

Notes from Black Rock Orchard to the Mount Vernon Triangle Community.

This is an April note from Emily and David at Black Rock Orchard. We want to thank you for putting enthusiastic support into the farmers market at MVT. Your practical support means everything. The challenges of facing Covid last year taught us not to take anything for granted. Some of our markets opened with restrictions last year, some didn't open and a few opened in word only with little community support. Going to market this past year has been risky for us and with uneven success. Our season at MVT last year was steady and kept improving. Here are some key reflections:

- As a whole, customers pulled themselves together to wear masks, wait in line and stay apart from each other. We sold fruit in containers only, we took credit cards instead of cash and we created a system for online orders packaged on the farm. We were amazed at the changes we were able to make with your support. The Mount Vernon Triangle customers put their money where their mouths are and made the market a success in a year that others failed. Not all markets were so supportive.
- Like you, we missed our families, we haven't seen either of our children in a year and we didn't travel over the winter as we have done for the past 25 years. Instead we worked on the farm and completed projects, made future plans and learned to zoom. There are endless things to do on a farm. We still haven't worked out finding ways to take time off at home, but we have accomplished a lot. We kept one fall tomato greenhouse going into winter, we covered another one with hard plastic and we completed a 10 foot deer fence around our entire main orchard.
- Nature doesn't care about Covid. Last year, due to a very late severe frost in mid May, our fruit crop was reduced. Some varieties of fruit such as pears didn't produce anything. Even if Covid continues to limit our market sales this year, the orchard has its own challenges and rewards. As we move into Spring and watch cold temperatures threaten the pretty blossoms, we hope for a full fruit crop. At the same time, a full fruit crop requires full markets, healthy workers and good weather. Nature doesn't care about politics, traffic or Covid. A full fruit crop is always an advantage, but if everything grows, all the fruit needs to be picked and a market home.
- At this time of year, we are pruning the stone fruit trees. The pretty blossoms we sell at market are the trimming of plums, peaches and apricots. Our greenhouse tomatoes are planted and will start bearing at the end of April. We have some extra plants to sell. We are planting a new field of raspberries, honeyberries, and more gooseberries and currants. Like restaurants in the area, we are hiring help to be ready for a better year.
- We have a good supply of apples stored from last fall: Pinklady, Goldrush, Evercrisp.

We thank the Mount Vernon Triangle community for making our return to market possible and hopeful. You made this neighborhood market the best it could be. See you on Saturdays and stay tuned.

Emily Zaas & David Hochheimer
Black Rock Orchard