

Communicating Your Sustainable Growing Practices: A Conversation about Challenges and Strategies

Susan Futrell



PFI Commercial Apple Growers Workshop

Ames, Iowa

Feb 6, 2024

Communicating Your Sustainable Growing Practices: Resources and Strategies

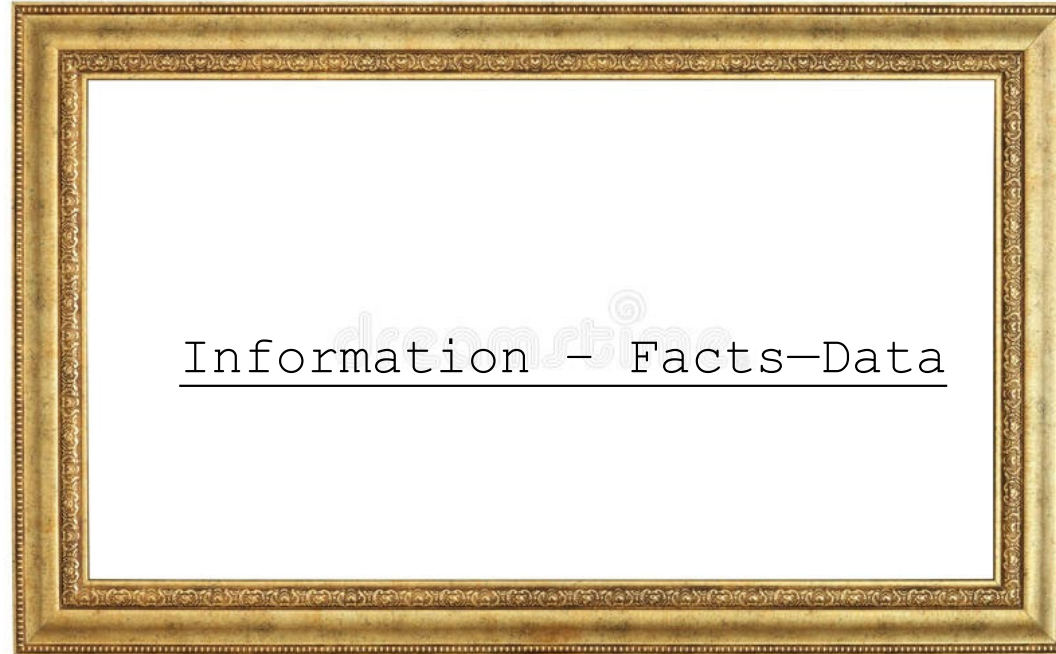
- 1. Crafting Your Message: Framing Effective Communications
- 2. Delivering Your Message: Marketing Opportunities
- 3. Supporting Your Message: Certification Options

Please ask questions and add you own experience as we go along!

How do you describe your farming practices, in 1-2 sentences, to a visitor or customer?

Take 1 minute to jot down the answer, and 2 minutes to share your thoughts with the person sitting next to you:

Framing is how human beings process information

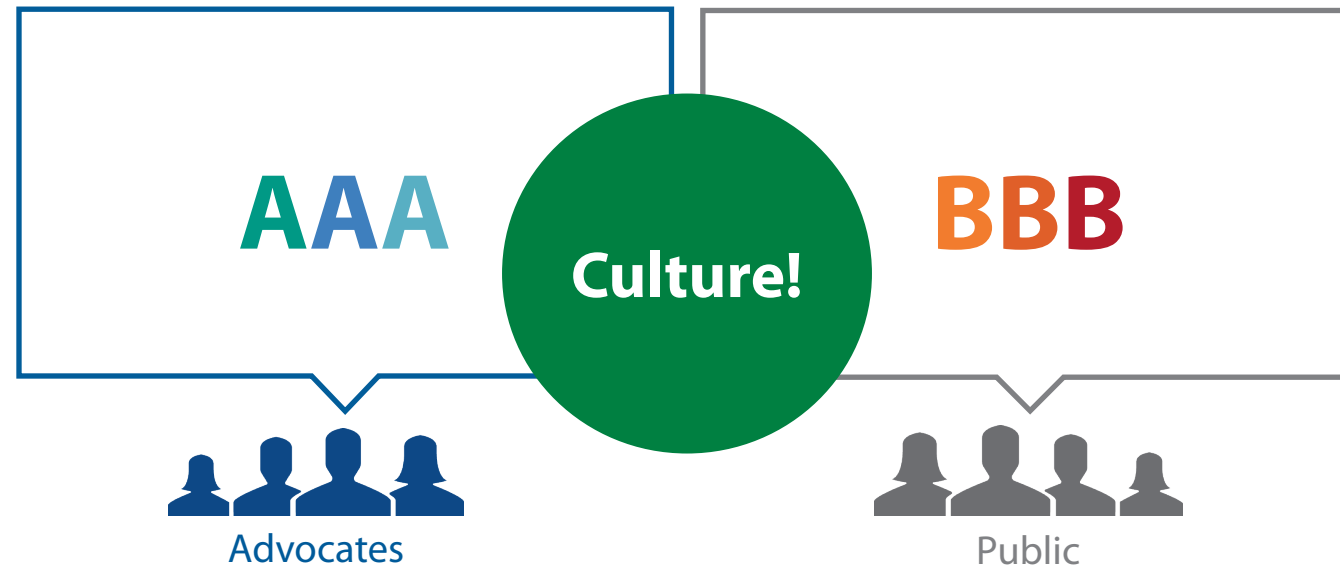


- The **mental structures** that shape how we see the world
- The **stories** we tell ourselves about how the world works
- Trigger words will **activate** the frames already in your mind

How Frames Work

- 1. They are **unconscious**—you have no idea you are using them
- 2. They define **common sense**, which *varies widely* from person to person
- 3. **Repetition** embeds them
- 4. **Surface frames** are what we hear; they activate, hook on to deep frames
- 5. **Deep frames** are values, beliefs—they change slowly if at all
- 6. **Facts won't enter the brain** unless there's a frame to make sense of them
- 7. **Negating** the “other” side's frames actually **reinforces** them. E.g. “I am not a crook.” Richard Nixon 1974

You Say... They Think...



The Goal of Farming and Food Narrative Project:

- Break through the polarization, oversimplification and mis-information that characterizes current discourse on food and farming
- Counter the isolation and competition among various approaches to good farming practices.
- Speed progress toward a sustainable farming and food system.
- Make our efforts as productive, effective and collaborative as possible.

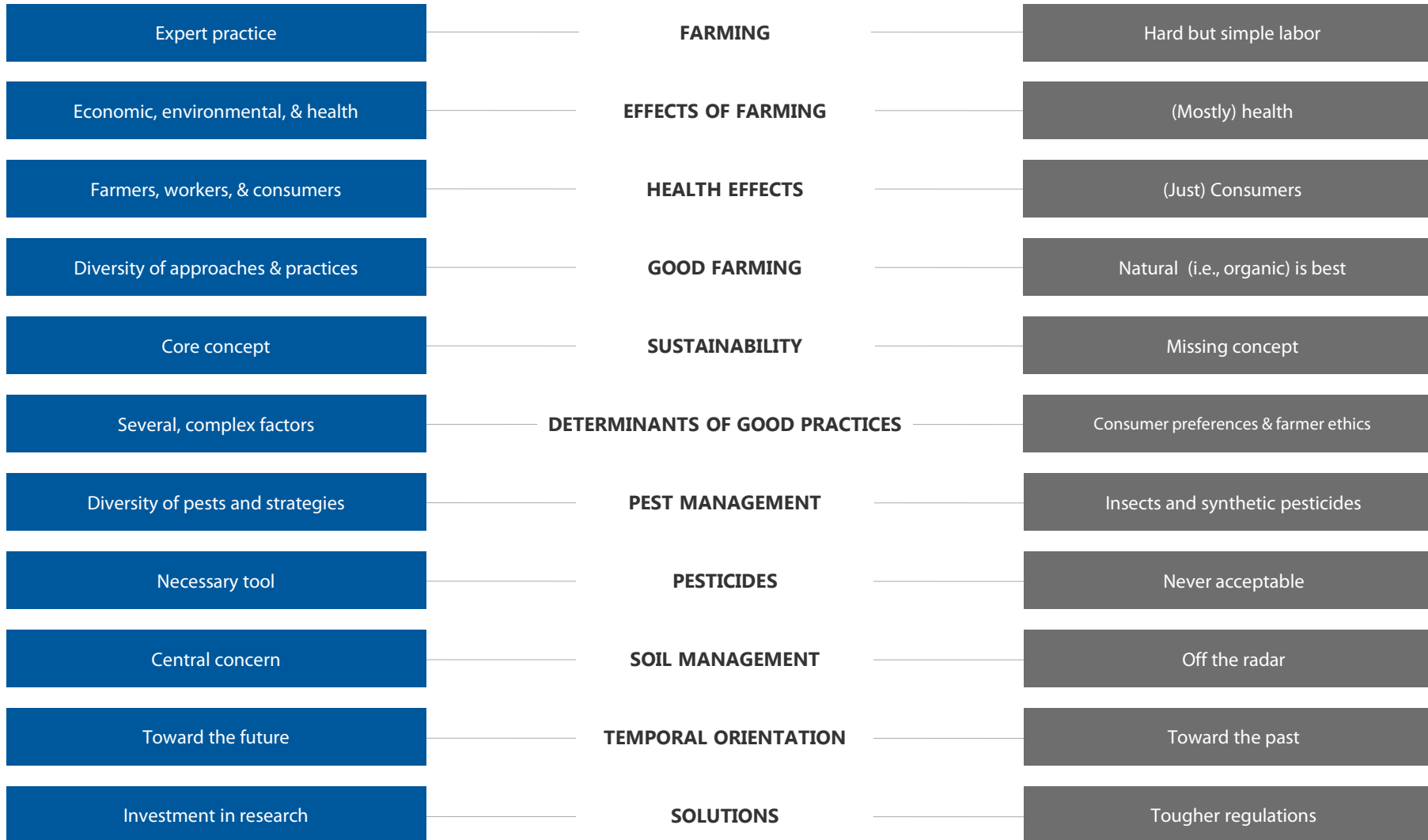
Mapping the Gaps



Field



Public



Reframing Farming: Top-line Recommendations

See full report for explanation and details: <https://www.farmingandfoodnarrative.org/resources>

- ***1. Start with farming, not food.***
- When we start conversations about farming with the theme of food, the issue quickly narrows to individual safety or eating experience. On the other hand, when we enter conversations about farming through other issues – especially community vibrancy or environmental concerns – people can and will begin to grapple with the complexity of farming.

— ***2. Make the story about interconnection.***

- People readily agree that farming is vital to society; we don't need to spend precious communications energy convincing them that it matters. We do, however, need to remind people why it's an issue that deserves more public attention.

- ***3. Show how adjusting farming practices and policies can contribute to the type of communities we want.***
- Farming is often far out on the horizon in public thinking and public discourse. Even if people think about farming at all, they tend not to think of it as integral, necessary parts of their lives. Use framing to bring it closer and connect it to the communities where people live and the ideals that that people believe society should uphold.

- ***4. Talk about the tightrope that farms must cross.***
- Compare the risky, complex decision making involved in farming to the process of crossing a tightrope. Use the metaphor to center farmers' perspectives without zooming in on stories of specific individuals, which can activate the public's tendency to romanticize farmers.

- ***5. Tell science-rich stories about innovative practices on farms.***
- Show how innovative, scientifically informed practices are being implemented on diverse types of farms. Explain the ways in which farmers develop, test, and adopt evidence-based practices to solve specific dilemmas that arise from their context.

- ***6. Speak directly to historical and contemporary inequities.***
- The erasure of farmers of color and women farmers from media coverage and agricultural communications is both striking and important. Farming is part of society, and therefore current societal realities must be reflected in communication about agriculture. Embrace and cultivate opportunities to acknowledge that historical inequities in terms of race, class, and gender have an impact on the present reality and future of farming issues.

- ***5. Tell science-rich stories about innovative practices on farms.***
- Show how innovative, scientifically informed practices are being implemented on diverse types of farms. Explain the ways in which farmers develop, test, and adopt evidence-based practices to solve specific dilemmas that arise from their context.

Framing the Pesky Subject of Pest Management

Farmers must, at some point and in some way, eliminate some pests; the selection of methods comes down to balancing financial costs, environmental impacts, and human health in pursuit of a viable crop.

The public, on the other hand, has a limited understanding of farming practices and a narrow view of pest management. People equate pest management with the application of chemical pesticides. They also assume that on organic farms, no pesticides are applied. And, because they mentally model chemicals as artificial and unhealthy, they assume that pesticides should be avoided, always.

These mindsets hamper and constrain efforts to expand holistic approaches to pest management that limit, but don't eliminate, the appropriate and safe use of pesticides.

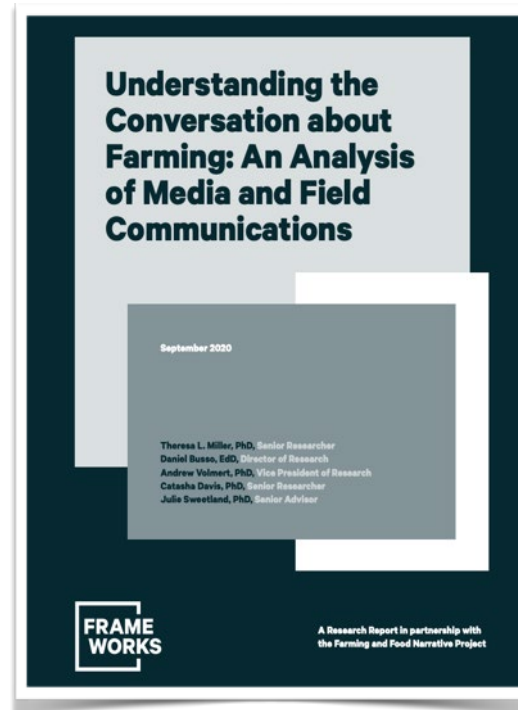
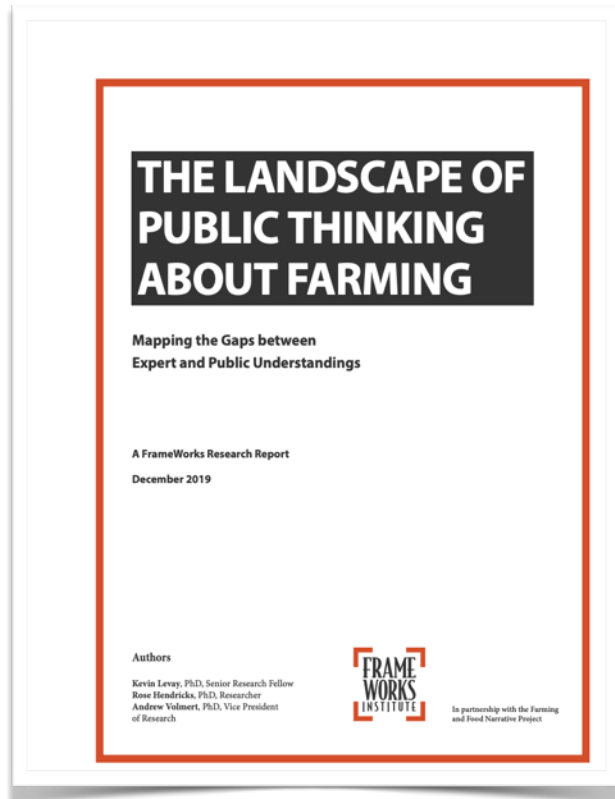
What the public thinks when they hear the word “pesticides.”



RECOMMENDATIONS for a more productive conversation about pesticides:

- Limit use of words that have pest as a root word, such as pesticide or pest management.
- Talk instead about “farming practices that keep insects and diseases from harming crops.”
- When speaking about Integrated Pest Management (IPM), use specific examples of integrated practices earlier and more often than general descriptions of the principles involved.

- When time and space allow, use a four-part narrative structure that builds understanding step- by-step, moving through these “four B’s”:
- ***Background - Biology - Barriers – Balance***
- When people begin to reason through on-farm challenges themselves, this helps disrupt oversimplified, “good/bad” thinking about farming practices. Telling science-rich stories about farming dilemmas and practices offers a way to talk about farming practices with the public that lead to more accurate, nuanced, and inclusive understanding of ‘good farming.’



Think back to the exercise at the beginning.
Take 1 minute to think about your response,
and then ask yourself:

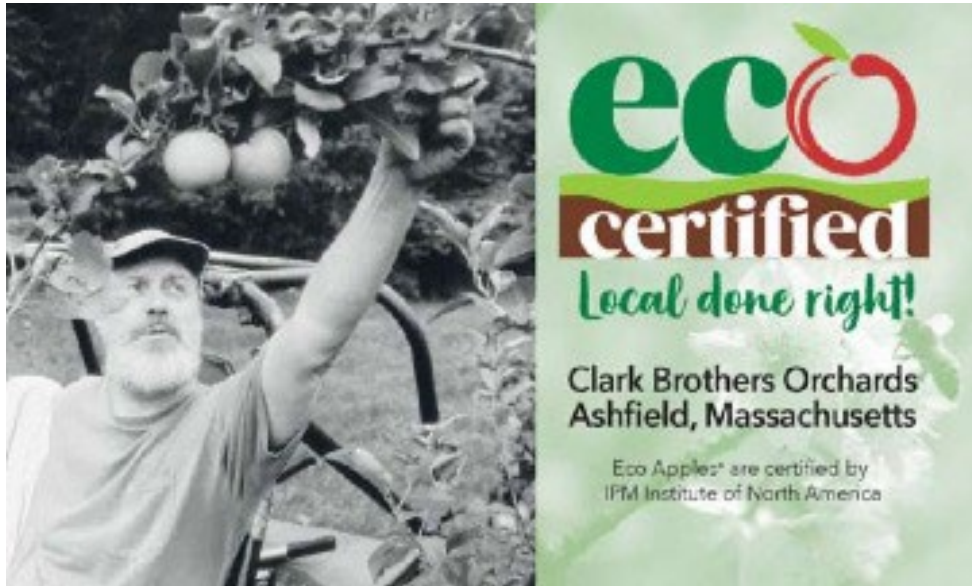
What cultural models or frames might be
activated by my description?

Are there any changes I might want to make in
how I talk about our farming practices, to
activate the most positive frames?

What Will Make Your Apples Stand Out?



Signs



Packaging



Photos: Red Tomato

Events



Photos: S. Futrell

Red Tomato's EcoCertified™ Program



EcoCertified™ is developed and managed by Red Tomato, a RI-based nonprofit, in partnership with a network of Northeast tree fruit growers, land grant scientists, and IPM Institute of North America.

The program includes four major elements:

- Production Protocol
- Certification
- Brand and Marketing
- Distribution and Sales

EcoCertified™ Program Overview:

- The Eco certification was created to support the most ecological growing practices for fruit in this region.
- The program began in 2005 with 6 orchards and 462 acres. There are currently 12 orchards certified (2020), with over 1300 acres. Farm tenure ranges from from 12th generation to first generation.
- Participating orchards include wholesale and direct market growers ranging in size from under 10 acres to over 300.
- In first 15 years, Red Tomato has sold over \$25 million of Eco certified fruit (apples and peaches); millions more sold by growers.
- *EcoCertified is independently verified by the IPM Institute of North America.

Eco Certification

- The Eco Core Protocol is extensive, and covers 6 areas of farm practices:
 - Operations, Food Safety and Management
 - Ecosystem and Water Conservation
 - Soil and Orchard Floor Enhancement
 - Pollinator Protection and Enhancement
 - Pest Management and Pesticide Risk Reduction
 - Energy and Waste Management
- Based on advanced IPM and ecological orchard management practices specifically designed for growing conditions in the northeastern US.
- Basic required practices are supplemented with a broad range of optional advanced practices.

Eco Certification

- Eco Apple orchards are certified annually by The IPM Institute of North America.
- Requirements include annual audit of spray records and certification documents and a third party on-farm inspection every 3 years.
- To be certified, growers must follow all required practices and reach a point threshold for optional advanced practices.
- Detailed protocol and application available here: [Eco Protocol](#)

Certification costs (updated annually):

- Annual certification fee of \$450 (under 10 acres) to \$2000 (300 or more acres) depending on number of acres certified
- On-farm inspection every 3 years with independent inspector, average fee \$1200
- Annual submission of application and spray records

This Orchard is Eco Certified™

Eco Certified™ is our promise to you:

- We grow great-tasting local fruit, using the most ecological practices for our region.
- We protect pollinators, wildlife, and people. Always.
- We uphold our integrity through Eco certification* based on transparent standards.
- We focus on long-term prevention, natural methods, and careful treatments when needed to manage pests and diseases that harm trees and fruit.
- We build healthy soil and clean water.
- We are part of a community of farmers, neighbors, employees and eaters who help our orchard thrive.

***Certified by IPM Institute of North America**

*For more information behind Eco Certified see:
www.redtomato.org/eco*



Tools and Training

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udLtvXqYEP4>

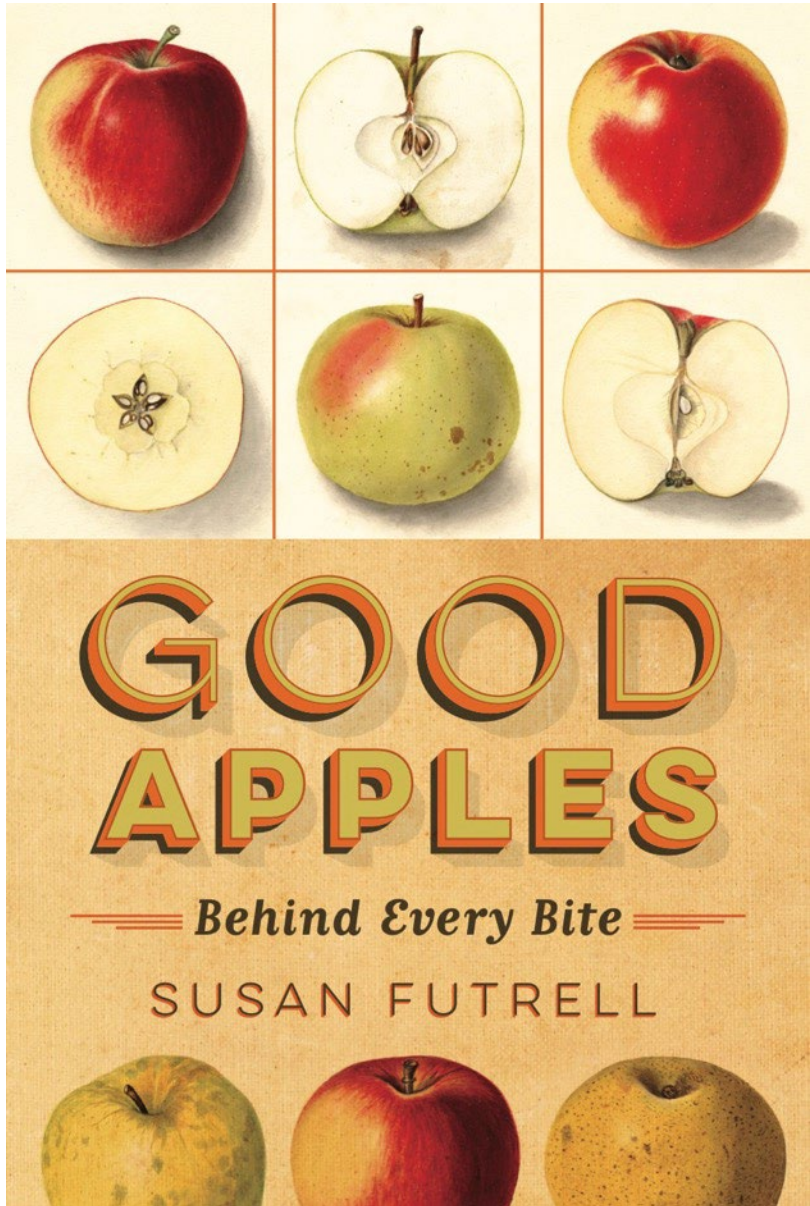
Credit: Red Tomato



Red Tomato's
[Eco Fruit Program](#)

www.redtomato.org





sfutrell0@gmail.com

susanfutrell.ink