

A new gig for apples

By **JULIE SHERWOOD** / jsherwood@mpnewspapers.com

RICHMOND - The idea isn't new. In fact, during apple season, early settlers boiled down cider to make a sweetener when refined sugar, honey, maple syrup and similar products weren't available.

Though most folks these days turn to a bag of sugar, John Loveland, who gave up city life a few years ago to put down roots in the country, is finding people have a taste for cider-based molasses. Last month alone, Loveland boiled down 400 gallons of cider to make the molasses that he's selling at local grocery stores, markets and festivals.

"I've been cooking since I was a kid," said Loveland, an Auburn native who graduated as a geology major from Cornell University in 1982.

After working 20 years in restaurant management, Loveland and his wife, Carolyn, decided six years ago to move from Rochester to a 20-acre homestead off County Road 40. Behind their big yellow farmhouse, the family, which includes teenage offspring Jennifer and Mike, built a workshop where Carolyn continued running her custom drapery business. John, on the other hand, turned his sights to a new enterprise.

"One thing led to another," said John, who was leafing through a pioneer cookbook one day in the nearby Allens Hill Free Library and spotted an interesting recipe - one for apple cider molasses.

"It was pretty cryptic," he said.

But he started experimenting with ways of making the molasses. Two years ago, after much trial and error, he finally found a method that worked.

With help from experts at New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva and the state Department of Agriculture and Markets, John said he was able to protect his product under a trademark and market it for sale.

It takes 50 gallons of cider to make five gallons of syrup, said John, who produces and bottles his Allens Hill Farm Apple Cider Molasses - working about 14 hours a day, he said - in a separate room from Carolyn's workshop. He also creates variations of the product, such as flavored syrups and a line of cake and cookie mixes sweetened with apple-cider molasses.

"John represents one of our first forays into new products," said Brian Nicholson, who helps run his family's fruit farm, Red Jacket Orchards in Geneva. John buys

all his cider from Red Jacket and said he'll continue using locally made cider as the business grows.

"He's a resourceful, smart guy," said Nicholson.

Carolyn said she's busy printing labels and performing other administrative duties while John enjoys the science behind the project, getting the boiling temperature just right and monitoring sugar concentrations. Though pretty much a one-man show now, John said he anticipates hiring help before too long. But first, he wants to finish outfitting the products with nutritional labels and bar codes so they can be sold in bigger outlets such as Wegmans Food Markets.