

## APPLE ORCHARD Q & A'S

Q: Why are some rows marked closed and others open?

A: Apple varieties ripen at different times. Rows with STOP signs mean these varieties are not yet ripe. I have carefully chosen varieties to cover early September through October and planted them in seasonal order, so customers may pick at different times of the year.

Apples are not tomatoes. When TOMATOES change from small and green to big and red, they are ready to pick. The outside appearance of the apple does not equal its ripeness. Red varieties often color up before they are ripe. PLEASE CHECK OUT OUR PAPER ON THIS WEBSITE ON VARIETIES AND RIPENING TIMES.

Grocery stores will often have early and late varieties together in the produce section. These apples are stored so can be offered to you at the same time. U-Pick apples are available to you when they are ripe on the tree.

Q: Which are sweet apples - green or red?

A: When ripe and ready to pick, color has nothing to do with taste. I have sweet and tart green apples, and sweet and tart red apples. Some varieties are both sweet and tart. PLEASE CHECK OUT OUR PAPER ON THIS WEBSITE ON VARIETIES AND RIPENING TIMES.

Q: Are you open in bad weather?

A: Yes. I'm open on advertised days rain or shine, unless I run out of available varieties, which can happen if there has been a spring freeze that damages the crop.

Q: Why aren't you open all week?

A: Closed days are needed for cleaning the orchard and making and bottling cider for the next week.

Q: When does the season start and end?

A: We open the Friday closest to 1 September, and close when out of apples or people stop coming, usually mid-October, for a total of 6-7 weeks. If there are any apples remaining, they are taken to food banks by a fabulous glean team.

Q: Do you allow dogs?

A: Sadly, not anymore. There are several reasons why this policy has changed. 1) Increased numbers of apple pickers are competing with dogs they don't know, and although we are dog fans (there are 3 here on the farm), not everyone is. 2) There has been an increase in the numbers of visiting dogs which has sometimes made the orchard look more like a dog park (see #1). Although most dog owners have been respectful and obeyed the poop removal and leash requests, which we so appreciated, there have been exceptions (see #1).

Q: Am I guaranteed the quantity and variety of apple I want?

A: No. There are many factors that determine what we have when you get here. Mother Nature, the numbers of people who show up to pick, and the number of apples of each variety that people want all play a part.

We try to update the site and phone when possible but cannot determine what "a lot" means to you. The trees do what they can, but if you are looking for more certainty in your apple purchasing, please go to the produce section of your grocery store.

Q: Do you spray your apples?

A: Yes. The owner is certified by Virginia law every two years and attends meetings on new regulations and practices every year. She is also the only one who sprays the orchard to ensure safety quality and consistency. Some sprays are organic; others are not.

Q: Why don't you make more cider, so you don't run out?

A: The cider we make is "raw cider" (unpasteurized), which has a short shelf life. Quantities are made based on past year's purchases, this year's sales and the apples available to try and gauge how much we can sell during the week so we don't have to dump gallons (which makes us very sad). We cannot sell "hard" cider, which is what happens when it passes its sell-by date. Customers - and the Commonwealth of Virginia - expect our cider to be "sweet" (fresh and not hard), which is why we press each week just before sales start. You can of course do with it as you please once you get it home!

Q: Do you sell deer apples?

A: No. These are apples that are graded out as too small, disfigured or rotted for human consumption. We used to grade out these apples when Doe Creek Farm was a commercial orchard (100 acres; 50,000 bushels/year). Since the orchard is U-Pick ONLY now, and only 6.5 acres, there is no grading or provision for deer apples.

For our deer hunters: Try the area around Cana, VA (we recommend Ayers Orchard) where there are still commercial operations.

Q: Do you sell by the bushel?

A: No. We do not sell by volume, only by the pound. Check with larger orchards still commercially operating.

Q: Do you have already picked apples for sale?

A: No. The only exception is when other customers have enthusiastically picked more than they can pay for (this happens) and they must leave some with us for resale.

Q: Why do you only accept cash or checks?

A: Fees discourage our credit card use, especially when many purchases are very small. We have recently started accepting VENMO, although we don't widely advertise this since the internet can be a bit tricky on the mountain.

Q: When you close for the year, does this mean you are out of apples and cider?

A: Yes. We do not store apples or cider for later sales. Closed means it is time to start pruning our trees, and we hope to see you the following season.