

MAIA7 and MAIA8 to be Introduced in the Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co. Catalog

On September 9th, 2009 6 members of the Midwest Apple Improvement Association met at Eckert's Orchard in Belleville, Illinois to make a final evaluation of some 60 Goldrush x Sweet Sixteen crosses (out of an original seedling block of around 1200). Out of the 60 sampled, 6 were chosen to be propagated for further evaluation—the common trait being an array of rich, unique flavors ranging from sweet licorice, to strawberry milkshake to cherry pie.

In a similar scene, elite selections were made from a seedling block of open-pollinated Honeycrisp at Lynd's Fruit Farm in Pataskala, Ohio—all featuring extraordinary traits over traditional apples on the market.

Fast forward nearly 8 years and 2 of MAIA's elite selections from these plantings have had patents filed by MAIA and are slated to be introduced in the Spring 2017 Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co. catalog/website. The final selections were made based on results from tasting panels held in 2013 and 2014 and conducted at the research farm of Gurney's, and sister company Gardens Alive, in Tipp City, Ohio. The 2013 tasting panel was a blind comparison against 13 elite MAIA selections and the 2014 tasting panel included 6 advanced MAIA selections and 4 released, well-known varieties.

Taste-testers raved about the eating qualities of these 2 selections and it was this eating experience, along with strong grower attributes such as productivity and disease resistance, which clinched the decision to advance on these exciting new apples.

The first of these elite selections, from the open-pollinated Honeycrisp block, is MAIA7, to be marketed under the name Crunch-A-Bunch®. What many have called an improved and earlier ripening version of Goldrush, Crunch-A-Bunch offers the intense and complex flavor profile and great storage-ability of Goldrush but with an improved appearance, a crisper texture and overall higher consumer ap-

peal. The flavor complexity is apparent when reading notes from various taste tests, where flavors have been likened to pineapple upside down cake with hints of almond, bright and herbal with a hint of tarragon, delightfully sweet-tart. Crunch-A-Bunch appears to be resistant to scab and fireblight and is extremely precocious and productive.

The second selection, from that fateful Goldrush x Sweet 16 cross, is MAIA8. It will be marketed under the name Baker's Delight®, a name suggested by Gurney's customers. Baker's Delight is indeed a superb baking and dessert apple, with the richest, most complex flavor you can get from an early to mid-September ripening variety. The flavor has hints of honey, cinnamon, anise and vanilla with a delightful floral fragrance. Medium-sized apples have an attractive, glossy red finish and do not brown easily



Crunch-A-Bunch® (right) compared to Gold Rush (left).
Photo Credit: Gardens Alive!



Baker's Delight ®. Photo credit: Gardens Alive!

when cut. This variety is an extremely heavy annual bearer, and apples hang on the tree for an extended period with no loss in flavor quality – allowing for a longer picking window.

Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co./ Gardens Alive! has been an active supporter of the Midwest Apple Improvement Association's efforts from early on in the organization's history and looks forward to continued collaboration with MAIA. This past Spring saw the planting of more seedling crosses at the Nurseries Tipp City research facility, with an eye on the future of great improvements in the world of apple breeding. The focus on superior eating quality, disease resistance and reliable cropping translates to varieties which will be of great success with home gardeners and hobbyists—the core Gurney's customers.

Serious commercial tree numbers of these two new releases are not anticipated to be available till the 2019 planting season as the nursery ramps up bud wood. Interest in trees for this purpose should be directed to Felix Cooper VP Horticulture Gardens Alive (felix@gardensalive.com)

Felix Cooper
Board Member