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Brad Fraser of Wheelbarrow Orchards, located on 10 Sideroad, east of Hwy. 25, shows off some the damaged apples at his farm. Fraser said the warm March weather, followed by an April frost, has decimated the Ontario apple crop. (Right) A bunch of apples show the damage where the frost hit it, leaving a 'scar' on the apple.



Photos by Ted Brown

## Warm weather wreaks havoc on local crops

By **TED BROWN**  
Staff Writer

While some southern Ontario residents were complaining about brown, dried out lawns this summer, many of the province's farmers were viewing the situation as a recipe for potential disaster for their crops.

And the weather, going right back to March, has been all over the map, with dry spells when least expected, as well as warm weather when it should have been freezing cold.

The worst hit of the year is the apple crop, due to an unprecedented warm spell in March, which fooled the trees into thinking it was spring causing them to develop buds, only to be hit with a frost in April that froze off the buds.

Brian Gilroy, chair of the Ontario Apple Growers, said due to the warm weather experienced in March, 85 per cent of the province's apple crop was destroyed.

"Nothing like this has ever happened before," he said. "Ontario's going to have the smallest apple

crop since the 1800s."

As a result, the local apple crop is nothing short of a disaster:

Brad and Heather Fraser of Wheelbarrow Orchards, located on 10 Sideroad, east of Hwy. 25, are no exception. The freak spring warm spell hit their orchards pretty hard.

The Frasers said they were luckier than some, but still suffered a hard hit on their 1,500 trees.

"I know the provincial numbers are forecasting around 20 per cent of an average crop, but we're a bit better than that," said Brad. "Still, we have some trees that have no apples on them at all."

Brad says that the public isn't really aware that the apple crop is in such dire straits.

"People are going to get into their cars to go apple picking in September, like they have every other year," said Brad, "only to find a limited supply of apples at their favorite orchard. It's only then that they'll see how bad the business has been hit."

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