all should hold dear.

Although I can't personally embrace the MAGA fiction, I would wear a hat that said MOOG. You know, "Make Our Orchards Great!" APFGA plays an important role in providing information, help, and assistance to grow the best fruit possible in Alaska. Together, we can make our orchards great.

One can't discuss fruit growing in Alaska, or anywhere for that matter, without the topic of climate change looming on the horizon. Growers in the lower 48 are looking for varieties that flower later to avoid frost damage, or strategies to combat heat stress or the sudden onset of cold. In Alaska, we ponder how to take advantage of warmer and longer growing seasons while knowing the opposite extreme is always a possibility. As Alaska continues to warm, it is doubtful that we will stay isolated from the pests and diseases faced by growers outside. As the young Greta says, "change is coming."

The good news is that we can experiment with fruits like Apricots, and more people can grow sweet cherries. The bad news is that we will face greater climate extremes that will at times test those decisions. A couple years ago Michigan lost almost its entire fruit crop. That year, a warm and early spring was followed by a devastating freeze with severe consequences for the growers. We will have bad years too, caused by an increasingly erratic climate.

In the trade publication "[Growing Produce](#)," I bragged to the editor about the virtues of growing fruit in Alaska. What we can grow, and our future potential is pretty impressive. However, my enthusiasm should always be tempered by the realization that climate can be oppressive here as well. To see a severe drought in parts of normally wet Alaska two summers ago, or last year's huge Siberian arctic forest fires are just a couple of examples of climate change's impact. We shouldn't assume that we are immune to the downsides of a warming climate or better off because we live in a cooler part of the world.

It will take sacrifice and a willingness to embrace science and facts to keep the climate from spiraling out of control. As fruit growers, we contribute to the solution by growing plants and caring for our soil and environment. The fruit we grow and consume displaces produce that would otherwise be shipped or flown to Alaska. At the very least, growing your own fruit and/or produce can help to reduce your carbon footprint. But obviously, that isn't your first thought as you are enjoying a slice of pie made with the Romance or Evans cherries that you grew last summer!

January is when I start planning what I will experiment with this upcoming season. I am considering what [scion wood](#) I might want to order or what might be available from other members. Yesterday, I was browsing the Fedco Seeds [catalogue](#) looking at their collection of apple scion wood. I really enjoy this catalogue because it is full of information and contains a number of heritage apples. The descriptions are interesting, and come complete with Maine bloom and ripening times, along with hardiness zone ratings.

When I started my orchard, I would only grow varieties that were zone 3 or lower. But because of climatic warming, I have been letting a few zone 4 apple varieties into the mix, provided the ripening times were appropriate. In the Fedco catalogue that means varieties that ripen in summer (S), late summer (LS), or early fall (EF). But I do this with the complete awareness that they could be injured by a freak winter, or that an early fall ripening time in Maine may be too late in a cold short Alaska summer. However, since they are only branch grafts and not whole trees, I feel safe in experimenting.

Fedco is not the only source for scion wood. My favorite source of scion wood outside is from Bob Purvis. Bob lived in Alaska from 1972-1989, is a founding member of APFGA, and has a nursery in Idaho. He offers an extensive list of [scion wood](#), and best of all, he is very knowledgeable about Alaska and what might be successful here. I am currently growing an apricot variety that he recommended, and this year I intend to experiment with a sweet cherry that he has suggested.

Of course, APFGA will again make a limited selection of the best varieties of apple scion wood available as we did last year. So, if you are not looking for something exotic, we should be able to help you out. It is expected that most Alaskans won't be vaccinated until this summer at the earliest, so it is unlikely that we will have our traditional grafting workshop in the spring. Consequently, we will probably distribute rootstock and scion wood much like we did last year.

Debbie Hinchey expressed the wish that I do a presentation on growing blueberries. One should always be careful what you wish for because on Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 7:00 pm, I will present my thoughts on growing blueberries and lingonberries in Alaska. Click the link to join the [Zoom meeting](#). Should you miss it, the program will be recorded and posted the following week on the APFGA website under the "Research" tab. Our zoom session will begin with an abbreviated membership meeting with the program to quickly follow. The following are the links for the full [Zoom invitation](#), [proposed agenda](#) and [minutes](#) from our December Meeting.

I have also scheduled a Zoom [board meeting](#) (click to join) for Thursday, January 28 at 7:00 pm. Here are the links for the complete zoom [invitation](#), [proposed agenda](#), and [minutes](#) from our December board meeting.

Memberships (\$16) are due for this calendar year. So, if you haven't already renewed your membership, please do so online at our [website](#). It is so much easier for everyone when you renew online rather than sending us a check. If you want to skip the annual rite of renewal, you might consider signing up for a life-time membership.

Finally, I am sad to announce the passing of long-time member Marianne Boyer who died on January 1. She was born in 1954, and married Bob Boyer in 1974. APFGA benefited greatly from the interest and expertise of the Boyers. Bob built the greenhouse in 2001 and planted the orchard on the spare lot they owned. APFGA enjoyed holding the annual pruning workshop in the greenhouse for many years. Bob died in 2014, but Marianne maintained the orchard with volunteer help and enjoyed sharing Bob's passion for fruit trees. She fondly called him a "displaced farmer," and the orchard a "hobby gone wild." Marianne had been a teacher in the Anchorage School District for many years. Together she and Bob had owned Boyer's Photography in Anchorage. She will be missed.

Hope you can join us for the meeting and program next Thursday!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA