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Hello Fruit Growers!

Tuesday, January 23, was the first day they saw the sun in Utqiagvic (Barrow) after 66 days of darkness. In Alaska we seem to keep track of milestones that herald the gaining sun. I completely understand the prehistoric urge to build Stonehenge. In our yard, the third week of January was the first week that the sun was high enough to begin shining on our fruit trees again, albeit briefly.

Although sunny, Alaska's weather in Southcentral and the interior has been under the influence of a big ridge of stationary high pressure. Low air temperatures were between -5° to -20° in our East Anchorage orchard for the second half of the month. (Subtract 25° F for interior low temperatures!) In addition, the last week of the month saw another foot snow fall in Anchorage. As was reported by the Washington Post, BBC, and other news outlets, this broke the record for the earliest date that the season snowfall total has exceeded 100+ inches. On the positive side, because of the bountiful snow, our orchard ground temperature at 6" is still above 33° F.

On January 21, I was in our local Carrs/Safeway grocery store and came across a brief appearance of an apple cultivar named "Lemonade." This yellow-green apple was originally bred in New Zealand. It is a cross between Braeburn and Gala and is now grown beyond New Zealand in Washington State and Pennsylvania under license by Giumarra. The apple has excellent crunch and has a pleasant flavor indicative of the fruit's parentage. I found Lemonade to have a more interesting flavor than either a Braeburn or Gala. To my palate, the sharpness nicely balanced the sweetness so that the apple was not cloyingly sweet. It is a bold move to market an apple that isn't perfectly red, so I am rooting for it. After all, the public needs to learn that great apples come in all shapes and colors!

I laughed when I saw that Lemonade was bred in New Zealand as we had just returned from exploring the Hawkes Bay region of New Zealand's North Island where the fruit growing is quite impressive. The photo above is of a high-density apple orchard outside of Napier with reflective fabric between the rows. I had the opportunity to talk with an apple orchard manager for one of New Zealand's largest corporate growers – Craigmore Sustainables (21% of all NZ fruit grown). All new apple plantings are high density with Granny Smith planted every 12th tree as pollinators. They were working on installing hail netting over their blocks and experimenting with a reflective coating that can be sprayed on the orchard floor to replace the labor-intensive use of reflective fabrics. Some aisle runs of apples exceeded a kilometer in length!

Closer to home, fellow APFGA member Emily Becker shared news that the USDA Forest Service has awarded funds to the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP) to sub-award up to ten grants of \$40,000-\$60,000 to climate and economic disadvantaged Alaska communities. This includes Title 1 schools, Alaska Native Villages, and disadvantaged communities. Applicants must be a federally recognized Tribe, non-profit organization, school or public organization. The purpose of this funding is for establishing and maintaining community orchards and food forests. This initiative is made possible with funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. Click the link for more information and application details about the [Orchards and Food Forests \(GROW-OFF\) Grant Program](#).

Speaking of food forests, I was recently contacted by Doug McGregor who owns Oak Summit Nursery and is a board member for the [Assiniboine Food Forest](#) (AFFI) in Brandon, Manitoba. He is looking for photos of the some of the varieties and cultivars of fruit that they grow. He reached out to APFGA since we grow many of the same cold hardy cultivars. Click the link to see the [list of cultivars](#) he is seeking photos of. You can email photos to [Doug](#). Any pictures used will have your photo credit at the bottom.

APFGA member Yael Hickok who manages the [Friends of Boyers Orchard](#) non-profit has undertaken the task of trying to identify trees in the Boyers greenhouse and orchard that have lost their tags or are otherwise undocumented. To accomplish this, she is going to send samples out for DNA testing to David Bencoster at the Lost Apple Project. The cost will be \$60 per sample and she has offered to request additional test kits for members who have old trees whose identity is unknown. If you are willing to spend \$60 to find out what your old apple tree might be, just email [Yael](#) to join the effort.

On Saturday, February 3, at 2:00 pm, join us for an in-person get together with Vic Johanson. Vic will be in Anchorage to meet and talk with members about what he has been doing in Fairbanks. Vic is always fun to talk with. He is constantly experimenting with cultivars, grafting, and rootstocks, in an effort to out-flank the climatic limitations of where he lives. Treasurer Gary Masog has rented the Moose Room at the [Z.J. Loussac Library](#) on Saturday for us to get together and chat with Vic.

Our third presenter for the APFGA Winter Speaker Series will be Washington State University Tree Fruit Extension Specialist Tianna DuPont. I had the good fortune to attend Tianna's presentation at the 2022 Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Expo. She is a fantastic speaker that I encourage you not to miss. Click the link to join Tianna's presentation [Soil Health in Orchards](#) on Zoom on Thursday, February 8, 2024 at 7:00 pm. As a primer, I recommend that you read her 2020 article in Good Fruit Grower titled, [Soil Biology in Orchards](#). I am thrilled to have her present to the club and hope you will not miss this opportunity to learn more about what constitutes "healthy soil." If needed, here is the full [Zoom invitation](#).

The Orchard Bee Association (OBA) will be hosting a live webinar and Q&A session on February 21, at 4:00 – 5:30 pm, for both new and longtime orchard bee enthusiasts. Presenters include four bee experts who will talk about what a [Blue Orchard bee](#) is, how to manage them in an orchard setting, and how to manage them in a backyard gardener setting. Tickets for attendance are \$15 and all proceeds go towards OBA funding and future activities. Click the link for [ticketing information](#).

Also on Wednesday, February 21, your APFGA Board of Directors will meet on Zoom at 7:00 pm. APFGA members are welcome to attend. Click the links to attend the [Board of Directors Meeting](#), view the [agenda](#), the past [minutes](#), or the full [Zoom invitation](#).

I look forward to seeing everyone on Zoom for Tianna's presentation on February 8. Until then, stay warm and please, you can stop doing the snow dance!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA