Farmers in the Ancient Middle East grew apples as early as 6500 B.C.E. The Romans introduced them to England around the first century B.C.E., and the English brought them to America in the seventeenth century C.E. Apples remain the most popular and versatile fruit grown in Kent County, England, and in Virginia. Peaches, pears, cherries, and strawberries also grow in both places.

Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley is well suited to orchards. Today, fruit growers face shrinking profits due to imports, and many have sold their land. Some sustain family farms by producing vegetables, nursery stock, and heirloom fruit for gourmet chefs and adventurous consumers.

Captain John Smith wrote that the native Virginia grapes “well please when they are made into wine.” With over 100 vineyards statewide, wine production in Virginia has blossomed in the past twenty years. The Viticulture Program of Virginia Tech researches pests and diseases that plague Virginia grapes. Some wineries now produce wines from the Norton Grape, a Virginia native.

FRUIT FACTS

◆ George Washington probably did not chop down his father’s cherry tree. Today, apple trees grace the restored Mount Vernon garden.

◆ Thomas Jefferson, considered the founder of the modern Virginia wine industry, employed an Italian winemaker to establish a vineyard at Monticello in 1774.

◆ Frederick County, Virginia, is the self-proclaimed “Apple Capital of the World.”

◆ The Fresh Fruit Terminal at the port of Sheerness in Kent County, England, is the largest port for soft fruit in the United Kingdom. It annually handles over 885,000 tons of produce.