



Apples are smaller and earlier this year

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

The summer drought that's taxed farmers from Berwick to Bowdoinham may take a toll on this year's apple harvest. Commercial growers in southern and central Maine, the heart of the state's apple region, are focused on the next few weeks to determine the nature, size and quality of the fruit.

After last year's bumper crop, it was expected that this year's yield would be less impressive, but how much less? That's up to Mother Nature.

"I don't think it's going to be the end of the world, it's a matter of sizing," said Andy Ricker, owner of Ricker Hill Orchards, based in Turner, where 30 percent of his apple trees are irrigated.

"Some varieties will struggle with size, macs and galas. It all depends on how much rain we get in the next two weeks. In two to three weeks, we will pick," said Ricker. "If we have a wet September we'll be OK."

Compared to Massachusetts, wilting under an extreme drought, Maine's commercial orchards are faring well, according to industry trackers.

"The northern states seem to be in the best shape. From the center on up, there is good moisture," said Russell Powell, a spokesman for the New England Apple Association, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit.

"We are getting good reports from Vermont, central New Hampshire and central Maine. Maine will do pretty well this year region wide," said Powell, author of the book "Apples of New England: A User's Guide."

Though apples may be smaller than usual, and in some cases not as colorful, a dry spring and summer has caused little damage to spring blooms. On the upside, the drought kept harmful hail storms at bay.

But this year's mixed forecast is tricky.

Home orchardists, watching apples drop in August, may be fooled by what they see.

At first blush "apples seem to be ripening early, but they are not ripening, they are stressed because of the lack of water," said John Bunker, an agricultural historian who tends to an heirloom orchard in Palermo. "The tree is shedding the apple because it doesn't want it, it's a nuisance. It is taxing the tree."

Where orchards are planted matters, said Bunker.

"Commercial orchards, as a rule, have the best locations with the best soils because people were smart," said Bunker. "There is

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One of three energy-efficient homes can be seen recently on Fern Street in Bangor. Bob and Suzanne Kelly, building renovators, are developing a "green pocket neighborhood" on the site of an old dry-cleaning facility.

Green neighborhood

Home renovators adapt new ideas to traditional setting

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

On Fern Street in Bangor, in the modest block between Garland Street and Mount Hope Avenue, there's a bright new addition to the housing stock. On the site of a former commercial laundry and dry cleaning plant, three custom designed, super energy-efficient houses have been built in the past two years, with room for three more.

These homes are different from the others on Fern Street. Their exterior walls are 16 inches thick and filled with rockwool and cellulose. The windows are triple-glazed and seal as tightly as a refrigerator door. Banks of solar cells cover the south-facing slopes of the roofs. The landscaping trends toward edible permaculture, boasting raised vegetable beds, native fruit trees and berry bushes instead of grassy lawns and flowering shrubs.

This is Bangor EcoHomes, a small but ambitious sustainable-living project developed by husband-and-wife team Bob and Suzanne Kelly, owners of House Revivers and Kelly Realty Management. The couple, longtime members of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Bangor and active with the Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine, has renovated and remodeled dozens of in-town properties over the past 20 years — including many historic buildings. They currently manage about 65 apartments, of-



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David Kelly (left) and his mother, Suzanne Kelly, show off an energy-efficient house during a tour recently.

fices and commercial spaces.

Now, with their 30-year-old son, David Kelly, as a consultant and designer, they've entered the single-family home market, aiming to attract like-minded buyers to their ambitious new mini-development.

"We're calling it a green pocket neighborhood," Suzanne Kelly said. "It's open to people of all ages, but it's ideal for elders in many ways."

Bangor EcoHomes is a bit like the intentional community model of co-housing, she explained, but without the commitment to bylaws, committee work and planned group activities. Also, unlike many co-

housing projects, the Fern Street project is not in a rural setting but in an established neighborhood.

The project offers many advantages that appeal to older Mainers, Kelly said, including its energy efficiency, a spirit of shared values and a livable, walkable intown vibe.

Plus, she said, "We like the idea that we're improving the neighborhood."

"We're drawing from history, re-using what we can, fitting into the existing community and trying to make it better," Kelly said. "We've never done anything like this before."

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Music made under the pines at Fiddle Camp

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

MONTVILLE — Doug Protsik hopped off his bicycle on a mid-August day and took a moment to absorb to the music that rose up to the white pine trees towering over Maine Fiddle Camp.

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

His gaze lit on a group of people practicing swing dance steps, then at a knot of folks concentrating hard on practicing some licks on the double bass. Off in the distance some campers played their fiddles with happy abandon, the old-fashioned strains of a jig causing toes to tap and heads to nod.

When asked what he thought when he looked around, Protsik, a 66-year-old professional musician from Woolwich and the long-time director of Maine Fiddle Camp, had to take a moment before he can answer.

"It's just so wonderful," the director said, with the glint of tears in his eyes. "I see so many good things going on all the time. Love and support, inspiration — all things positive.



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It can be so powerful and overwhelming. It's amazing what I see and hear when I travel around the camp."

Welcome to Maine Fiddle Camp, which is held several times a summer on the grounds of Camp NEOFA — owned by the Northeast Oddfellow Association — in Montville. It's not a typical summer camp at all, and though it is located on quiet True's Pond in Montville, people don't come here to frolic in the water and cool off in the August heat. Instead, they come in droves from across the country and beyond to immerse themselves in traditional music at the camp. It's a music camp for people of all ages and all abilities. They stay in rustic cabins or in tents, and spend most of their time playing music and improving their skills, which can range from rudimentary to near-professional.

Protsik, who was one of seven founding

members who worked to start the camp in 1994, said that in the beginning it was a fairly low-key effort and stopped altogether during the summer of 1997. It was restarted the following year, and in the fall of 2000, the musician — who plays fiddle, piano and accordion — took it over, despite being told by others that the camp would never be a significant success and that there would never be more than 100 students interested in it.

"It stuck in my craw to drop it," he said. "Somebody's got to do it."

And it was him. Sixteen years later, it's working out very well, Protsik said, with attendance and interest steadily increasing all along. In 2001, the first year he was responsible for Maine Fiddle Camp, it was held on just one weekend in June, with 150 people there. Over the years he has added another weekend

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Assistance programs changing to meet needs

BY JULIA BAYLY
BDN STAFF

For years, federal agriculture funding programs took a one-size-fits-all approach, but thanks to United States Department of Agriculture policy changes over the last couple of years, agencies are better able to help a wider range of farmers and farming operations — including those in Maine.

"It's surprising how many people are not aware of what we can do to help," Amanda May, program specialist with the federal Farm Services Agency, said. "When they do finally find and contact us, they will say they wish they had known about us sooner."

That's because, according to May and her colleagues, federal agricultural assistance programs for decades were tailored to meet the needs of the larger farms in midwestern states, leaving smaller farmers in the dust.

But as the face of agriculture has changed so, too, have the pro-

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