

# New Ways To Make Money On The Farm

## Old Varieties Boost Business At Apple Orchard

There are many good reasons why commercial apple growers switched away from the old apple varieties. They can be difficult to grow, store and ship.

But what, unfortunately, was lost was outstanding flavor and texture. Louis Lego decided to go back to the heirloom varieties and, as a result, his orchard business is thriving.

"There are so many different varieties with so many different flavors," explains Lego, co-owner of Elderberry Pond Farm, Auburn, N.Y. "New York once had hundreds of varieties."

Elderberry Pond Farm is a 100-acre farm producing organic fruit, vegetables and flowers for sale at the farm and at local farmers' markets. While some new apple varieties are raised, the marketing niche Lego has carved out centers on the older ones.

Some of Lego's favorites include the

Spitzenberg, which was introduced from France by Thomas Jefferson, and Cox's Orange Pippin and the Caville Blanc.

"The Spitzenberg has a very strong flavor, but many of our customers get hooked on it," says Lego. "Cox's Orange Pippin apples were developed just for cider. We make an heirloom blend that is just extraordinary, like a nectar almost."

Caville Blanc is a French baking apple that Lego admits "tastes pretty bad before it is stored. Store it for six or seven months, and it changes color and taste and then bakes up creamy and smooth, almost unlike an apple."

Selling heirloom apples is an education process, warns Lego. He points out that people have to taste the varieties for themselves.

"It takes a long time to get people to try apples they haven't heard of," he says. "People are trained to look for Red Delicious,

and these heirlooms may be either flat or conical and have a russet color or a thick skin."

Growing heirlooms is also a learning process. Golden Russets that Lego planted early on were green and bitter when they started bearing fruit. He cut down most of them and regrets it today.

"It took ten years for the trees to mature, and now the fruit is just wonderful," he says. "I wish I still had every one I cut."

Lego advises talking to university specialists about regional sources and looking for old books on apple production. One of his favorite sources for trees is Southmeadow Gardens in Michigan. ([www.southmeadowfruitgardens.com](http://www.southmeadowfruitgardens.com); ph 269 422-2411). Their catalog supplies a history of each variety.

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Old apple varieties have outstanding flavor and texture, says Louis Lego, whose orchard specializes in heirloom varieties.

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## Custom Trainer Teaches Animals To Do Tricks

Dan Wallen knows tricks and how to train animals to do them. The fourth generation trainer has trained donkeys, mules, llamas, goats, cattle, camels, zebras and buffalo to ride, drive and do tricks. Wallen keeps an inventory of animal acts on hand for sale or lease and has several acts leased out to circuses and animal shows. He also custom trains animals and is currently working with animals from 8 different states.

"All animals can learn," says Wallen. "Just like people, some learn easier. It all depends on their personality."

The Bluffton, Ind., animal trainer charges \$750 per month for board, room and training. He likes to have each animal for a minimum of three months, in which he will teach them 10 to 12 different things, such as walking a plank and a teeter board, rolling a barrel, climbing up on a pedestal, lay-

ing down, riding and driving.

"I start off teaching them to lead and come forward, then to march and get up on pedestals," says Wallen. "The more they learn, the easier it is to learn the next trick."

The longer he has an animal and the more eager it is to learn, the better trained it will be. Wallen has a crème colored pony that is the only one he knows of in the world that can climb up on a barrel and roll it with all four feet. It is also trained to do a wide variety of other acts, such as sitting up like a dog, something Wallen says only his family members know how to teach.

He has also trained buffalo to ride under saddle, kneel, walk on their knees and lay down.

One of his specialties is the 'liberty act', which involves training a group of horses, ponies or zebras to work loose with no lead.

When he is done, they will dance, waltz, move two abreast, then four and then six abreast, all on command.

The value of the training quickly exceeds the value of the animal. "You can take a \$2,000 horse, and when it is trained, it can be worth \$15,000," says Wallen.

The trainer recently offered his first ever training clinic with plans to video tape it and offer training tapes for sale. While mostly geared toward horses, Wallen says the same technique works with all animals.

"I just adapt them a little for each one," he adds.

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Dan Wallen custom trains animals to do tricks.

## Demand Grows For Red Meat Pork

Business is booming for "the other red meat," says a Minnesota meat processor who specializes in Berkshire hogs, a breed known for its dark red meat and outstanding flavor.

Until the recent Atkins meat-eating craze, the ancient breed was out of favor because of its higher fat content. But now Doug Smith of Geneva, Minn., says he can't process enough meat to satisfy the market.

"We could sell the meat from 250 head a week if we had it," says the owner of Geneva meats. "In six months, we hope to be processing 400 head per week, and we don't even have a full time salesman. The product sells itself. Little old ladies from Florida are calling for it. You know you have a good product when you get repeat orders."

Smith has worked with the American Berkshire Association and various Berkshire breeders to define and market the meat both in Japan and domestically. He pays Berkshire breeders \$55/cwt, a full \$15 over average cash hog prices for most of the past year.

Demand in the U.S., says Smith, is tied to the amount of fat on the carcass and marbled throughout the meat compared to most modern pork. Overseas demand is based not only on the fat and flavor, but the dark red color. In much of Europe and Japan, the redder the pork, the better. He describes Berkshire as the pork equivalent to prime beef.

Rodney Goodwin, Ames, Iowa, is riding the demand curve for Berkshires. In ten years, he has grown his sow herd from 25 to 400. He owns all the sows, but contracts with others to breed and finish the animals.

Demand is strong now, but that wasn't always so, says Goodwin. He credits the USDA certification system for much of the current demand.

"Before, anybody could sell pigs and claim they were Berkshires," says Goodwin.

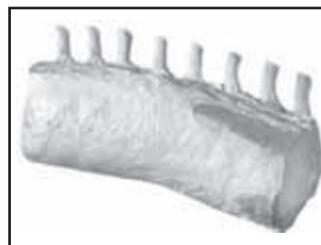
To be certified, all pigs have to be purebred Berkshires with pedigrees to prove it. All Berkshire sires also have to be tested for two genes, and any health products or feed additives have to be used at labeled status to avoid any food safety concerns. Through the program, any pork labeled as Berkshire can be traced back to the farm where it was raised.

Goodwin also sells breeding stock with gilts going for \$250 each. Boars sell from \$500 to \$1,000 each, depending on the number purchased at one time.

He cautions the Berkshire business isn't for everyone. "Raising purebred pigs is not like raising cross breeds," says Goodwin. "Purebreds aren't as robust as cross breeds, so it takes better management skills to get sows bred and to get pigs to weaning. Once they get to weaning, they are an easy growing pig."

He also points out that a breeder should know he has a market for his pigs. Smith is doing his best to build such markets. Although it has taken him three years to get the business to its present point, he sees lots of

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growth ahead. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal boosted his and Berkshire pork's visibility. Orders poured in.

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Berkshire meat, right, is much darker than conventional pork, left.

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