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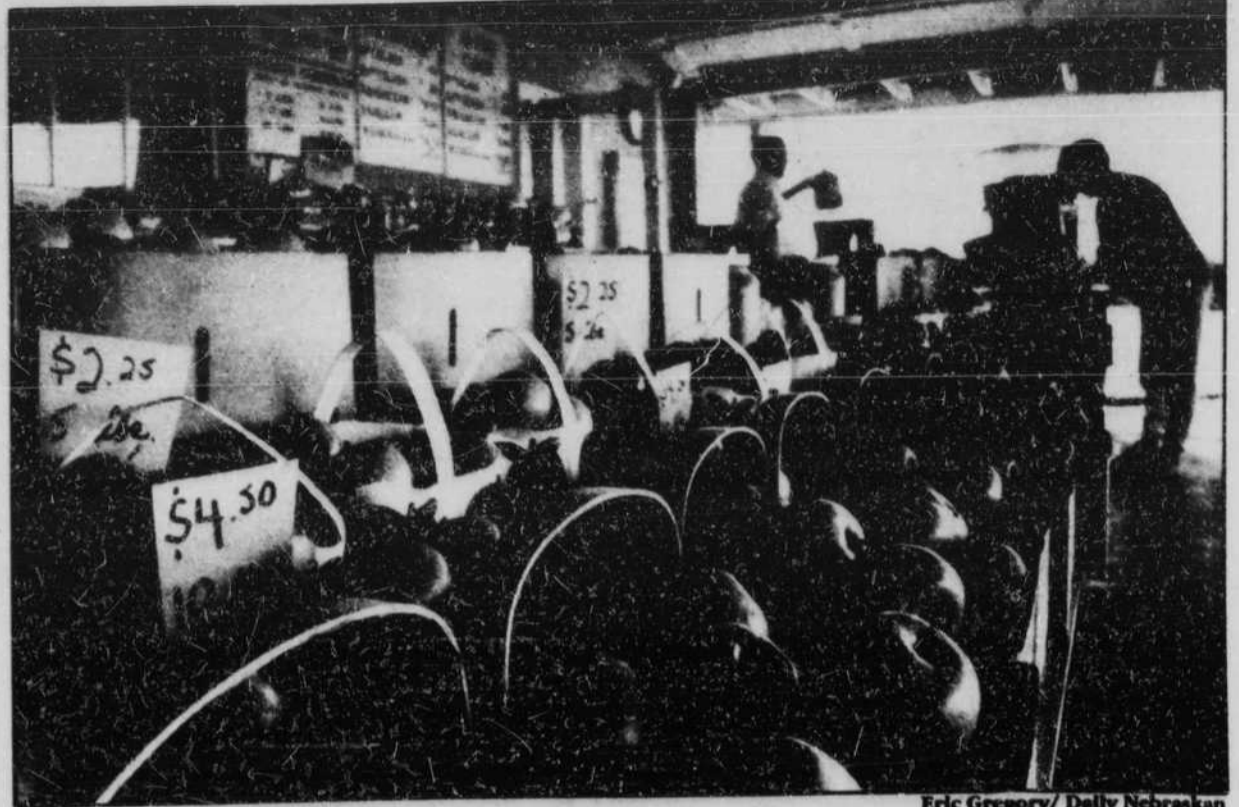
The Nebraska Air Guard, the Nation's second oldest, has recently been awarded its third Air Force Outstanding Unit Award. We've also won the best TAC Unit Award out of 50 units nationwide.

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Eric Gregory/Daily Nebraskan

Nebraska apple harvest underway, orchards grow more than apples

By Joeth Zucco
Senior Editor

Nebraska City is famous for many things: John Brown's cave, home of the National Arbor Day Foundation and apple orchards.

The city is surrounded by three apple orchards: Kimmel Orchard, J. Sterling Morton Orchard and Tree Farm and Catron Orchard.

Kimmel Orchard, a commercial orchard since the late 1920s, is located northwest of Nebraska City on Highway 75. Harvesting of the fall season apples is in its third week and will last until Oct. 31, Manager Dan Giittinger said.

A large majority of the all-purpose apples are harvested at this time. Giittinger said these include Jonathon, Red and Golden Delicious, Grimes Golden and King David apples. Besides the fall season apples, there are seven varieties of summer apples and two varieties of winter keeping apples.

"Each variety has its own purpose," Giittinger said. "While one may be good for cooking, another may be good for eating."

As an example, he said that green apples are better for applesauce. Other apples such as Whitney Crab are used for jelly, pickles

and eating or Lodi which are good for sauce, pies and eating.

The wide variety of apples come from chance seedlings. In nature, the process is done by bees pollinating the blossoms, the pollinated apples falling to the ground and the seeds planted. In the laboratory, man has created such apples as the Jonathon Gold.

Giittinger and his father-in-law, William Oberdieck, have 5,000 trees on their 90-acre orchard. Giittinger said that the apple trees are in all different stages of tree life. The trees range from "just planted" to "beyond their peak," he said.

During a normal year, 10 to 15 bushels of apples are harvested per tree and 3,000 to 4,000 bushels are harvested per acre. However, Giittinger said that in the 11 years he's been with the orchard, he hasn't seen a normal year yet.

The orchard plants standard apples trees which produce quality fruit for 30 to 35 years and semi-dwarf trees which produce quality fruit for 20 to 25 years. He said that after a tree reaches its peak, it is cut down and a new one is replanted.

Southeast Nebraska is ideal for growing apples, Giittinger said. The weather and soil content contribute to the quality of the fruit. The

annual rainfalls and moderate winters salvage the trees that thrive in the loess soil. Loess soil is "wind blown" soil. Giittinger said that it is only found along the Missouri Valley and in parts of China.

"Condition-wise we have more problems," he said. "We have to put up with hail and drought. But soil-wise we feel we can grow an apple that is as good as anywhere in the world."

The trees are cared for year-round. In the spring and summer, they are sprayed for fungus and insects, and the orchards are mowed to keep the weeds down. In the winter, the trees are pruned, so when the growing season returns, the light will be better distributed through the trees and the color of the apples will be enhanced.

Besides apple trees, he said that 3,000 cherry trees occupy 30 acres of the orchard. Giittinger also has a bee colony that he uses to pollinate the trees in the spring.

Giittinger said that the products of the orchard are mostly sold on location. Besides apples, the store sells apple and cherry cider, applesauce, caramel apples, popcorn, honey, honey combs, and frozen cherries. In addition to the orchard, Ideal Grocery in Lincoln sells apples and Baker's Supermarkets in Omaha sell cider.

The orchard is mainly a family operation except during the harvest when 25 to 30 people are hired to help grade, sell and pick apples.

The orchard store is open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from the first of June till the first of November, depending on the weather.

Kimmel Orchard store and production headquarters located off Highway 75, northwest of Lincoln. The store sells apple, cherry and honey products and popcorn.

Dan Giittinger stands next to a Jonathon apple tree. Off his shoulder hangs a picking bag used during the harvest. The bag can hold 30 pounds of apples.

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