

[The next big thing in apples](#)

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Co-owners Stephen and Michael Van Meekeren on their apple farm Van Meekeren Farms.

Meet the Pazazz, possibly the next big thing in Nova Scotia apple exports.

The “sweet-tart” tasting fruit supposedly not only lasts longer than other apples in the kitchen fruit bowl, but is also sweeter than Honeycrisp while retaining all of that variety’s crunch and juiciness.

The non-GMO Pazazz, a descendant of the Honeycrisp, takes after its ancestor’s texture and flavour while adding longevity to the apple season. That’s because it’s harvested much later in the fall than other varieties, then stored until the very end of each calendar year to attain peak flavour — for eventual sale only from late December onward, when other varieties may not be at their best.

Stephen and Michael Van Meekeren own and operate Van Meekeren Farms, a half-century-old Annapolis Valley business that’s one of a handful of Nova Scotia-only exclusive growers.

The farm is also the exclusive distributor of Pazazz.

“Though Honeycrisp tastes amazing in the fall when fresh off the tree, it doesn’t have enough starch to carry it through the winter in storage, and so by January its flavour, while good, is starting to wane,” Michael Van Meekeren told The Chronicle Herald recently.

Pazazz has the opposite “problem,” said Van Meekeren.

“Straight off the tree its flavour is almost too powerful — but after a few months in storage its sugar and acid mellow into pure delight,” he said.

Van Meekeren said Pazazz, which appears well-suited to this region's cool climate, also has better colour and fewer issues for growers than Honeycrisp.

“When we offer consumers samples of Pazazz in-store, peoples' expressions say there's no possible way I can surprise them with the slice of apple I'm about to give them. Then they take a bite and say 'Wow!' It's sweeter and tarter than most other apples.”

The brothers' strategy is to offer consumers a fresher-tasting apple further into winter, when shoppers can find produce aisles underwhelming.

The pair have been growing Pazazz since 2008 via a research partner based in Minnesota who has been working on it for more than a decade.

The farm began harvesting in 2015. Then, early this year, the apples were sold at Loblaws stores in Ontario and Atlantic Canada, where they were priced about the same as Honeycrisp.

Thousands of cases sold, of which about a fifth came from Van Meekeren Farms.

Their next goal is to sell twice as many at the start of 2018 as they did this year.

Along the way, he said, they'll face several challenges including raising the variety's profile among consumers, meeting demand, and also “working with our researchers and growers to nail down all the unknowns about how to best grow and store this apple.”

The farm also grows a lot of Honeycrisp, Gala and Ambrosia apples, as well as McIntosh, Cortland and Gravenstein.

Van Meekeren said a bin of hard-to-grow Honeycrisp earns approximately three times that of other apple varieties.

In 2016, the farm invested more than \$1 million in the plant, some of that funded by the province.

Roughly 20 people work in the farm's packing plant and up to 30 people work the 120 acres (roughly 50 hectares) of orchards.

The family's links to the land date back to 1964 when Frank Van Meekeren bought the property to grow vegetables, apples and other fruit, which he sold door to door.