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Hello Fruit Growers!

It is funny how even before the season wraps up, our attention turns to next spring. There is a quality of hope and expectation about the future with Alaska growers, regardless of the travails they may have just experienced. Members are already planning what varieties and cultivars they want to grow next spring even as winter settles in for the long haul. And of course, everyone is determined to grow even better fruit next year!

To that end, Board Treasurer Gary Masog has secured our spring 2024 root stock for our members. I am excited to see orders for 350 Geneva 890 apple rootstock that members will plant for the first time in Alaska. If as successful as I expect, these clonal rootstocks will be a game changer for growers. They are super hardy and can be used for either freestanding or high-density plantings. Most importantly, they will provide earlier fruit production on a tree with predictable characteristics.

In my personal trials with apple rootstock I am also growing G. 969, G. 935, G. 11, and G. 41. In particular, G. 41 looks promising for maximizing high tunnel production with high-density plantings. While on the cherry side, I am experimenting with sweet cherry trained to grow in a UFO (Upright Fruiting Offshoot) system. This method of growing/training is also ideal for high density plantings and would be suitable for growing in a high tunnel.

Over the past few years there has been talk among growers and government stake-holders that climate change was going to lengthen our season and render more fruit varieties and cultivars feasible in Alaska. This past season showed the fallacy of that expectation.

Unchecked global warming is only making weather patterns more unpredictable and extreme. In Southcentral at our orchard, we finished the season with only 2340 GDD/42°. Poor return bloom and pollination aside, none of the late season apples achieved ripeness, Evans cherries were barely ready, and even Northblue blueberries left a number of berries stranded at the close of the season. Having 300 GDD/42° less than 2022, had a significant impact on our results. And it could have been even worse had high pressure settled over central Alaska in September rather than waiting for the end of October.

The message from 2023 is clear. Plant and grow varieties and cultivars outdoors that will successfully crop during the worse extremes of climate change. Have aspirational cultivars outside with the knowledge that they may only be successful in the good years. And if you are considering growing tree fruit for commercial sale, investing in high tunnels will secure your ability to consistently produce good crops.

In watching our trees move towards dormancy and leaf abscission (drop), it is fascinating to see the impact, or lack thereof, of rootstocks. In watching the leaves of Montmorency cherry in pots on three different rootstocks, it seems they begin moving towards leaf drop (dormancy?) on Krymsk 5 faster than they do on Evans, or P. maackii. I also have a limb of Montmorency on an Evans on unknown rootstock. The Evans dropped its leaves early in October leaving the Montmorency leaves green and unaffected. I'm not sure if this impacts plant hardiness early in the winter but it makes me feel better when it looks like our trees don't waste time getting ready for the cold.

We have been growing the blueberry cultivar Northland for trial. This year, it's third, it finally fruited for the first time. This cultivar does not appear to be ideal for Alaska. Northland blooms late, fruit ripens late, and the size of the fruit is underwhelming. We will give them another year before they are replaced. In contrast, Northblue is a superior and proven cultivar for Alaska. It is 2 feet in height with large, excellent fruit, and is an early bloomer and dependable cropper. Chippewa is also an excellent performer. It overlaps and blooms slightly after Northblue (but still before Northland), and grows to become a larger bush (4'). It is a prolific producer of tasty powder-blue blueberries.

Dan Moore of Fire Apple Orchard was kind enough to send me a note that his vole bait is needing to be restocked already. Vole populations tend to rise and then crash. Putting bait out in pet/child proof containers is one way to control them. My approach is to maintain bait stations all year around to keep populations in check. However, there are many approaches to controlling voles and everyone needs to do what feels right for them. The main thing is to be proactive and at a minimum have tree wraps or screens in place. Once they have girdled your trees, it is too late.

In other news, James Luby, professor in the Department of Horticultural Science at the University of Minnesota, was recently named the 2023 B.Y. Morrison Memorial Lecturer. Perhaps best known for bringing the Honeycrisp apple to the commercial world, Prof. Luby has directed research at the U. of Minn. in fruit crops breeding and genetics since 1982. The emphasis of his program is to develop new varieties that combine a satisfying eating experience for the consumer with cold hardiness and disease resistance. His research aims to determine the inheritance of important fruit and tree traits and identify important genetic loci and DNA markers for use in DNA-informed breeding. Click the link to watch an interview with Prof. Luby on his apple breeding research and [The Rise of Honeycrisp](#).

The North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX) will hold their annual conference via Zoom November 9-11. There will be eight sessions and twelve speakers on topics relating to fruit. The conference is a benefit of NAFEX membership which is only \$19. Click the link for more information and a schedule of the sessions for the [NAFEX 2023 Virtual Conference](#).

Be sure to mark your calendar for our annual membership meeting on Thursday, November 9, on Zoom at 7:00 pm. At the time of the meeting, just [click the link to attend](#). The annual membership meeting is your opportunity to vote for candidates to serve on the board of directors. This year, four of the seven seats on the board will be up for election. Just about any activity that you attend on behalf of APFGA has one or more board members behind the scenes volunteering their time to make it happen. We will need a quorum of at least 35 members to elect new board members. What follows are the links for the [agenda](#), past [minutes](#), and full [Zoom invitation](#) if needed.

The week after the Membership meeting on Wednesday, November 15, at 7:00 pm, we will hold a [Board of Directors meeting](#) on Zoom with our newly elected board. The main purpose of this meeting is for the board to elect officers and to decide who will take lead on the various activities and duties. Click the links for an [agenda](#), past [minutes](#), and the full [Zoom invitation](#).

We had a very enjoyable in-person conversation last Saturday (October 28), at the Russian Jack Park Chalet. Fred Deiser shared his experience working with inter-stems on Krymsk plum rootstock. On Saturday, November 11, we are going to have another in-person get-together, but this time in Palmer at the UAF Experimental Farm. Come share your experiences, bring your questions, or simply enjoy the conversation about fruit on Saturday, November 11, at 2:00 pm in the "Blue Room" at the [UAF Experimental Farm](#). (Click the link for directions.) (The Blue Room is attached to the main office and has a separate entrance - the man door left of the garage door.)

Our winter speaker series takes place on Zoom on the second Thursday of each month during the months of December, January, February, and March. Each year we try to book speakers who deepen our understanding of growing fruit, or enjoyment of the fruits of our labor. The schedule of events is as follows:

- December 14, 2023 Apples and Cider Making with David Takush
- January 11, 2024 Growing Apricots with Ilona Farr
- February 8, 2024 Soil Health in Orchards with Ilona DuPont
- March 14, 2024 Geneva Rootstock with Gennaro Fazio

Click the link to learn more about each program and presenter for the [APFGA Winter Speaker Series!](#)

Please make plans to join us on November 9, for the annual membership meeting on Zoom, and come join us for a conversation on fruit growing on November 11 in Palmer. Hope to see you at both events!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

