



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



**Topic:** There's Still Time to Pick Your Own Apples

**Date:** November 6, 2009

**Location:** Barden Family Orchard  
56 Elmdale Road, North Scituate/Glocester

## **Background**

The cool, rainy weather Rhode Island experienced this summer was perfect for growing this year's fall harvest of apples. Rhode Island apple growers are still harvesting an excellent crop of apples, and many orchards throughout the state continue to be open for pick-your-own activities while offering several varieties of apples including Macoun, Mutsu, Empire, Idared, Red and Golden Delicious, Fuji, Cameo, and more. Fresh, locally-made cider is also available at many orchards.

Not all orchards are open, so call ahead. Orchard information is available at the DEM website <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/pdf/riapples.pdf>, and the RI Fruit Growers website, <http://www.rifruitgrowers.org>

Support local agriculture and treat yourself to the best the land has to offer.

Buying locally-grown products provides many benefits, particularly during an economic downturn. It strengthens the local community by investing the food dollar close to home. It recycles money and keeps it local longer though local wages and suppliers. A dollar spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy. And not only does RI's farming industry help fuel our local economy and protect our environment (saving on fuel costs and reducing the chances of contamination), it protects our physical resources and superior quality of life by preserving endangered farms, open space and our families' health and wellness.

The Department of Environmental Management's Division of Agriculture promotes and markets Rhode Island farms so that Rhode Islanders are aware of all the offerings provided by farms throughout the year. The Rhode Island agricultural business offers great activities for people of all ages. The fall season presents a perfect time for apple picking, hot apple cider, pumpkin picking and other fun activities such as hayrides and corn mazes.

Farms across Rhode Island have been a source of fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables for many years. Now, with the agri-tourism industry growing, many farms have diversified in order

to offer their visitors fun and educational experiences of what farm life is like along with their fresh produce.

### **Pick-Your-Own Apples at Barden Family Orchard in North Scituate**

Barden Family Orchard in North Scituate offers the opportunity to “pick your own” apples. The orchard was founded in 1931 by newlyweds John and Hazel Barden, who planted some of the first apple trees along the eastern edge of the orchard. These trees are the oldest trees on the farm, and are evidence to John Barden’s keen interest in the science of apple growing. They were “grafted” many years ago, meaning that a new cutting was placed in the notch of a branch of an existing tree to produce an additional variety on that tree. These particular trees have a mixture of Cortland, Macintosh, and Macoun branches on them. John was excited to experiment with new apple varieties and enjoyed growing fruit into his early 80s.

Like his grandfather, current farm owner Gilbert Barden also has a strong interest in horticulture and loves to farm. In the 1980s, he and his grandfather began to replant much of the orchard to both semi dwarf apple trees as well as peaches. He also began to plant pumpkins and winter squash for more diversity.

Barden Family Orchard now grows many varieties of apples, pumpkins, winter squash, peaches, and sweet corn, and has added raspberries, tomatoes, summer squash, zucchini, cucumbers and eggplant and blueberries.

In 2005, the Bardens became full-time farmers, dedicating themselves to growing quality fruits and vegetables for those who are dedicated to buying locally grown produce. Since then, the entire Barden Family has been involved in the farm. They work together from crop production through harvest, attending farmer’s markets around Rhode Island, and meeting their customers who make their annual trip to pick apples and peaches, or those who purchase freshly picked fruits and vegetables at their farm market. Currently, Gilbert, Sandra, Andrew, Stacey, and Luke Barden actively work during the growing season at the farm, and are dedicated to growing the finest quality and best tasting fruit and vegetables for Rhode Island families.

### **Apples, Other Local Products Available Year-round at Farmers’ Markets**

If you don’t have an opportunity to pick your own apples at Barden Family Orchard, you can purchase their apples, squash and cider at two wintertime farmers’ markets in RI. These include the Hope Artiste Village farmers’ market in Pawtucket, and the Lafayette Mill farmers’ market in North Kingstown, which are open on Saturdays.

Interest in purchasing locally-grown produce and in farmers’ markets has grown over the years. Nationally, farmers’ markets have seen a 71-percent increase over the past decade, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, and there are currently nearly 40 throughout RI – a significant increase from 15 years ago – and evidence that Rhode Islanders appreciate and *want* to consume locally grown vegetables, fruits and products. Locally grown food, often picked within 24 hours of purchase, is fresher, more nutrient rich, and tastes better than shipped in, nationally produced supermarket food. And eating locally allows for more variety and the ability

to eat foods in season when they're at their peak taste, most abundant, and least expensive – even during winter.

**Interviewees:**

Peter Susi of DEM's Division of Agriculture discussed the importance of buying locally-grown fruits and vegetables for healthy eating as well as supporting local farmers; the availability of these products at farmers' markets; how DEM works with apple growers and other farmers to promote their products and agri-tourism at local farms; and provided background on the importance of farming and how farmers have learned to diversify activities to stay in business.

**Sandra Barden** of Barden Family Orchard talked about this year's apple crop and the various opportunities for pick your own apples at Barden Family Orchard.

**More Information for Consumers**

- DEM's Agriculture website ([www.getfreshbuylocal.org](http://www.getfreshbuylocal.org))
- *Rhode Island Agriculture Guide*, published by DEM, lists local farms, roadside stands and farmers' markets by location as well when specific products are available. (<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/pdf/agguide.pdf>)