



## MOLLY DELICIOUS AND GROUCHO MARX

*A Short History of Apples in Oconee County*

BY WAYNE COX

**A**sk people in Upcountry South Carolina where they go in the fall to pick up fresh apples, and more than likely most of them will not mention South Carolina. Though fruit stands selling apples can be found in abundance along the highways of the foothills, many drivers barrel past them on their way to North Carolina.

It wasn't always like this. At one time, many apple growers in the Upstate—in Oconee County, for example—belonged to a co-op, and the South Carolina Apple Fair, still held in Westminster during the first two weeks of September, used to recognize the grower of the year. Even Groucho Marx was a co-owner of Horseshoe Lake Farm in Long Creek (part of which is now known as Chattooga Belle Farm). But as more Upstate growers got out of the business, the co-op broke up, and now growers in the Upcountry—whose orchards can be located pretty far from major scenic highways—pretty much fend for themselves.

Before the end of the 19th century, apples provided the main source for two essential ingredients in our diet: sugar and alcohol. That's why most of them went straight to the cider heap.

Richard and Lynn Carver, owners of Carver Orchards in Mountain Rest, are one such example. A two-time winner of Westminster Fair's apple grower of the year, Richard began growing apple trees in 1967, buying the plants from his uncle and working part-time to pay him off. Though only 14 at the time, he wasn't setting a precedent. The scent of apples he followed could be traced back to his maternal great grandfather, a Matheson, who started the apple industry in Long Creek and has a highway named after him there.

Up until last year, the only way to buy apples from Carver Orchards was to go directly to the orchard itself, tucked away across from the Belmont Baptist Church on Whetstone Road. The locals still go there, but last year the Carvers opened up a small stand on the corner where Whetstone Road meets Highway 28, and this year they have built a larger stand there with refrigeration, which should allow them to sell apples from their

25-acre orchard far into the fall. They begin in July, with Galas, then Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Rome Beauty, Pink Fuji, Mutsu and Arkansas Black. They'll close the stand when the apples run out and consumers are forced to return again to buying last year's gassed apples from Washington in supermarkets.

The only apple native to North America is the wild American Crab. Unlike wild apples, orchard apples, grown from grafts and not from seed, rely heavily on the few varieties that contain the sweetness and texture that people seek, and as a result their relatively shallow genetic pool makes them susceptible to the vast army of insects who evolve and find ways to eat them before we can. This is why the large, sweet, showroom apples we've learned to love are impossible to grow without the use of pesticides, requiring

more than any other food crop, as Michael Pollan points out in his bestselling book, *The Botany of Desire*.

This is where Richard Carver's other job comes in, the full time one that helps him sustain his apple business: he's an agricultural chemical salesman. Yet it's precisely this training that helps him use the right pesticides in the least amount at the right time—the kind of knowledge that even older agrigrowers in the Upcountry come to him seeking. And even though he doesn't yet grow for national companies, he follows the same protocols that the most demanding buyers, such as Gerber Baby Foods, require.

The Carvers are quick to point out that they aren't the only family with a history of growing apples in the Long Creek area of the Upcountry. Marvin and Gail Bryson of Bryson's U-Pick and Doug Hollifield of Hollifield's Orchard are both located off of Highway 76 in Long Creek, and other growers, such

as Stanley Brewer of Blue Haven Orchards, along with Bill Butts, Ted Matheson and Mike Ables, all help the Upcountry offer a bounty of local-grown apples.

Not too long ago, orchards, a mark of civilized cultivation, were a part of almost every settler's land. Some land-grant territories in their property deeds actually required them by law. Before the end of the 19th century, apples provided the main source for two essential ingredients in our diet: sugar and alcohol. That's why most of them went straight to the cider heap. Now that apple growers focus on growing apples for eating instead of drinking, it's good to know that the intoxicating sweetness that first drew us to the forbidden fruit can still be found on a branch not too far from home. 🍏



Groucho Marx, 2nd from right. Photo courtesy of Chattooga Belle Farm.

## FRIED APPLE RINGS

Author Wayne Cox spends his summers on the coast of Spain. This recipe comes from Chef Pilar Catot of the restaurant Cal Robell in Monistrol de Calders, in Catalonia. It is usually served as an accompaniment to a main dish, such as pork, rather than as a dessert. Although simple to make, it's one of their most popular items.

Serves 4/ Start to finish: 10 minutes

1–2 Golden Delicious Apples, peeled and cored

1 extra large egg

1–2 tablespoons of all-purpose flour

Sunflower or canola oil (not olive)

Cane Sugar

Paper towels

Cut the cored apples into rings, no thicker than ½ inch.

Beat the egg well in a shallow bowl. Gradually add one teaspoon of flour and mix thoroughly. The texture of the batter should not be too thick, nor should it be too thin. The texture should resemble thin pancake batter. Add more flour by ½ teaspoon if needed.

Place ¼ inch of sunflower oil in a hot frying pan.

While the oil is heating, place one apple ring into the egg and flour mixture and coat completely. If a drop of the batter sizzles, coat about half of the rings and place them into the oil, one at a time. Don't overfill the frying pan. Fry until light brown—about 3–4 minutes, depending on the temperature, and turn only once. The second side will take less time to brown.

When finished, line a plate with paper towels and place the cooked rings on the towel. Dip the other half of the rings in the batter and repeat.

While the rings are still warm, sprinkle cane sugar over the top of each ring. Serve warm.

Go online [www.edibleupcountry.com/recipes](http://www.edibleupcountry.com/recipes) for a special South Carolina Apple Festival mulled cider recipe.



### ABLES ORCHARD

Farm Stand  
Hwy 76  
Long Creek, SC  
864-647-6455  
Open Jul 15–early Nov

### BLUE HAVEN ORCHARDS

Farm Stand  
12508 Long Creek Hwy  
Long Creek, SC 29658  
864-647-2855  
Open Aug 1–Nov 30; 7 days a week,  
9am–6pm  
Arkansas Black, Cameo, Fuji, Galas,  
Ginger Golds, Golden Delicious, Golden  
Supremes, Granny Smith, Mutsu, Red  
Delicious, Stayman, Yates; raw cider

### BRYSON'S

U-Pick & Farm Stand  
1011 Chattooga Ridge Road  
Mountain Rest, SC 29664  
864-647-9427  
gbryson@hughes.net  
Open Aug 15–Nov 15, 9am–6pm  
Arkansas Blacks, Fuji, Gala, Golden  
Delicious, Granny Smith, Mutsu, Ozark  
Goldens, Red Delicious, Rome Beauty,  
Yates

### CARVER ORCHARDS

Farm Stand  
5195 Highlands Hwy (Hwy 28)  
Mountain Rest, SC  
Stand & Orchard located 1 mi. past  
Stumphouse Tunnel  
864-557-2715, 864-638-6301  
Open through Nov, 7 days a week, 9am–6pm  
Arkansas Black, Galas, Golden Delicious,  
Granny Smith, Pink Fuji, Mutsu, Rome  
Beauty, Stayman

### CHATTOOGA BELLE FARM

Farm Store, U-Pick, Tours & Events  
454 Damascus Church Road  
Long Creek, SC 29658  
864-647-9768, 864-972-1026  
[www.chattoogabellefarm.com](http://www.chattoogabellefarm.com)  
ChattoogaBelleFarm@bellsouth.net  
U-pick through mid-October, Thur–Sat,  
9am–5pm. Farm Store open year round,  
Thur–Sat, 9am–5pm  
Fuji, Gale Gala, Ginger Gold, Golden  
Delicious, Granny Smith, Honey Crisp,  
Liberty, Pink Lady

### HOLLIFIELD ORCHARD

Farm Stand  
Hwy 76  
Long Creek, SC  
864-638-3695  
Open Jul 15–early Nov

### MOUNTAIN REST APPLE ORCHARD

Farm Stand  
475 Hwy 107  
Mountain Rest, SC  
864-638-2232  
Labor Day–Thanksgiving, 7 days a week,  
9am–6pm  
After Thanksgiving—Christmas, Weekends  
only, 9am–6pm  
Arkansas Black, Cameo, Fuji, Gala, Ginger  
Gold, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith,  
Jamie, Jonagold, Molly Delicious, Mutsu,  
Pink Lady, Rabun Ball/Big Green, Red  
Delicious, Rome Beauty, Stayman; fresh-  
pressed, unpasteurized cider; pure raw  
cider vinegar

### 49TH ANNUAL SOUTH CAROLINA APPLE FESTIVAL

Westminster, SC  
September 7–11  
864-647-7223  
[www.westminstersc.com/festival.htm](http://www.westminstersc.com/festival.htm)  
Schedule includes: white water rafting  
event, pie baking contest, rodeo, road  
race/fun walk, arts and crafts, live music,  
talent show, parade, kid and family-friendly  
activities, delicious food and drink

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