

# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Wednesday, August 25, 2010**

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## Apple season arrives early

ST. PAUL, Minn. – Minnesota apple growers say the 2010 harvest has arrived about a week to 10 days earlier this year due to the warm spring and recent warm weather. Customers looking for a favorite variety are advised to call ahead to time their trip.

Minnesota is known for the undisputed quality and variety of its fresh apples such as Haralson, Zestar and Honeycrisp – all very popular fruit developed by the University of Minnesota. Those varieties taste great, and they thrive in our harsh climate - cold winters and hot summers. There are more than 100 commercial apple orchards that harvest fruit for sale at retail stores and for customers who want to pick their own. Minnesota apple growers literally brave hail and high winds to bring us all the “fruits of their labor.”

With apples, timing is everything. Apple growers generally have only a few weeks to harvest each variety, and the 2009 harvest included very few fall weekends without rain. For growers that rely on pick-your-own customers, that makes the 2010 picking season particularly important.

The Minnesota Apple Growers Association publishes a brochure that includes estimated harvest dates (available at the State Fair in the Agriculture/Horticulture Building). They estimated the average statewide harvest date for Zestar at August 18 (compared to Aug 30 last year). Honeycrisp is estimated to arrive in early to mid-September – about 5-10 days ahead of schedule.

Zestar apples are now being harvested at Apple Ridge Orchard near Rochester. Grower Vince Steffen says his crop was ready at least a week ahead of average.

Center Creek Orchard near Fairmont plans to open Labor Day weekend. Grower Gordy Toupal says he has one of his best crops ever.

Rick Kluzak of Wild Fruits Farm, a certified organic apple orchard near Taylors Falls, says the picking season will definitely vary from region to region.

"If there is one message for consumers looking for Minnesota apples this year – it is call ahead and get out early."

Consumers can use the Minnesota Grown Directory at [www.minnesotagrown.com](http://www.minnesotagrown.com) to find an orchard. At that site, users can view a description of each of our 100+ orchards, print directions, and find a phone number to call ahead or link to the orchard website for more information. With the widespread interest in local foods, the Minnesota Grown website has hosted more than 110,000 unique visitors so far this year.