

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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CiderFest at BelleWood Acres offers taste of the season

CALEB HUTTON - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Spiced and sparkling ciders were up for sampling Saturday, Nov. 5, at BelleWood Acres' first CiderFest, a two-day celebration of the end of the harvest season.

In front of the large farmhouse on Ten Mile Road, visitors handcranked their own juice from a mix of Belle de Boskoop and Fuji apples.

The farm is open daily to the public from Sept. 1 through Dec. 31, when anyone can wander through the orchards, watch the apples as they're sorted or pick up a box of their own.



"There's no bigger honor than coaxing food from dirt," said BelleWood Acres owner John Belisle. "And if you're going to do that, you've got to respect everything around it: the environment and the community."

Belisle, who hopes the festival will become an annual event, led short walking tours through the processing rooms and the acres of apple trees.

One unexpected difficulty of harvesting the fruit, he said, is finding a place to send the ones that have grown too large.

"The little ones go down there, for the schools," Belisle said, pointing to the opposite end of the processing room, "and the big ones go down there, for - I don't know who yet."

Workers had discarded the gargantuan, deep red apples. Belisle handed them freely to folks on the tour; stores won't take them.

"I never knew that," said Jim Chromik, just before taking a bite. "I mean if you're going to bake them into a pie or a crisp, what would it matter?"

Crates awaiting shipment are kept at a crisp 33 degrees before they're sent out to public schools and grocery stores, many of them within the county.

This year Belisle expects to ship more than 1 million pounds of apples, during a season that the harvest had its ups and its downs.

The farm also churns out its own ciders, vinegars and jams. While they produce apples tailored for hard ciders, all of those with the BelleWood brand are non-alcoholic.

But soon, with a new distillery and restaurant in the works at a new building along Guide Meridian, BelleWood Acres should be marketing its own brandies and vodkas. The distillery should be operating by early 2012.

In the past decade, Belisle has also experimented with horticultural grafting to create new, designer varieties of apples.

After leading about a dozen people through rows of Jonagolds, he took them around back of the farmhouse to show off a new variety that Haggen, Inc., had requested that he produce, with a green skin, almost like a pear, and crimson underneath.

The novelty of it can hike up the price to about \$7 per pound at market.

Mostly, however, the constant tinkering isn't about novelty: It's about flavor.

"Because there's a lot of money," Belisle said, "in a better apple."

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Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/11/05/2259048/ciderfest-at-bellewood-acres.html#ixzz1d45SYaoo>