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Matthew Passafiume, owner of Applewood Farm Winery



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Matthew Passafiume of Applewood Farm Winery at his family's McCowan Road business.

Spring frost decimated some apple varieties

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If you want to go apple picking, you better do it sooner rather than later.

The frost that hit in late May wiped out about half of Applewood Farm Winery's crop. Applewood has 13 varieties of apples on 35 acres.

"It was so cold that day. Wind was from the north. It was 2C at sunset and it just dropped like a stone from there," Matthew Passafiume, owner of Applewood Farm Winery said.

"It's crazy you can lose a whole year's work in eight hours," he said.

The hardest hit were the honey crisp apples. About 80 per cent of Applewood's crop was lost. Honey crisp also happens to be the most popular, according to Passafiume.

The frost was about a week later than normal, so some of the apples were already on the tree, while the rest were in bloom.

"The apple is completely garbage," Passafiume said of those that were already on the tree.

Applewood also lost about 30 per cent of their strawberries.

"We're not going to break even this year. We're going to be operating at a loss this year," Passafiume said.

Applewood not only relies on the apples for family pickers, they turn them into fruit wines. Because of the smaller crop, they may have to reduce their wine production, he said.

Whitchurch-Stouffville resident James Liaros, whose family owns a nine-acre orchard the just over the border in Markham, also lost about 50 per cent of their crop due

to the frost.

"The loss does have some impact, but I buy and sell in large volumes, which allows for a flow of apples," Liaros told The Sun-Tribune via email, noting he does not solely rely on his own orchard.

Other provinces did not suffer the same weather damage, which means they can meet Liaros' supply and demand needs, ensuring a stable market, he said.

Liaros, who has been selling apples at the Stouffville Country Market for more than 25 years, was a 2014 Ward 4 candidate. He lost to Rick Upton.

"In my opinion, I believe it will be status quo other than the high demand apples such as ambrosia, royal gala, fuji and honey crisp that may see a slight increase in price," according to Liaros.

Both growers lost more this year than in 2012 when the warm winter was followed by a deep freeze, then hot summer.

"That was a once in a 100-year event and it happened again. I think we're seeing a trend here and it's troubling" Passafiume said.

Apple picking in Applewood's McCowan Road orchard began last weekend.

"This year I don't think we're going to make Thanksgiving," Passafiume said, noting they typically go to Halloween.

However, not all is lost when it comes to the family fun orchard experience. Because he knew the apple crop would be so small, more pumpkins were planted so people have something to pick later in the season.

For more information, go to www.applewoodfarmwinery.com

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