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# LEADER

Farm Credit of the Virginias *∞* Autumn 2013

Albemarle CiderWorks

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## Albemarle CiderWorks:

Where the craft of fine cider-making is making a comeback!

By Jennifer Showalter

**F**or nearly two centuries, cider was America's staple beverage, but virtually disappeared after the mid-19th century. From the first settlements, cider provided vital nutrients through the winter months and was often used for barter and trade. Orchards today grow apples primarily for fresh markets instead of cider production, but cider is enjoying a comeback in America and Virginia.

Albemarle CiderWorks is one of eight cideries in Virginia specializing in this

long-lost craft. Like the orchards of yesteryear, Albemarle CiderWorks' Vintage Virginia Apples orchard includes numerous heirloom varieties of apples with many being grown exclusively for cider.

### A Retirement Farm that Took Off

Originally intended as a simple place for the Shelton family to retire, this 80-acre farm tucked away in the mountains of North Garden, Va., has turned into both a productive and attractive business. Charlotte Shelton along

with her brothers, Chuck and Bill, and their 93-year-old father, "Bud," all work together to make their business a success. They purchased the farm in 1986, and remodeled the old farm house, which serves as a guest house today. Bud had intended to run a few cattle, but he and his children began raising different heirloom apples instead. To their surprise, their hobby quickly became a flourishing business with several facets.

Since starting to plant trees in the mid-1990s, the Sheltons now grow

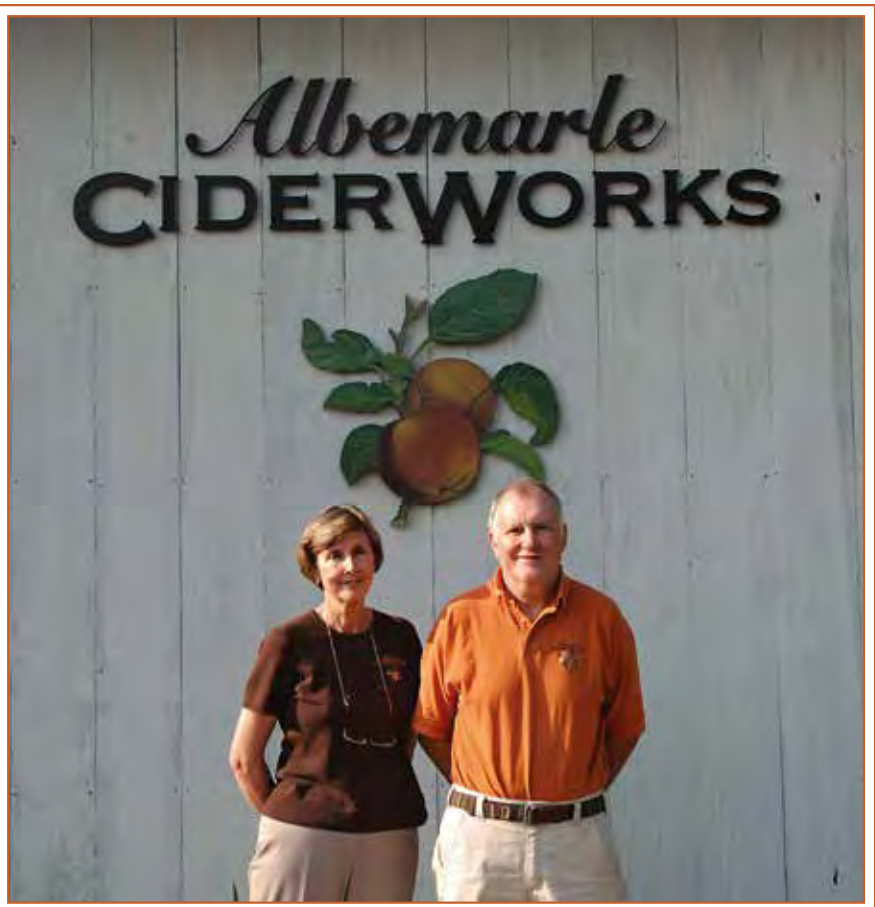
some 250 varieties of apples. Realizing they had outgrown the hobby stage, they founded Vintage Virginia Apples LLC in 2000. In response to the interest in the rare varieties of fruit trees they were growing, the Sheltons started grafting and propagating trees from their collection. Today, they have an online catalog to accompany their 3-acre nursery so customers can easily place orders. The Sheltons sell several thousand apple, peach and pear whips a year and continue to increase that number. With their sales growing throughout the United States, they hope to help preserve the older varieties that are rarely available and difficult to find.

Realizing that cider was the reason for which many of these heirlooms were grown, the Sheltons branched into cider-making, completing their cidery in 2009. "Building the cidery and its tasting room was the most ambitious thing we have done," says Charlotte. "Farm Credit has been our lender of choice all the way through since the beginning back in the late 1980s. Farm Credit is flexible and understands the business. They are more receptive to entertaining plans than the classic bank."

## A Family Adventure

Chuck works full time on the farm as the cider maker. Bill and Charlotte, still active in their careers, are very involved in the business and work there most of their free time. The youngest brother, Todd, lives away from the farm presently but maintains his interest with the operation for the future. Despite his age, Bud is also active and points out that he planted the first trees. He mows grass, greets people, gardens and keeps the roads up around the orchard. Bill's daughter, Anne Shelton, works full time along with two other full-time and six part-time employees who help in the tasting room and with making cider. Other part timers work in the orchard.

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The two owners of CiderWorks, Charlotte Shelton and her brother, Chuck Shelton



The Sheltons are very proud of their award winning ciders. They have them on display in the tasting room for all to see and taste.

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The Sheltons specialize in apples, but also have 30 to 35 varieties of peaches which they sell fresh; 20 varieties of pears with which they are experimenting in hopes of

making perry, a fermented pear juice; and a few cherries, plums and apricots. Tending to so many different varieties of fruits is a considerable challenge. "Orcharding is highly specialized and requires a high level

of skill," says Charlotte. "Our learning curve has been steep. We are gradually moving towards larger plantings of varieties we want especially for cider."

### Hard Cider Making

The Sheltons have put their best efforts into learning and perfecting the crafting of their ciders. Like wine, cider is produced by fermenting the juice of apples. Since the end of Prohibition, most Americans think of cider as fresh juice and the fermented product as "hard" cider.

The apples are selected when the sugar and acidity levels are optimal. The apples are then ground into in a coarse mash known as pomace. The pomace is fed into a press where the juice is extracted. The juice is transferred into tanks and fermented for four or more weeks and bottled. With good, firm cider apples, the Sheltons generally get two and a half to three gallons of juice per bushel.

Most cider is made from a blend of different apples that give a richer, better crafted cider, but the Sheltons have also experimented with several single varietal ciders using just one particularly promising apple variety. With much of their own orchard still being young, they source around three-fourths of their cider apples from other local orchards with whom they have relationships. Their current storage and tank space permit a production of approximately 3,000 cases of cider each year. Their cider can be purchased at the farm and from a variety of other locations throughout Virginia. Albemarle CiderWorks



Chuck Shelton pours a glass of Royal Pippin, one of the many varieties they offer, for us to taste.

**“Farm Credit has been our lender of choice all the way through since the beginning back in the late 1980s. Farm Credit is flexible and understands the business. They are more receptive to entertaining plans than the classic bank,” says Charlotte.**

is a licensed farm winery and is just starting to ship cider within Virginia.

## Open Doors

Different events throughout the year draw people to Albemarle CiderWorks. Vintage Virginia Apples and Albemarle Ciderworks offer classes and workshops on topics such as pruning, grafting, cider making and other horticultural topics, featuring noted authorities in the field. Live music and other events also encourage visitors to stop by the tasting room. In addition to cider, guests will find a variety of locally sourced foods for enjoying with their ciders. Local cheeses, ham, sausages, salami, baked goods, candy and other items are available.

Albemarle CiderWorks Harvest Festival has been a popular feature for the past 12 years. Offered on the first Saturday in November every year, it features approximately 35 vendors of local foods and crafts, fresh cider, live music all day and a broad selection of apples. This event typically draws well over 1,000 guests and features tastings of rare



apples from their collection along with talks and workshops on topics related to the agricultural history of southern Albemarle county and Virginia.

The Sheltons also rent out their tasting room facility for meetings, dinners and receptions throughout the year. Their guest house sleeps eight people and can be booked through their website.

The Sheltons are not only excited about what they are doing on their own family farm,

but are passionate about striving to help bring back the cider industry as a whole. "Cider today is where the wine industry was in Virginia 35 to 40 years ago," says Charlotte. "I would like to think the cider industry will get its own legs as we go forward. We were the second cidery to open in Virginia. Now there are eight."

Albemarle CiderWorks is open year round, Wednesdays through Sundays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit [www.albemarle ciderworks.com](http://www.albemarle ciderworks.com). ∞



The tasting room where products are sampled and sold and where different events take place.

# Perfect Autumn Eats!



## Iced Pumpkin Cookies

### Ingredients

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups white sugar
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### For Glaze:

- 2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 3 tablespoons milk
- 1 tablespoon melted butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, ground cloves and salt; set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, cream together the 1/2 cup of butter and white sugar. Add pumpkin, egg and 1 teaspoon vanilla to butter mixture, and beat until creamy. Mix

in dry ingredients. Drop on cookie sheet by tablespoonfuls; flatten slightly.

3. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes in the preheated oven. Cool cookies, then drizzle glaze with fork.

4. To Make Glaze: Combine confectioners' sugar, milk, 1 tablespoon melted butter and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Add milk as needed, to achieve drizzling consistency.



## Apple Glazed Pork Chops

### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup apple jelly
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
- 4 (1 inch thick) pork chops
- 2 small baking apples, cored and sliced

### Directions

1. Combine first four ingredients in saucepan; cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until jelly melts. Keep warm.
2. Place pork chops on rack in broiler pan. Broil five inches from heat, seven minutes on each side.
3. Remove from oven; brush one side with jelly glaze, and broil three minutes. Flip and brush other side with glaze; top with apple slices, and drizzle with remaining glaze. Broil three minutes.



## Sweet Potato Casserole

### Ingredients

- 4 1/2 cups cooked and mashed sweet potatoes
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1 cup chopped pecans

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease a 9x13 inch baking dish.
2. In a large bowl, mix together mashed sweet potatoes, 1/2 cup butter, milk, sugar, vanilla extract and eggs. Spread sweet potato mixture into the prepared baking dish. In a small bowl, mix together brown sugar and flour. Cut in 1/3 cup butter until mixture is crumbly, then stir in pecans. Sprinkle pecan mixture over the sweet potatoes.
3. Bake for 25 minutes in the preheated oven, or until golden brown.



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**Reminder: November 20, 2013, is the sales closing date for apples, peaches and grapes.**



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