BLADE PHOTOS BY LORI KING

Aaron Mora, 7, checks on one of his two beehives at his family's farm in Fulton County's Swancreek Township. Aaron and his brother Eli, 9, are responsible for the hives.

FAMILY AFFAIR

Fulton County farm espouses earthy values

From left: Alycia Martinez, Fernando Mora, Erica Robinson, Eli Mora, and Marie Richardson collect apples for the Apples for Everyone event at Johnston Fruit Farms.

Eli Mora, 9, and his brother Aaron, 7, pick blueberries on their family farm.

Owner Martha Mora, left, stops sorting apples long enough to chat with a tour group from Holy Trinity Catholic Preschool in Assumption, Ohio.

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>
> Martha Mora

Fernando Mora, co-owner of Johnston Fruit Farms west of Swanton, adjusts the tractor for cultivating strawberry plants.

By LORI KING
BLADE STAFF WRITER

SWANTON — As children climbed on large pumpkins, fed goats, and picked apples at Johnston Fruit Farms, the owner strolled among them and captured memories with her camera.

It was a special day for Martha Mora and her family, who expected more than 1,000 visitors to her Swanton area farm for the annual Apples for Everyone event Sept. 26.

Not only did the visitors get to pluck their own fruit, they were given an opportunity to help gather 23,000 pounds of apples for the Seagate Food Bank.

There was also live music, freshly made doughnuts and apple cider, and local vendors selling their wares.

Apples for Everyone is the farm's signature event, and it espouses the direction the Mora family has taken since Ms. Mora inherited the farm from her parents, Dale and Pauline Johnston, in 2009.

Ms. Mora and Fernando Mora, her husband and co-owner, run the 120-acre fruit farm, with a commitment to grow and sell fresh and nutritious crops: asparagus, strawberries, blueberries, peaches, raspberries, apples, pumpkins, squash, and gourds.

It is a small family operation that includes the couple's two young sons, and Ms. Mora's two adult daughters.

"It's definitely a family affair, and that's what makes it work, what holds our family together," Ms. Mora said.

"To me, that's more valuable than any money we would make here, because, trust me, if we were just doing it for the money we wouldn't be here. I'd be doing dental hygiene and my husband would have a job with insurance.

"When you get farming in your blood, and I'm talking as a small farmer, I think the reason we do it is, we're fulfilling a community service. So yeah, I feel that family farmers have a different reason why they stay in farming."

Female farm operators are in the minority in Fulton County and across the country.

"As a woman farm owner, I have an advantage when dealing with the public because a lot of times it seems we're selling fruit to women. Women want to bring their children out and show their kids how things are grown," she said.

Customers use a fruit collector to reach apples high up in a tree at Johnston Fruit Farms.

📹 View a photo gallery online at toledoblade.com/a-e.

"They realize that having something fresh [means] having something more nutritious."

But she admits there are disadvantages, as well.

"I do a lot of physical work, but there are some instances where the lifting is just beyond me. And I'm not super mechanically inclined, so that's also beyond me," she said.

"But I got to hand it to my husband. He really tries his best to get all of that. We are a great team because we really complement each other well. As long as we remember that, and appreciate that, and respect that in each other I think that's what makes our family farm run."

It is that kind of mind-set that keeps Swanton area resident and longtime customer Carole Moll coming back. She has been picking strawberries in the spring, blueberries in the summer, and apples for applesauce in the fall for about 40 years.

"I don't buy from the store. I only buy from here or use vegetables from my own garden," she said. "I like fresh and local. And they are my neighbors."

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