



THE STOUFFER REPORT

Senator Bill Stouffer
Capitol Building, Room 332

Senate District 21
Jefferson City, MO 65101

For the Week of:
January 28, 2008

Contact: Aaron Baker
(573) 751-1507

A Local Apple A Day

Agriculture is the anchor of our economy. Sometimes in our part of the state we just think about livestock and row crops. I've come to realize agriculture expands beyond the traditional pictures of cows and plows. Can you remember driving down Highway 24 or another scenic byway and stopping at one of our local apple orchards? Whether we realize it or not, apples are impacting agriculture more than ever.

With increased concerns about health and nutrition, it is no wonder that our food industry is making changes to meet consumer demands, including fresh fruit production.

You have seen the ads. Today's health and fitness world is offering options for everyone. Sometimes the choices can be over-whelming. If you are like me, you may wish for the simple things in life. Whatever happened to the days when eating healthy was as easy as hearing your mother say, "Eat your veggies."

With growing health trends encouraging individuals to eat foods rich in nutrients, apples are a popular commodity. The significance of Missouri's apple industry hits close to home, with a strong presence of apple orchards right here in our own area. You have likely been driving down a country highway and stopped to visit a local orchard with a roadside market.

Like other farmers, apple producers are looking for opportunities to improve their fruit. By finding improved methods and seed varieties, orchards can make their quality products even better.

MORE

You would not believe how much apple production impacts Missouri:

- The leading Jonathan producer in the state is located in Lafayette County, averaging 300,000 bushels of apples each year (less than 10,000 after last year's freeze).
- In 2006, Missouri's apple crop ranked 15th in cash receipts for agriculture commodities.
- Apples follow grape and orange production, ranking 3rd in most income earned by U.S. fruit producers.

Missouri orchards are currently retail-based and sell directly to consumers. This marks another trend benefiting our orchards. Buying local produce is becoming more and more popular. Orchards can benefit from direct sales because it increases their share of the food dollar for each apple sold from their farms.

Only two orchards in the entire state have continued business in the wholesale market, while also having a presence in the retail market. We are proud to have both of these family-owned orchards within our senate district. No matter the marketing and sales techniques, our producers offer quality products and also benefit our economy.

While health-conscious consumers have increased the demand for fresh fruit, our local apple producers are challenged by the limited amount of labor. This concern comes from the hands-on attention needed to grow and harvest the fruit. Producers hope for increased mechanization to limit their dependence on labor as well.

So, the next time you see an orchard in our area, consider stopping by and learning more about the industry. I cannot promise it will make you healthy, but you will be blown away by the work being done by some hard-working Missourians.

If you have any questions or comments about local producers in our state or any other topic, please call my office toll free (866) 768-3987 or send me an e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

- END -