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Why Honeycrisp apples are so expensive

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Honeycrisp apple.

SPARTA, Mich. (WOOD) — Fall in Michigan means apples.

In the last dozen years or so, there has been one apple that stands out from the rest — Honeycrisp.

Honeycrisp apple lovers have suffered severe sticker shock at the grocery store. Oftentimes, Honeycrisps are more than four times as expensive as other varieties of apples.

Schweitzer Orchards near Sparta grows dozens of varieties of apples for major retailers like Costco and Meijer.

Nick Schweitzer, 28, oversees the operations at Schweitzer Orchards. He graduated from Grand Valley State University and is a 5th generation grower who will eventually take full control from his dad.

There are many reasons that add to the cost of Honeycrisp apples, and it all starts on the farm.

The Honeycrisp variety was developed by the University of Minnesota, which still holds the patent. So for every Honeycrisp yielding tree a grower buys, they have to pay a \$1 royalty to the University of Minnesota. That's not the case for more common and older varieties like Red Delicious.

The trees which grow Honeycrisp apples are relatively weak and yield very large fruit, so they require a trellis system to hold them up and keep their branches from breaking or hitting the ground.

One of the appealing things about Honeycrisp is its thin skin. It adds to the crunch and allows people to enjoy the meat of the apple without breaking their teeth. But that also means the apples bruise more easily, and can be damaged by their own stems during processing.

Nick Schweitzer says workers are asked to pick them slowly and more carefully than other types of apples. Instead of being paid by the bin of apples, they're paid by the hour. Workers are also required to clip the stem as closely as they can to the apple so it won't bend and puncture the skin as its transported.

Unlike varieties that tend to ripen at the same time on the tree and only require one picking, Honeycrisp tend to ripen at varying intervals and require three pickings before the season ends in November. That means more time spent in the fields for smaller yields. It also means that growers have to suspend picking operations on one variety and move their workers to the HoneyCrisp trees in order to catch the apples at their peak.

In addition, they also require more calcium sprayings to prevent an affliction called "bitter pit."

The lengthy and delicate process all adds up to a greater cost for the grower, which gets passed on to the buyer, and eventually the consumer who's willing to pay a premium for them.

Schweitzer turned down a job at Hershey to instead work 80 hour weeks in the field on his family's orchard.

"It's a challenge, a lot of work. A lot more work than it could have been," said Schweitzer.

A very rare piece of fruit—**known as the chimera apple** (<http://woodtv.com/2014/10/09/one-in-a-million-chimera-apple-found-in-kent-county/>)— was also discovered recently at Schweitzer Orchards.

The green portion of the apple is a roma apple, and the red portion is an early spur roma apple. The split is the result of a genetic mutation.



(<https://lintvwood.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/weird-apple-2-100914.jpg>)

(A chimera apple in between two Roma apples,

found at Schweitzer Orchards in Kent County. Oct, 9, 2014)

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