

PROGRESS REPORT
North Central Region
Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program

Progress Report Year: 2012

Project Title: Preservation and Diversification of Heirloom and Antique Apple Varieties in Southern Ohio

Project Number: FNC12-865

Producer/Project Leader: Jo Huff

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Website: none (old site) – new site in the works

1. *Describe in detail your work activities and how you used your grant funds this year. (Use another sheet if necessary.)*

2012 June – August: Removed existing vegetation (grass) from planting area. Prepared planting area by creating raised beds using soil – no wood was used. Installation of fence using one piece (16 foot long) cow panels, wooden posts. Gates were made using cow panels. Beds prepared with clean topsoil, composted horse manure, and ProMix soil-less mix. Soil prepared using pH and moisture meters. Soil was allowed to set before testing. May need to extend the top of the fence to prevent access by deer but currently no issue.

Known historic orchards and/or trees were identified and mapped according to farm owner for use by OU students. See examples, Figures 1, 2, and 3. This inventory and mapping has been started but we are continuing to add as apple trees are found. During spring 2013 it was noted that yet unidentified apple trees were visible when blooming, not as noticeable otherwise.

2012 September – December: Field work included interviews and data collection. Apple identification will be ongoing. An inventory spreadsheet was developed to identify the tree location, date the tree(s) were located, GPS data, historic landowner, current landowner, and apple tree variety. The Rome Beauty orchard owned by the Gillett family was destroyed by the current property owner/local developer. See Figure 3. We are now trying to locate trees within Rome Township that still exist.

Continuing historic research including courthouse deeds, libraries, landowners, and agricultural journals.

Newsletter published and attached.

2013 January – February: Scion collection was to begin with list of at-risk heirloom trees. The root stock needed for the grafted trees has proved to be rather expensive given the unpredictability of grafting. Since the farm owner has assumed the cost of root stock, grafting will continue, yet there may be more emphasis on the rooter pots if they prove to be successful. The use of the pots was discussed with growers in Washington State, many of which use grafting practices less frequently. This is an experiment in progress but we have made efforts to talk with those growers with more experienced in collection and grafting.

OUS naturalist, Adam Wilson and the farm owner visited Montroso Apple Orchards north of Ironton. The orchard has been a long time viable orchard but appears to have been abandoned more recently. There are numerous trees but it is unknown yet what varieties are within the orchard. Adam will be interviewing family members in the spring but the operator, Mr. Montroso, apparently passed away which may be the reason the orchard seems unattended. It is not known if any family members know the extent of the tree varieties or if they will work with us in preserving them. See Figure 1.

2013 Mar – June: Rooter pots shall be utilized on specific heirloom trees to determine if the use can provide viable healthy trees. The maintenance of the rooting pots is currently unknown in the Ohio Valley.

This activity will likely extend beyond June so that we can add as many trees as possible. I am a bit concerned that we will cause damage or disease to trees so we have been careful to disinfect all tools, knives, etc.. prior to each use.

OUS students are working on a website for Hillgate Farm of which the apples research will be displayed along with farm information.

2. *List the results of your project and what you have learned so far.*

See results in item 1.

According to the book titled the *Hanging Rock Iron Furnace Region* published in 1916, "ask any Ohio apple grower if he knows Lawrence County apples. Investigate the award of premiums at the Ohio State Fair for the past ten years, inquire of the managers of the state and national apple shows and let them tell you what Lawrence County can produce in the way of apples. For a dozen years half the Ohio State Fair premiums given the apple exhibitors have come from Lawrence County."

Further, there was a Rome Beauty Growers Association and a United Growers Association in the county. Mr. U.T. Cox at one time had over 15,000 trees in his orchard and was known as one of the best orchardists in the United States. An aerial photo of his former home and land is attached in Figure 2. Property is now owned by Mary Ann Ater.

In 1816, Joel Gillett, a native of Connecticut, moved into the Marietta Ohio area and later down the Ohio River to the Proctorville area, then known as Quaker Bottom. Gillett brought with him fruit tree seedlings from Putnam Nurseries in Marietta. Those tree seedlings had come from Putnam Orchards in Connecticut. The Rome Beauty

apple, then known as “Gillett’s Seedling”, was initially grown by Joel Gillett and his son Alanson. An aerial photo of the Gillett home place and remaining orchard is attached as Figure 3.

3. *Describe your work plan for next year.*

2013 Mar – June: Rooting pots shall be utilized on specific heirloom trees to determine if the use can provide viable healthy trees.

2013 July: Lawrence County Fair Booth display for heirloom apples.

2013 August – November: OU students begin site visits and collection of data. Tree identification continues. Maintenance occurs for successfully planted scions and rooting pot trees.

2014 January – April: Evaluation of the project. Compilation of data, lessons learned, mapping locations, letters from the public and antique and heirloom apple inventory list of varieties located in Lawrence County, inventory list of successful scions and rooting pot trees. Final report compiled for SARE. In addition to the report an Antique and Heirloom Apple Manual for Southern Ohio shall be prepared to provide a history, locations (mapping), list of apple varieties found in Lawrence County and a how-to section about grafting, rooting pots and more. Hillgate Farm spring newsletter edition will discuss the project and future plans for preserving antique and heirloom apples. Final press release about the project and encouragement to other small farmers to apply for SARE funding.

4. *How did you share information from your project with others? (Include the number of people who attended field days or demonstrations.) What plans do you have for sharing information next year?*

Published quarterly newsletters.

Press release.

Interviews and site visits.

Students currently working on new website.

Booth set up at the Lawrence County Fairgrounds summer 2013.

5. *Send completed report by e-mail (e-mail is preferred) or mail to:*

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Figure 1 – Montroso Orchard

Lawrence County Ohio



Figure 2 – Former U.T. Cox Property

Lawrence County Ohio



Figure 3 – Gillett Orchard, Home of the Rome Beauty Apple. Trees were destroyed in 2012 by current landowner/developer.

Lawrence County Ohio