

Westcott extends apple deal, begins high-density planting

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By [David Mitchell](#) August 05, 2015 | 2:14 am EDT

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Wescott Agri Products Inc. used to start its Minnesota apple harvest in early September and finish the deal by Thanksgiving.

This season is going to be different.

Vice president of sales and marketing Don Roper said the Elgin, Minn.-based company — which markets apples nationally under the Honeybear brand and in the Midwest under its Mississippi Valley label — has expanded its Elgin facility and added controlled atmosphere storage that will allow Wescott to extend its Minnesota apple deal into February.

Roper said the upgrade was necessary because Wescott, which grows more than half of its own volume in the state, and its grower partners have reinvested in their orchards with new varieties and high-density plantings.

Roper said that within the next four to six years, Wescott expects to handle about 100,000 cases of RiverBelle and 1 million cases of Pazazz when those new plantings have fully matured. Both varieties are Honeycrisp descendants.

Roper said RiverBelle, which will be grown in Minnesota, will be harvested in early September and will be distributed primarily in Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Pazazz, on the other hand, will be grown in Minnesota, New York, Nova Scotia and Washington and will be distributed nationally.

The variety will be harvested in mid-October in Minnesota.

“It’s a very large Pazazz planting,” Roper said. “It’s going to be very significant.”

Roper said the combination of new varieties and high-density plantings should mean better returns to growers.

That’s especially important because the company has asked its growers to earn certification for the TruEarth program it developed in conjunction with the Institute of Pest Management of North America.

The best practices include balanced nutrient profiles, improved soil fertility, the encouragement of beneficial insects and other measures.

Roper said it’s difficult to grow organic apples in the Midwest, but TruEarth provides a program that is good for orchards and should appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

