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Editorial

Lessons We Should Have Learned from the 2002 Apple Marketing Season

It took the shortest crop in almost 50 years to increase fresh apple prices to the point where growers could make money this year. Even then it was hard work! Only by working together through Premier Apple Cooperative and by growers holding the line on bulk apple prices could growers get and hold a decent price. (We also had a lot of help from Mother Nature in providing one of the best coloring years we have had in a long time.) What does this tell us?

- Supply is critical!
- We have to stay informed, work together and hold the line in order to make money.

The process apple lesson is a bitter one. There is such an oversupply of process apples in New York State that it took diverting apples to fresh and cider markets and increased demand from out of state (and country) processors before the price increased. And this was only on the latest maturing varieties. Even this price increase did NOT surpass 10 cents per pound! What are the process apple lessons learned this year?

- Plan on losing money if you grow process Cortland, Wayne, Twenty Ounce, Greening, Monroe, McIntosh, or Empire for the applesauce market in the future. If these varieties were undesirable (as indicated by price) this year, the price will surely be less next year when New York and the nation have a more normal crop.
- The only way to make money growing the remaining process apple varieties will be to cut costs and increase production (probably over 900 bushel per acre). How many growers are in a position to cut costs and still increase production? Probably not many!
- If you didn't get any buyer respect or empathy this year, you are less likely to get it in the future.

I have little hope for strengthening peeler apple prices in the future. China has the capacity to double apple juice concentrate exports. Most of the countries exporting apple juice concentrate have living standards so low that they will continue to seek our dollar by sending the U.S. more apple juice concentrate. If there has been serious damage to Washington State's trees from the late October freezes, we could probably expect even more low quality apples being dumped into process markets next fall (similar to what happened after the 1968 freeze).

The big lessons that all apple growers should have learned this year are:

1. **PRESERVE ASSETS** for the future! Even though many growers are unlikely to remove unprofitable apple blocks this winter. You will be much better off removing all unprofitable blocks this winter and sitting the game out rather than wasting your time, money and energy losing money in an oversupplied market next year.
2. The future rests with growers keeping informed and controlling supply **together** (tree removal and adequate thinning)! A huge crop next year could undermine any progress made with fresh buyers this year. No one can survive going back to the fresh apple prices of 2001.
3. Supplying (not oversupplying) varieties demanded by consumers is the name of the game.
4. We cannot work together if we don't share information; we need cooperation among growers and marketers and accurate tree surveys for strategic planning both on the individual farm level and on an industry-wide level. We are all in this together—there is no honor in being the last man standing when the infrastructure that supports the industry has been gutted.

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FRONT COVER: World apple markets? Rosy or bleak? An article by Desmond O'Rourke examines world trends and how they impact the situation in New York. Credits: Illustration by Elaine Gotham.

BACK COVER: Measurement of whole tree photosynthesis with mylar balloons helps determine the effect of summer pruning on apple trees. Credit: Alan Lakso

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