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Hello Fruit Growers!

September was a busy month between harvest and APFGA activities. We held apple pressings in Anchorage and Wasilla. Between the two, we pressed almost 3 tons of member-grown apples! We concluded the month with an amazing fruit/apple tasting in Wasilla (photo above) that featured about 100 samples. Many thanks to our event hosts Mark & Sharmin Oathout, Michael Burke and the leadership and guidance of Mark Findlay and Doug Damberg, as well as the many fabulous volunteers and contributors of fruit who made the events possible.

At the tasting, I was impressed by the many beautiful examples of Prairie Magic. The apples were large and sweet. Our first Prairie Magic apples grown on Geneva 935 rootstock had a brix (a measurement of sugar) of 14.5° as measured by a [hand-held refractometer](#). The brix of our Prairie Magic apples on established trees on M. baccata were consistently between 13-14°. An early drop was an astounding 15°.

Commercial apple growers consider a brix of 12° as good, and 13° or more as excellent. How do your apples rate? Well, you'll never know if you don't spend the \$20 for a refractometer! The instrument is inexpensive, and it is fun to note the sugar levels of the various fruits that we grow. I like to slice the apple and then with the blade of the knife, scrape a bit of juice from the open side of the apple slice. The area near the skin is sometimes sweeter and will give an inflated reading. Getting juice from the entire radius of the apple I think leads to more accurate measurements. I then just tip my knife down and place a drop on the refractometer glass.

Apples that produce good sugar levels before being completely ripe are especially suitable for locations that may have shortened seasons from limited Growing Degree Day (GDD) accumulation. Apples like Prairie Magic and Carroll are still great tasting even if harvested slightly before being fully ripe. In our orchard, we experience the same effect with slightly later apple cultivars like Sunrise, Prairie Sensation, and KinderKrisp (Mac 2137). They sometimes require more GDDs than Mother Nature provides but still develop a brix of 13° or more by the time we harvest. Most importantly, they are great eating.

As for what was new at the tasting, I was impressed by my first tasting of the cultivar Redfree. Flavor and texture were very good, and it is supposed to store well. I ordered scion wood and grafted the cultivar two years ago on G.935, so maybe we'll have our first Redfree apples next fall. Then I will know more about its ripening time and growing characteristics.

Below are the Growing Degree Day (GDD) amounts for September, the September 4-year average, and the current GDD year to date (YTD) total. Ground temperature at 6" is 51.5° F.

September 2025	4 yr Average	YTD total
332 GDD/42°	275 GDD/42°	2502 GDD/42°

We have been fortunate that we have had a cloudy/wet cycle of weather. This has kept nighttime temperatures above freezing. The end of the growing season for apples is dependent upon when we get a severe radiative cooling event (clear night) that puts the temperature below 28° F for more than 4 hours. When that is predicted, I recommend that you pick any remaining apples beforehand. Keep in mind that forecasts change daily in Alaska, and you need to correct for the temperature predicted for your location. For example, our phone weather app low temperature prediction is generally 5 degrees warmer than what we experience, especially on a clear night. If you have to pick after a freeze let the apples warm up before harvesting.

Here are some other tasks to be done in preparation for winter:

- Put on tree guards, rodent screens, and/or paint trunks with diluted cheap white latex paint
- Be prepared to knock an early snow off trees that still have leaves.
- Tie up and stake young bushes for snow load
- Tie trees (1-10 years old) to stakes for snow load
- Head laterals on purple raspberries to 8"
- Secure raspberry primocanes for winter
- Mulch strawberries once ground freezes
- Take steps to reduce vole populations
- Remove all fruit or leaves from under trees that had fungal infections



We took advantage of the sunny weather and picked and pitted the remainder of our Evans (Bali) cherries yesterday (photo above). The Evans tree is on its own rootstock and yielded 19 lbs of cherries which translated into 10 quarts of pitted cherries. The cherries had an average brix of 12° as measured from the juice in the pit-box of the pitter. Our other Evans was picked 16 days earlier with a brix of 11°. So, in just over two weeks the brix rose 1°.

The cherries were large and juicy with a cull rate of only 10% indicating that this cultivar held up against the recent heavy rains pretty well. The major downside of the Evans cherry is the large size of the pit. They wear out the pitter gasket very quickly. After being frozen, these cherries render more juice when thawed than the Romance cherries and consequently may be better suited for drying. Unfortunately, the juiciness of the cherries also means that the pitter upstroke sometimes fails to lift the cherry.

Despite those shortcomings I can pit at a rate of about 20 lbs/hour. I have learned that it is best to pit cherries outside. Pitting cherries is not recommended anywhere near painted walls. Red juice squirts everywhere! Consequently, I set up a make-shift platform on the edge of our deck so that the height of the pitter is comfortable to use and I am well away from the walls of the house.

We will hold an APFGA Board of Directors meeting on Wednesday, October 8, at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Members are welcome to attend by clicking the [Zoom link](#). Here are the links to the proposed [agenda](#), previous meeting [minutes](#), and the full [Zoom invitation](#) if needed.

One of the Board agenda items is to prepare for the November 13 annual membership meeting. Each November, three or four of the seven board of director seats are up for renewal or replacement. Because our 300+ members are located from Fairbanks to Homer and beyond, we will hold the membership meeting on Zoom. If you are interested in serving on the board, please [email me](#) no later than October 30. I will need to set up a poll on Zoom for the membership to vote at our meeting.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA

