



DID YOU KNOW?

ORCHARDS

Commodity Description

The orchard industry across Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland is centered primarily around apples, with peaches, cherries, pears, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and wine grapes providing important diversification.



The Mid-Atlantic region benefits from:

- Favorable elevations
- Well-drained mountain soil
- Moderate rainfall
- Strong agritourism demand
- Proximity to East Coast population centers



Commercial operations increasingly rely on:

- High-density plantings
- Precision irrigation
- Integrated pest management (IPM)
- Mechanization where practical
- Direct-to-consumer marketing

Labor availability, weather volatility, and disease pressure remain the industry's largest challenges.

What are some best management practices?

Site Selection

Choose:

- South or east-facing slopes
- Air drainage to reduce frost
- Well-drained soils
- pH between 6.0–6.8
- Reliable water source

Select Disease-Resistant Varieties

Plant multiple cultivars to:

- Spread harvest timing
- Improve pollination
- Reduce disease losses
- Meet different market demands

Use High-Density Planting Systems

Modern orchards commonly use:

- Dwarf rootstocks
- Trellis systems
- Narrow canopies

Install Irrigation Before Planting

Drip irrigation provides:

- Better tree establishment
- Improved fruit sizing
- Drought protection
- Fertigation capability

Prune Every Year

Annual pruning:

- Improves sunlight penetration
- Reduces disease
- Enhances fruit quality
- Maintains manageable tree height

Implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Successful orchards monitor:

- Codling moth
- Apple maggot
- Brown marmorated stink bug
- Fire blight
- Apple scab
- Cedar apple rust
- Spray only when thresholds warrant.

Build Multiple Marketing Channels

Successful orchards often combine:

- Wholesale
- Retail farm market
- Pick-your-own
- Farmers markets
- CSA subscriptions
- Hard cider
- Online ordering

Develop a Long-Term Capital Plan

Startup orchards often require:

- 4–6 years before meaningful cash flow
- 8–10 years before full production
- Maintain sufficient operating capital through establishment years.

What are the industry trends?

Current trends influencing Mid-Atlantic orchard profitability include:

- Increased consumer preference for locally grown produce
- Continued growth in agritourism
- Expansion of hard cider production
- Greater adoption of precision agriculture technologies
- Labor shortages encouraging mechanization
- Rising investment in frost protection and irrigation
- Strong demand for premium apple varieties
- Moderate food-price inflation supporting fresh fruit values

What is the current industry outlook?

Overall outlook for Mid-Atlantic orchards remains favorable for well-capitalized operations that:

- Utilize modern high-density production systems
- Diversify revenue streams
- Invest in irrigation and frost protection
- Focus on premium fresh-market fruit
- Develop direct-to-consumer sales

The greatest risks remain:

- Labor availability
- Weather extremes
- Spring frost
- Disease pressure
- Rising production costs



Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA Economic Research Service, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Cooperative Extension, WVU Extension Service, University of Maryland Extension, Virginia Fruit Page (virginiafruit.ento.vt.edu), West Virginia Division of Economic Development – Food & Agriculture, West Virginia Department of Agriculture, Maryland Department of Agriculture

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