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Apple crop plentiful, ready to pick

By JENNIFER KEEFE

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Sunday, September 18, 2011

DOVER — There's nothing sour about this year's apple crop.

Orchard owners across the Seacoast are raving about the output, using words like "beautiful," "bountiful" and, most importantly for families and apple picking enthusiasts looking to start fall traditions as soon as possible, "ready for picking."

At Applecrest Farm Orchards in Hampton Falls, owner Todd Wagner said this year's crop is a significant improvement over last year's.

"We have a bumper crop, actually," he said Wednesday. "We managed to weather the hurricane; we had a minimal drop and pretty much all the apples stayed in the trees, fortunately."

Wagner explained the farm had lost about 80 percent of its apple crop to a late frost in the spring last year. However, when a tree doesn't have a crop



EJ Hersom/Staff photographer
A tractor pulls a wagon through the apple orchards at DeMeritt Hill Farm in Lee Friday.

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to produce, all the tree's energy goes into producing fruiting wood and foliage, which produces "a real boom" the following year when all that energy goes into creating a new apple crop.

"It has produced a really bountiful crop across all varieties," he said.

Orchard owners say they got lucky this year that Tropical Storm Irene, which was classified as a hurricane until it reached the New England area, didn't do more damage.

"We dodged a bullet from the hail and heavy wind," said Meg Wilson, owner of DeMeritt Hill Farm in Lee.

The farm's apple, peach and nectarine crop had suffered in previous years from hail and frost damage. Wilson said she's glad to be looking at a full crop this year even after the storm's heavy winds and several days of precipitation.

"The apples are really good this year," she said. "Even though we had nine days of rain during the 12 days of pollination, we have a great crop."

She said they brought peaches inside before Irene hit to make sure they wouldn't be damaged or fall off the trees.

Jenn Hall, an employee at Butternut Farm in Farmington, said their apple crop looks "really really good" and they "didn't lose much of anything" in the storm. There was some hail in early June, but the apples weathered through and are ready for picking.

Several varieties of apples are ready for picking at orchards around the area, including McIntosh and Cortland. More varieties like Ginger Gold, Macoun, Honeycrisp, Red Delicious and Gala are also expected at many orchards as the season continues.

The apple season is expected to last until about the end of October and possibly into November.

Apple Annie in Brentwood opened last weekend and Owner Laurie Loosigian raved about the available crop there.

Despite storm winds that took down one apple tree and numerous limbs, she said the apples are plentiful and ready for picking. For Loosigian as well, it's an improvement over previous years.

"A year ago, we didn't have a crop," she said. "We lost a whole crop because of an early bloom and frost in May."

This fall is a deliciously different story.

"There's tons and tons of apples," she said. "It's so bountiful."



EJ Hersom/Staff photographer
Apple pickers take to the
orchards at DeMeritt Hill
Farm in Lee Friday.

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**EJ Hersom/Staff photographer
Andrea Fennell picks apples at
DeMeritt Hill Farm in Lee
Friday.**

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**EJ Hersom/Staff photographer
Bob Colwell bites into an apple
at DeMeritt Hill Farm in Lee
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