

**Perfecting the apple at VRIC**  
Annual open house returns Sept. 19

September 10, 2019

By Steve Henschel, Grimsby Lincoln News



*Daryl Somers examines the fruits of one of 22,000 apple trees at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre farm. The centre's ongoing efforts to breed the perfect apple will be highlighted during an annual open house Sept. 19. - Steve Henschel/Torstar*



*Vineland Research and Innovation Centre research director of applied genomics Daryl Somers walks the rows of test apple trees at the centre's Victoria Avenue farm. - Steve Henschel/Torstar*

For Daryl Somers and his crew at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre farm, the proverbial white whale is the perfect apple — one that is sweeter, more crisp, bright red and lasts on the shelf.

“There are way better apples,” said the VRIC research director of applied genomics, walking the farm located just southwest of the QEW and Victoria Road overpass.

Currently, he explained, Canadian farmers grow rather dated breeds of apples. The honey crisp and ambrosia apples Canadians swear by are, in Somers' mind, "legacy breeds."

"There is, pardon the pun, an appetite for refreshing the apple variety mix," said Somers, who will share his work during the upcoming VRIC What's Growing On open house Sept. 19. That appetite, based on the research from VRIC's consumer insights work, is an easy-to-grow apple that is sweet, red, juicy and crisp, with a solid shelf life. Apologies to those who prefer the more tart varieties; those individuals are in a unique segment representing 11 per cent of all apple eaters.

With that in mind, VRIC began breeding efforts at its farm in 2011 — it can take 12 to 24 years to fully develop and test a viable variety.

"The breeding process is very long," said Somers, who along with his team annually review the 22,000 individual and unique trees planted at the farm, selecting the best-looking for taste testing.

"Every single tree is different," said Somers, who hopes in the vast array of precisely-catalogued new varieties that perfect apple is waiting.

Somers won't be the only one presenting on the quest for the perfect apple either during the open house. The tour of the farm will include three stops among the rows of apple trees: one being a presentation from Somers, alongside a presentation on the state of the apple industry from the Ontario Apple Growers, and a presentation on consumer apple preferences from VRIC consumer insights team member Amy Bowen.

Typically, the annual open house — an effort to highlight to the public the myriad of agricultural research projects at the centre — is held in July. But with the focus on apples this year, the event was moved to September to coincide with harvest.

Beyond some insights, guests can expect some light refreshments. Registration ahead of time is required, and can be completed on the VRIC website at [www.vinelandresearch.com](http://www.vinelandresearch.com).

<https://www.niagarathisweek.com/whatson-story/9589423-perfecting-the-apple-at-vric/>