

the

Coop

all the news that's fit to eat

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE DIXON CO-OPERATIVE MARKET

ISSUE #39 SEPTEMBER 2011

WWW.DIXONMARKET.COM

Martinez Apple Orchards Blossom, Despite Hard Winter

by Emily Bregel

The early morning air is dreamy-cool and moist as Fred Martinez leads the way into his apple orchards, the soil still muddy from a late-summer rain.

Stepping over an irrigation furrow, he approaches a stout apple tree grafted with two varieties. The 70-year-old Dixon native easily swings himself up into



the crook of the tree then climbs even higher, finally reaching up to pluck an apple from the highest branches. There, he says, the fruit has “colored up” from the sun.

He descends and proudly cuts a crisp slice from the apple, which he identifies as “Snow White,” named for its pearl-white flesh and vibrant red skin. Even early in the season the apple is sweet, though “not overbearingly sweet,” Martinez points out. It’s a variety he cultivated in part for its sentimental value, since his grandmother used to grow it.

As our interview and tasting continues, Martinez hands me apple after apple, explaining their particular characteristics like a practiced sommelier: mild, tart, sprightly, crunchy. Martinez knows the subtleties of all of the 12 varieties and their sub-strains growing on his 18.5-acre orchard in the Embudo Valley.

Martinez is no stranger to reporters touring his land. His and his wife Ruby’s orchards have been featured in The New York Times, Rio Grande Sun, Taos News, Santa Fean, Bon Appetit and other local and national publications.

The Martinez family’s success as growers is no secret, either. Martinez and his wife were named Farm Family of the Year by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture in 2006.

His quiet energy is infectious. His dark eyes glint from underneath a wide-brimmed hat, and he smiles

almost sheepishly when asked about his tree-climbing prowess.

“I don’t feel like an old 70,” he said. “I can out-climb a teenager.”

Martinez hasn’t lost an apple crop in 45 years straight, a feat which he attributes to obsessive attention to weather conditions, intense monitoring of insect activity and the aid of an enormous wind machine which looms above his orchards. When activated, the windmill-like machine circulates the air around his trees, warming the temperature enough to stave off killing frosts.

In terms of customer loyalty, the consistency of his harvest “makes a difference, (because) customers can rely on you,” Martinez said.

Martinez achieved an apple crop even this year, marked by late frosts and one bone-chilling night in February, when overnight temperatures dropped to negative-21 degrees Fahrenheit. That wiped out most fruit harvests completely, said Velarde-based apple grower Pat Montoya.

“It was an unusual year,” he said.

For Martinez, whose apples are available at the Dixon Farmers’ Market and the Dixon Cooperative Market, this year’s relatively small harvest is “kind of heartbreaking,” he said.

None of his stone-fruit trees, like peaches and cherries, bore any fruit this year. The proportion of his 3,500 apple trees that fruited this year is “so low, I don’t even want to mention it,” he said.

cont. on page 3

Sweet, Bitter and Sweet

by Gaywynn Cooper

Over the last several months the Coop has been privileged to have engaged the services of Lynda Prim as our first Farm Liaison. This has been a position funded by the HUFED Grant with the intention of bringing greater attention to the cooperative relationship between local growers and the Dixon Market. The Co-op would like to increase the quality and variety of locally grown produce, meat and eggs available in the store while providing a stable marketing opportunity for local producers. This is a key strategy for keeping jobs and dollars here locally as well as moving the community towards greater food security.

As many of you are aware, Lynda has been a constant advocate for farmers. For years she published and wrote a newsletter for farmers called the Farm Connection, she was the organizing force behind the very successful annual

Organic Farm Conference, she has been an inspector for the Organic Certification Board, she was on the organizing Board of the Dixon Cooperative Market and has worked tirelessly with the Santa Fe Farmer's Market. These positions are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of her commitment and concern for farmers, consulting, leading workshops and providing one on one support and advise for beginning farmers and tenured farmers for a fee and for free. As in her position as Farm Liaison, cutting her fee to almost nothing because she wanted to help her own "home" community.

That is the "sweet", now comes the "bitter". Lynda has accepted a new position entitled Vegetable and Fruit Technical Assistance Advisor for the Northeast



Dan waves goodbye to Lynda as she departs for greener pastures.

Organic Association of Vermont. In addition to providing technical assistance to farmers, she will be running the apprenticeship/farm worker program, working with Green Mountain College on curriculum development, planning professional workshops for farmers and helping with the NOFA organic farming conference. She will be leaving Dixon very early September. Congratulations Lynda. What a feather in your cap. May this be a sweet change for you and may Dixon always keep a hold on your heart and bring you back!

A Sack of Potatoes

by Susan P. Lewis

We mash them up, we boil them in a pot, we bake them in the oven, and cut them up and fry them. We "hash brown" them, smother them in butter and sour cream, and have made them into popular Chips.

Many of us associate the potato with Ireland. But that was just the blight in the mid-1800's. This great tuber actually is from the ancient lands of Peru and other South American countries and dates back at least 6,000 years. Again, as with the tomato, when the Spanish infiltrated those countries of South America in the mid-1500's, they brought the potato back to their homeland and it spread from there throughout Europe. That's how it ended up in Ireland. And with so few varieties at that time, the potatoes they had were subject to a greater incidence of disease. And that's what happened in 1845. The potato crops were infected with a blight which spread to that particular, single type which resulted in the Great Irish Famine.

That being said, the potato has come a long way. We see such varieties these days of skin color – red, white, golden, brown, and purple. There are literally over a thousand different types of potatoes. Some of those we see in the Dixon Market include Yukon Golds, Russets, Rose Golds, and Purple Potatoes.

The potato offers a lot of benefit to our bodies. Here are some:

Potatoes have about 620mg of potassium—that's more than a banana. Iron is also present.

One would expect potatoes to have minerals, as they spend their life underground. But potatoes are also a great source of vitamins, even supplying vitamin C. There are many varieties of potatoes that are also good sources of B vitamins.

Potatoes contain no fat or cholesterol and minimal sodium. And a six-ounce potato contains 2 grams of highly digestible protein, almost as much as half a glass of milk.

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The Board of Directors

Shelby Leonard ~ President
shelby@dixonmarket.com
579-0048

Steve Jenison ~ Vice President
steve@dixonmarket.com
579-9679

**Kiva Duckworth-Moulton
Treasurer**
kiva@dixonmarket.com
579-9102

Elena Arellano ~ Secretary
elena@dixonmarket.com
579-4027

Susan P. Lewis ~ Director
susanp@dixonmarket.com
(575) 751-7015

**The Co-Op is open
Monday-Friday
9am - 7pm
Saturday and Sunday
9am - 6pm
505.579.9625**

cont. from page 1

In 1999, Martinez took over Martinez Apple Orchards from his father, Delfin, who began growing apples in the 1950s. Martinez expanded the operation from three to 12 varieties of apples, in an effort to lengthen his market season, he said.

Like many small growers, Martinez is weighing whether to make the substantial financial investment to become certified as organic. He's working on phasing in organic sprays, which he says are more expensive and less effective than conventional pesticides. But consumer demand is pushing him toward organic certification.

"It's what people want to hear, O.K.?" he said with a shrug.

But Martinez maintains that his own standards of quality are more stringent, and more meaningful, than those of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's organic program.

"To me, growing fruits and vegetables means people are relying on you to sell them something wholesome and good," he said. "I wouldn't sell something I won't eat myself. I'd rather lose a little money and have a clear conscience."

Montoya said many small farmers are facing this same organic certification dilemma. Montoya began working toward organic certification five years ago, but became overwhelmed by the cost and paperwork involved. He opted instead to become "Certified Naturally Grown." The alternative certification program has quality standards just as rigorous as the USDA's organic program, but comes with less red tape and lower fees, making it accessible to smaller farming operations, Montoya said.

Martinez has long strived to minimize his use of pesticide sprays. He carefully monitors insect activity in the field and only sprays a couple times a season. In his father's generation, the orchards were sprayed about eight

to 10 times a year.

"He's very wise about the way he sprays," said Harvey Frauenglass, a long-time grower at Big Willow Farm in Embudo. "He sees when the bugs are there. He doesn't just spray indiscriminately. He's trying to do the right thing on his land."

The success of Martinez Apple Orchards is an inspiration for small-scale growers, Frauenglass said, and a testament to the importance of maintaining the region's traditional water-sharing irrigation system, known as the acequia system.

"He is one who demonstrates that you can make a living on farming," Frauenglass said. "That's important. We're trying to stand up against these mega-farms."

Emily Bregel, a native of Baltimore, MD, was a newspaper reporter for five years in Chattanooga, TN, before moving to Dixon in April. She currently works as an intern on Talon de Gato Farm in Apodaca.

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR:

Sunday, September 4th
10% off storewide for all Co-Op Members.

Wednesdays throughout September: Dixon Farmers Market 4-7pm · in front of the Co-Op

Come out and see what's fresh and local each and every week. Savor the delicious produce and other local items and see what you can conjure up in your kitchen. Enjoy swiss chard, carrots, cukes, peppers, potatoes – with new, emerging choices throughout the month!

Wednesday, September 7th 4:30pm – 7:00pm

The Farmers Market and the Food Initiative are joining together for a Veggie Tasting and Grilling Experience.

Come with open taste buds and a willingness to explore!

Taste the difference between several varieties of Tomatoes, Cucumbers and Zucchini's. Watch grilling techniques for all sorts of vegetables. Learn from other tasters! Go home with new ideas! Share the fun, Bring a neighbor

THE HEALTHFUL POTATO

An average potato with the skin contains:

- 45% of the daily value for vitamin C
- 620 mg potassium, comparable to bananas, spinach and broccoli
- trace amounts of thiamin, riboflavin, folate, magnesium, phosphorous, iron and zinc
- all for only 110 calories and no fat.

And potatoes with the skin on are an excellent source of fiber, with 2 grams of fiber per serving. Despite the popular notion, the majority of nutrients are not found in the skin, but in the potato itself. Nonetheless, leaving the skin on the potatoes retains all the nutrients, the fiber in the skin and makes potatoes easier to prepare.

Here in the lush Embudo Valley, we are bursting with the Autumn harvest that is seen at our local Farmer's Market each Wednesday as well as in the Coop itself. Potatoes have always appeared in our produce baskets,

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Rumblings from the Co-Op Kahuna

by Nelson Rhodes

By this time, most of you are aware of the break in that occurred at the Co-op at the end of July. Although a certain amount of the loss will be covered by insurance, these kinds of incidents undermine not only the fiscal viability of the market, but also act like a splash of ice water in the face of the community. We're vigorously pursuing the apprehension and incarceration of these individuals, but incidents like this also forces one to take a more realistic view of the times we find ourselves in, and the pressures that come to play in our community.

Being in the Co-op day after day, one can be easily lulled into the feeling that we live in a harmonious community, where people look out for one another, and treat each other with respect and consideration, no matter their background or social standing. By and large this is true, but Dixon is no different from other communities in that a segment of its population suffers from a combination of no employment prospects, a feeling of disenfranchisement, and drug addiction.

I realize that this is a very simplistic summation, but the fact remains that the Co-op can't afford to ignore some harsh realities. We will be beefing up our security systems in the near future, to help protect the physical store and its contents, and also making some changes to our check cashing policies, as we have also been victimized recently by scam artists with bogus checks. I hope that our membership, and the community as a whole, will understand that these steps are unfortunately necessary for us to protect ourselves from these losses that affect us all.

A big thank you is in order to the community for your patience and understanding as we dealt with our fried freezers. Due to either a brown-out or a surge, stores throughout the area had freezer compressors burn out, creating a shortage for compressors! Kudos are certainly due to our diligent and hard-working refrigeration technician, who stubbornly kept at it until the freezers were back in business.

On a happier note, plans continue apace for the expansion of the store. It will take place in stages, eventually occupying the entire building space. Construction will hopefully have begun by the time you are reading this on the initial project of installing a septic system and constructing a new bathroom (three cheers!), and the search has begun for a real produce cooler. Thanks to our HUFED grant, our hard-working Board, the support of our landlord, the Embudo Valley Library, and to all of our loyal members and customers, the long-awaited expansion is finally becoming a reality.

The Co-op has evolved, over the years, into what it is today. The eclectic mix of products is a direct result of responding to the preferences of our customers.

This is your store, both literally and figuratively. What it becomes will depend on how it is perceived and used by the community. So at this time of expansion, your customer and ownership input is crucial. What would you like to see? What products would you like us to carry? How can the Dixon Co-op improve your quality of life in this community? We will only thrive and grow if we are a reflection of your wants and needs. Soon some questionnaires

will appear asking some of these questions, and your responses will be very helpful to us, but always feel free to stop and talk to me or any of our helpful and well-scrubbed employees about your ideas. The Co-op belongs to all of us, and it should become what we want it to be, not what fits into some corporate mold. Your comments, thoughts, and input are always appreciated, and I continue to appreciate your support as your general manager.



but with the bounty of the season, new and interesting varieties of potatoes can be marching through the door at any time. This offers us an opportunity to experiment in the kitchen and experience new tastes in our mouths. Keep an eye for what's on our shelves in the days to come. You never know what might show up.

Here's a recipe for you to enjoy and try with your potatoes!

TORTILLA ESPANOLA (Potato Omelet)

This potato omelet is a New Mexican take on the traditional Spanish tapa.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, very thinly sliced
6 potatoes, thinly sliced
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
6 eggs, beaten
½ cup green chile, drained
½ cup grated cheddar cheese
Salt and pepper, to taste

Fry onions, potatoes, and garlic in olive oil on low heat until soft. Drain and combine with eggs, green chile, cheese, salt and pepper.

Cook in a 10-inch pan on medium heat until golden on one side. Using a large plate or tray, turn the tortilla over and return to the pan again until ready. Serves 8 or more.

(This recipe is from the July 2011 issue of New Mexico magazine.)