President’s Message

As I sit down to write my first President’s message, I have just finished plowing snow. I love seeing the beautiful white ground cover in the winter which usually means the temperatures will remain a little cooler.

I will give a small introduction to those who may not know me. I am a fifth-generation fruit grower. I currently reside in Lancaster, PA, where my brother Craig and I have owned and operated Cherry Hill Orchards since May 2020. Before moving to Lancaster, I owned McCleaf’s Orchards in Biglerville. My home farm was 50 acres that I purchased in 1999 from my grandparents, Ronald (“Chub”) and Joan Rice. Owning the home farm, which had been part of the Rice heritage since 1888, was a DREAM that came true.

Over the next 20 years, I rented numerous farms in Adams County. My peak was 300 acres of fruit trees which I spent countless hours spraying all by myself. That same year I started selling produce at one of the local Farmer’s Markets in Baltimore. By 2019, I was running to eleven Farmer’s Markets weekly in Maryland, Washington D.C., and Northern Virginia. Over the years, I became very diversified in the crops I grew: Apples, Peaches, Pears, Apricots, Plums, Sweet Cherries, Kiwi Berries, Strawberries, Grapes, Raspberries, Blackberries, and 20 acres of vegetables, which we started from seed in our greenhouse. A large part of my success was getting involved with the Young Grower’s Alliance. The Young Grower’s Alliance allowed me to visit other farms and incorporate things I learned from other farms into mine. I would be remiss if I did not mention Tara Baugher. Tara was someone who helped me and so many other young farmers along the way. Thank you, Tara!

As always, it is good to reflect on the previous year to see where we can make changes and improve. With the apple industry struggling at the moment and with all the trees that I hear are being removed, I would say that we are having a reset within our industry. With less demand in the processing industry and a large fresh crop across the country, prices could be much higher. As we make changes within our industry, keep in mind that the market changes all the time. Just a few years ago as Michigan and New York froze, we were all smiling at the demand and prices of our fruit. So don’t give up! It may mean some changes are necessary in your operation, but hang in there. Things will get better!

To deal with some of the ever-evolving challenges we face, we need to be supportive of our industry by supporting US Apple, SHAP, and the research projects that are being conducted. Many of you may know how hard US Apple is working in DC, but every time you get some money through USDA, you can thank US Apple. Our research projects are equally as important to our fruit growers. The research projects that are done on many of our farms are largely funded by the money raised at the PA Farm Show. I want to thank everyone who came to help this year. We had another record year despite two slow days due to the weather. For those of you who did not attend, I encourage you to attend next year. We have a lot of fun promoting apples while raising funds to support our industry.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Andrew Schwalm
for all the work he has done leading our organization for the past two years. In the coming years, I hope to work with each of you and to continue the great work that this organization provides to the PA Fruit industry.

Corey McCleaf

SHAP President