Honeycrisp is a "Killer" Apple

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We think Honeycrisp is a "killer" apple for many reasons but its unique and highly desirable texture puts it in a class of its own. When we sampled Honeycrisp and Gala to hundreds of customers at our orchard, five out of six preferred Honeycrisp. Ninety percent of communication is said to be nonverbal. The unfiltered feedback we get is a resounding consumer endorsement for Honeycrisp. It comes in the form of words, facial gestures and the blatant honesty of children who insist on Honeycrisp over any other apple, choosing others in their homes only after the last Honeycrisp is gone.

Many apples we grow have more flavor intensity than Honeycrisp, some have the long keeping quality of Honeycrisp, a few are resistant to apple scab and moderately resistant to fire blight like Honeycrisp and some are frost resistant and bloom late like Honeycrisp but none combine as many of these desired traits as well as Honeycrisp. As an added bonus, Honeycrisp has big size, ceramic smooth skin, high yields and great precocity. Once people taste Honeycrisp they can never go back to the more chewy-textured apples. The bar has been raised with regard to texture expectation in apples and, since texture trumps flavor in almost every tasting showdown, we have planted 3,000 trees exclusively for our U-pick market. We have planted none for the wholesale market because we cannot compete on the basis of Honeycrisp color from our location in central Ohio. Even though much of the public is weary of gorgeous mediocrity in apples, color still drives sales in the impersonal supermarket setting.

We believe that apple consumption per capita will rise as more Honeycrisp are grown. Perhaps more importantly, when the next generation of apples has arisen from crosses using Honeycrisp as one of the parents we will have a plethora of flavors and maturity dates with the Honeycrisp texture, disease resistance, large size, early precocity, ceramic smooth skin, long keeping quality and frost resistance necessary to put profitability back into the apple business. Hopefully the new cultivars will be patented, trademarked and sold in quantities limited to the market's ability to absorb the production at profitable prices. With product superiority, supply control through market cooperatives and heavy promotion for market development, a new era of profitable production can emerge like a phoenix from the ashes of overproduction and underconsumption.

Honeycrisp has some storage and maturity problems yet to be reliably resolved and it has an undesirable foliage anomaly, but we believe this to be trivial compared to the hope Honeycrisp brings the industry through increased apple consumption driven by a strong expression of consumer preference.

This is purely anecdotal but, when we were too late with the petal fall spray which targets plum curculio here on a row of test trees along our son's driveway, every apple had 3 to 6 egg-laying scars except the 20 apples on the one limb of Honeycrisp that had been budded onto a Spartan tree. Every one of the 200 or more Spartan apples, like the rest of the apples along the driveway, had the egg-laying scars of the plum curculios but there were none on any of the Honeycrisp apples. This was not intended as a test but rather a case of forgetting about the trees along the driveway until the trees we make a living from were all sprayed. Ed Fackler, a former grower, skipped a Honeycrisp tree on the petal fall spray the next year and he said his Honeycrisp were damaged by the plum curculios but less than expected. This may be worth looking into by an entomologist. Honeycrisp is a weird apple with some weird traits and there may be something unique with regard to curculio preference and something about Honeycrisp.

Our experience is limited to 4-year-old trees mostly on M.9 and a few on M.7. As expected, the M.9s produced heavily in the third and fourth years while the M.7s had only a modest crop in the fourth year. We have not seen any symptoms of calcium deficiency on the M.9s but plenty on the more vigorous and undercropped M.7s. If they start to drop, we waited too long to pick for best storage life and flesh quality.

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