

American Fruit Grower® Magazine Announces 2025 Apple Grower of the Year

Jim Engelsma, the fourth honoree from Michigan, takes multileader production, cidermaking and mentoring to new levels.

WILLOUGHBY, OH, UNITED STATES, August 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In this summer of Superman, [American Fruit Grower](#)® magazine brings you Jim Engelsma.

Extending a long line of industry superheroes, Engelsma is the 37th recipient of the American Fruit GrowerSM [Apple Grower of the Year](#), presented annually by the publication and parent company [Meister Media Worldwide](#) and sponsored since 2015 by Valent U.S.A.

As President of Engelsma's Apple Barn in Walker, MI, just over 4 miles west of downtown Grand Rapids, Engelsma, 60, has set standards with his multileader high-density production systems, award-winning cider business and mentorship of fellow growers.

"To be where I'm at right now and to realize that I've joined a group of people — past recipients, many of whom I know — it's humbling to be here today," Engelsma says. "I have to look backward and see how those giants in the industry took the time to mentor me and lift me and to help me grow to where I'm



Apple Grower of the Year



Meister Media Worldwide



Jim Engelsma of Engelsma's Apple Barn: 2025 Apple Grower of the Year

at now. Some of these men and women are still in my lives and are still mentoring me. My debt of gratitude can only be repaid by passing this along to the next generation of fruit growers.”

Engelsma now makes for a fantastic four of Michigan apple growers, each of whom hails from or near the state’s prestigious Fruit Ridge region. Previous recipients named Apple Grower of the Year include peers Phil and Judy Schwallier (2018), Ed Wittenbach (1999) and Harold and JoAnn Thome (1992). Only Washington (14) and New York (5) have fared better than Michigan at the state level.

“My first trip to Michigan, I asked former Apple Grower of the Year Phil Schwallier what progressive growers I should visit,” Dave Eddy, Editor of American Fruit Grower, says. “Jim Engelsma was the first grower he mentioned. I have never forgotten how Schwallier, who was then a Michigan State University Extension Advisor, held him in such high esteem.”

Engelsma, a third-generation farmer, purchased the family farm from his father, Jim Sr., in 2008. He and wife Becky have five children and nine grandchildren. Daughter Bridget runs the cidermaking business, which boasts a record seven state titles, and has assumed daily operations of the 78-acre orchard from her dad, who has been working full time with Nutrien Ag Solutions since 2015.

“Jim Engelsma is known among his peers for his family-centric farming operation, high-density orchards, and award-winning apple cider,” Vince Restucci, Tree Fruit Market Segment Manager at Valent U.S.A., says. “Jim is dedicated to producing high-quality apples, and he embraces new technology with the goal of improving efficiency and profitability. We are honored to recognize him as the 2025 Apple Grower of the Year.”

Diane Smith, Executive Director of the Michigan Apple Committee, singles out several Engelsma attributes while calling him a “respected leader” in Michigan’s apple industry.

- Beside growing apples and producing cider, he actively supports research efforts that help drive the industry's success.
- He volunteers his farm as a host site for horticultural research and collaborates with Michigan State University leaders in horticulture, plant pathology, and entomology to advance research priorities for the industry.
- He has held leadership roles with the Michigan Tree Fruit Commission and the International Fruit Tree Association (IFTA) and currently serves on the Michigan Apple Research Subcommittee, further demonstrating his commitment to innovation and industry development.
- He worked with the Michigan Dept. of Agriculture and Rural Development as part of a working group that created regulations and guidelines to improve the safety and quality of apple cider

production across the state.

"In short, Jim Engelsma is a passionate and committed advocate for the Michigan apple industry," Smith says. "Our industry is so fortunate to have had so many wonderful growers honored with this award."

Engelsma's talents are equally renowned at the national level.

"The USApple team has always been very impressed by Jim Engelsma," Jim Bair, President and CEO of the U.S. Apple Association, says. "In particular, Jim's dedication to the pursuit of science-based research to benefit the apple industry is broad and deep. He is a keen supporter of innovation, and his reputation as a thought leader reflects that."

In 2016 Engelsma assisted the MSU Dept. of Horticulture in its quest for top-tier faculty, resulting in the simultaneous hiring of researchers Todd Einhorn and Courtney Hollender.

"Jim is a wonderful individual, a stellar ambassador of Michigan fruit, who is extremely devoted to improving the competitive position of the industry," Einhorn says. "He has engaged my program in many key stakeholder events, and I have always been aware and grateful for his support. He is very deserving of this recognition."

Equally appreciative is Nutrien Ag Solutions, which employs Engelsma as the Location Manager at its Hart and Sparta branches.

"Jim is a hard-working manager, as he oversees two locations for Nutrien Ag Solutions, all while servicing fruit and vegetable growers in West Michigan," Scott Dumaw, the supply company's Michigan Division Manager, says. "Jim has a love for apple production, and you can see that in the smile on his face when he is talking about growing and producing high-quality apples. Jim is always looking for new and innovative products to take to his growers, as well as utilize for himself to produce high-quality fruit."

In addition to Engelsma, three apple growers are recognized as regional winners by American Fruit Grower and Valent U.S.A.:

East Region — Joy Cline (Farm Manager/COO, Bear Mt. Orchards, Aspers, PA)

Midwest/Mountain States Region — Benjamin Schilling (Owner, Schilling Family Farms, Eau Claire, MI; Mick Klug Farms, St. Joseph, MI)

West Region — Cass and Mac Gebbers (Owners [brothers], Gebbers Farms, Brewster, WA)

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About The Award

The American Fruit GrowerSM Apple Grower of the Year Award, presented annually by American Fruit Grower, honors apple growers who have gone beyond the confines of the orchard and have, through their involvement and leadership, made a real impact on the apple industry. Learn more at Apple Grower of the Year.

About American Fruit Grower

Meister Media Worldwide's flagship publication as well as its oldest, American Fruit Grower[®] magazine combines with Western Fruit Grower[®] magazine as the trusted brands that producers depend on to grow their crops and their profits. American Fruit Grower and Western Fruit Grower reach producers, shippers, and other influencers who serve the fresh and processing markets for deciduous fruit, citrus, grapes, berries, and nuts. Learn more at growingproduce.com.

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