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The Deep Dish

**An insider look at food and farming from Civil
Eats**

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Apples harvested from Century Farm Orchards in Reidsville, North Carolina.

The Follow-Up: The Cider Makers Preserving Varieties by Helping Others Grow Them

By **BRIDGET SHIRVELL**

After spending years reintroducing Harrison cider apples in New Jersey, Charles Rosen knew he had more work to do.

"Bringing back the Harrison apple and disseminating it throughout the community to ensure its resurrection and environmental diversity while creating a viable revenue stream was critical to my main goal of building resilience and almost an alternative food system," said Rosen, who is the **owner and founder of Ironbound farm**, a 108-acre regenerative farm and a cidery.

Cider makers and apple growers like Rosen, John Reynolds of **Blackduck Cidery** in New York's Finger Lakes, and David Vernon of **Century Farm Orchards** in Reidsville, North Carolina, are keeping forgotten varieties alive and promoting resilience in a changing environment—not only through the cider and other apple products they make but also by selling and sometimes giving away trees.

"It helps ensure diversity of fruit, which can be a great advantage to counteract diseases that can target specific varieties at times," said Vernon, who started Century Farm Orchards after moving back to his family farm and discovering apple

trees that his grandfather planted in the 1800s.

While Century Farm Orchards ships apple trees all over the country, they also invite people to the orchards during Open House Days in the fall, where people can taste apples, cider, and baked goods, something Vernon's friend Lee Calhoun, a history buff that **tracked and saved rare Southern apple varieties**, encouraged.

"Lee not only requested that we [sell] these rare varieties to folks all across N.C. and the nation [to grow], but that we also actually produce apples so that people can taste their history as well, in case they cannot plant their own," said Vernon.

Beginning in the early 20th century, **many traditional apple varieties disappeared** when growers started planting varieties that were better suited to **industrial production**. As a result, most people have never tasted the Harrison apple—nor varieties such as the Newtown Pippin, Roxbury Russet, or Northern Spy, all of which Reynolds uses to create his line of ciders.

“We still propagate some of our favorite named varieties, but exploring for new varieties is our family’s fall pastime.”

~ John Reynolds

Reynolds started his orchard more than 20 years ago with the intention of making apple-based ciders, perry (a fermented alcoholic beverage made from pears), and other fermented fruit concoctions. He first focused on grafting and selling varieties that he **found in the wild**, which had good cider qualities and some disease resistance. When he launched Blackduck Cidery nine years ago, he continued to focus on wild varieties.

"In a future that seems to have more climate extremes in store, we want to try and hedge our bets in the orchards," said Reynolds. "We still propagate some of our favorite named varieties, but exploring for new varieties is our family's fall pastime."

While the nursery makes up a small part of their business, Reynolds said it does provide some income during the later winter and early spring when, like most farms, they tend to have lower revenue streams.

"We also find grafting one of the most amazing parts of fruit growing," Reynolds said. "Our two daughters, now 15 and 9, have grafted a lot of trees themselves and both think of that as the best task in the orchard."

Back in New Jersey, Rosen has given away thousands of heirloom Harrison cider apple trees to small and medium-sized commercial apple growers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, and he has also sold apple trees to people who visit the farm.

“When we’re selling trees to the local community, it has no real revenue, but we’re using these trees as a calling card to learn about the history of New Jersey cider making, regenerative agriculture, and food systems,” Rosen said. “And I hope they’re significant when someone looks out their window and sees them growing.”

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