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Hello Fruit Growers!

Welcome to an El Niño weather pattern. This can be a potent mix when combined with warming sea temperatures due to climate change. We should be prepared for more extremes in weather. Warmer oceans allow more moisture to be lofted into the atmosphere. This can create large dumps of rain, or if the air is cold enough, snow.

In Anchorage, we set a snowfall record for the month of November. The snow came down fast and wet early in the month. It was a lot of work shaking the snow off the branches, but we ended up with only a few broken limbs. This was the earliest in the winter that I have put on snowshoes. They are handy for packing down snow around the nursery plants to discourage the voles from tunneling to them. Although early in the season, I began to compact the deep snow around the screens at the base of our fruit trees. Snow that goes over the screen or tree guard gives voles easy access to your trees. Little did I know that we would also have record amounts of rain and warm weather at the end of the month and much of the snow would melt.

The USDA has updated the plant hardiness zone map. The last update was in 2012. This map utilized more weather stations for sampling and has a resolution down to ¼ mile. As most of you know, the zone rating simply reflects the lowest temperature of an area, not the season length or heat available (GDDs), which is the critical measure for many crops. Global warming is raising the zone ratings. East Anchorage is now listed as 5a, and Gov't Hill and West Anchorage is now 5b! If only the season were longer to take advantage of the milder low temps. But on the bright side, this explains why rhododendrons now survive in our yard! Here is the link to the new interactive [plant hardiness zone map](#).

During last winter's speaker series, we were pleased to have Zach Miller, Superintendent for the Western Agriculture Research Center in Corvallis, MT, present on the fruit research they have been doing. Zach recently emailed me and provided some additional information. They have been evaluating several [Currant varieties](#). The new black currant varieties are from McGinnis Berry Crops. Zach says that they have been hard to find in the US. However, there is a [nursery in WI](#) (Canopy Farm Management) that is licensed to propagate them. The nursery website also provides some evaluation data on the currants and sells plugs (\$8 ea. + shipping) in lots of 25. These plants are under patent and buyers must sign a non-propagation agreement. If there is sufficient interest, we can order plants. Review the research in the links above and [place your request](#) by December 12.

It was recently announced that the apple SnapDragon, developed at Cornell, won the [outstanding cultivar](#) award from the American Society for Horticultural Science. The last two apple cultivars to receive this prestigious award were Empire (1987) and Jonagold (1988), both Cornell varieties developed in the 1940s. SnapDragon is a cross between Honeycrisp and an "advanced selection" known as NY752 from Cornell and was primarily developed by breeder Susan Brown. Trees were planted in select orchards in 2011, and their official name was released in 2013. Today, about 1000 acres (with another 500 acres in development) of SnapDragon apples are exclusively grown in New York state through licensed growers. This is an arrangement similar to that of Cosmic Crisp developed by Washington State University which can only be grown by licensed growers (over 12,000 acres) in the state of Washington.

I was recently contacted by Savannah Crichton, a researcher at the UAF Alaska Center for Energy and Power. She is part of a team of researchers seeking to investigate the feasibility of Agrivoltaics (the co-use of land for solar and agricultural production) in Northern latitudes. She is seeking people engaged with work in energy production, agriculture (you?), food security, or environmental management that would be willing to fill out a brief 15 - 30 minute survey to help them better understand who is interested in agrivoltaics and to guide their research questions. To learn more about agrivoltaics, I would recommend that you visit the [AgriSolar Clearinghouse](#) before taking the survey. The potential for agri-solar may exist in Alaska, depending upon how the low latitude of the sun is exploited and which crops are selected. Early ripening crops such as haskaps or black currants might be good candidates for integration with solar arrays. If you are willing to participate in the survey, click the link to the UAF [Agrivoltaics Contact Form](#).

On November 9, on the heels of a large winter storm (photo above), we attempted to hold our annual meeting but failed to meet the required quorum to conduct business. The annual meeting is a requirement of our bylaws. Consequently, time will need to be taken at the beginning of our program on December 14, to vote for board members and hear the treasurer's report. The slate of board members to approve includes:

1. Michael Burke: (new candidate) Rector, St. Mary's Episcopal Church where he oversees multiple acres of plantings and orchard development.
2. Doug Damberg: (incumbent candidate) Organizes annual grafting workshop and assists with multiple APFGA events. Is establishing a home orchard in South Anchorage.
3. Chris Hellman: (new candidate) Discovered APFGA a couple of years ago, has participated in the apple pressings, fruit tastings, pruning, and grafting workshops.
4. Sabrina Shaw: (new candidate) Has a mini orchard and relishes any growing information she can acquire. Her favorite APFGA events are the garden/orchard tours.

Please join us right at 7:00 pm on Zoom, Thursday December 14, and give a few minutes of your time to confirm these board candidates before we hear our first amazing presenter.

That first presenter of the Winter Speaker Series is David Takush, who will talk about Apples and Cider Making on Zoom on Thursday, December 14, 2023 at 7:00 pm. He is the Head Cidermaker and co-owner of [2 Towns Ciderhouse](#) and Board Secretary for the [American Cider Association](#). Dave earned a Master's Degree in fermentation science at Oregon State University and has over a decade of experience in the craft beer, wine and cider industries. Please join Zoom promptly at 7:00 pm by clicking the [meeting link](#). If needed, here is the full [Zoom invitation](#), [agenda](#), and [minutes](#) from our last membership meeting.

On Wednesday, December 20, at 7:00 pm we will have a [Board Meeting](#) on Zoom, provided we successfully elect a slate of new board members. The primary 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](#).

Finally, since the holidays are upon us, consider giving the gift of a membership to APFGA to someone you know who might like to grow their own fruit. While you are on the [website](#), be sure to renew your own membership for next year, or consider converting it to a lifetime membership.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA