

keep them pruned and try to get something out of them," he said.

Planting and harvesting

When Wes is making decisions about what corn or beans to plant, there's likely to be advice available about which variety will be good next year.

"With apples, you have to guess what will be popular 20 years from now. We have the tried and true varieties that everyone likes, but we also need to try new ones," he said.

The greatest difference between farming fruit trees and farming corn and beans may be in regard to the harvest and sale of your product.

"Someone is always going to buy your corn and beans at market value, but there is no guarantee that they will buy your apples or peaches, and they are definitely perishable," Wes said.

Corn can be stored in a bin, but you have to do something fairly quickly with peaches.

"When the peaches are ready, they are ready and you need to pick them and get them out the door or into the cooler," he added.

The apple harvest is a little less frantic. Wes has varieties of early season, mid-season and late-season producing trees so he doesn't have to deal with them all at once, and is able to lengthen his sales season.

"We have some apples that start in late July and others that won't ripen until November," he said.

Like off the farm work but closer

For many farmers a job off the farm helps augment their income. It is the commercial side of the orchard that is one of Wes' other jobs, along with doing landscaping and construction work for his other company Carithers Inc.

The vision he and his wife Stephanie have is to make Orchard Hill a "destination," not only for the Spoon River Scenic Drive, but all season long.

■ Cole Carithers, 2, is more than happy to eat as many juicy peaches as his parents Wes and Stephanie will let him. He is the youngest of thier family, which also includes Casey, 10, Brayden, 9, and Nikita 5.

Toward that end he will be expanding the playground this year.

"The biggest thing will be the Tricycle Track, along with the swings and slides and jungle gym," he said.

He also plans on planting a corn maze again, along with a huge pumpkin patch that will include pumpkins and gourds of all shapes, sizes, and colors.

Wes has plans for big changes over the next three years. A new roof and new front on the store will make it look more like a country store with a covered porch, for example.

Special products, special events

In some businesses, you are strictly at the mercy of the market. But in others, like Orchard Hill, you can make your own new markets.

Last year Wes partnered with a vintner and transformed 120 gallons of cider into 600 bottles of one-of-a-kind apple wine.

This year Wes hopes to have seven varieties of fruit wine available.

Most are already available for sale by appointment until regular hours start in July.

Last year he also started several new events, like a barbecue featuring apple

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