

Henggeler Packing Co. modernizes to meet challenges

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

FRUITLAND, Idaho — The Henggeler family has been growing tree fruit for nearly 110 years. The business started when C.B. Henggeler purchased a farm near Fruitland and began planting trees.

In 1943 two of his sons, Tony and Joe, started Henggeler Packing Co. to pack and market their fruit. Though the first two years were hard due to spring freezes, they had a good crop in 1945 and chose Fortress for their label to honor the Flying Fortress bombers of World War II.

Their sons Rudy, Tony, Jerry and Robert later became involved in the packing company and orchards.

Since then, many changes have taken place to keep up with the times and meet the challenges they faced.



Courtesy of Henggeler Packing Co.

From left, Kelly, Ryan and Chad Henggeler with different packages and boxes they use to ship all over the U.S. and to countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, India, Mexico and Taiwan.

Wooden baskets were exchanged for cardboard packing boxes, and the storage life of apples was extended with controlled-atmosphere facilities.

In 1994 Jerry's son Ryan began managing the packing line and storage equipment and Robert's son Kelly began

working with Jerry in sales. Jerry's youngest son, Chad, began operating and managing the orchards. A new building was constructed with a new packing line in 1998.

Kelly, Ryan and Chad now manage Henggeler Packing Co. Their company current-



ON THE COVER

Henggeler Packing Co. ships produce all over the United States and exports to other countries including, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Mexico and Taiwan.

Photo courtesy of Henggeler Packing Co.

ly grows more than half the fruit packed and packs fruit for more than 20 growers in three counties.

"We pack and market several varieties of apples including Gala, Honeycrisp, Red and Golden Delicious, Jonathan, Red Rome, Fuji, Pink

Lady and Braeburn," Kelly Henggeler said.

In 2001 they planted peaches and now grow and pack several varieties, which include O'Henry, Jon Henry, Zee Lady, Summer Lady and Elegant Lady. They also pack apple plums and prunes.

"In our orchards we continue to transition into new varieties and out of older varieties," Kelly Henggeler said. "This winter we removed several acres of Red Delicious and older Gala varieties that were planted 20 years ago that no longer produce the quality required in today's marketplace."

They use high-density planting trellis systems, drip irrigation and integrated pest management that adds efficiency in a sustainable program while protecting the clean water, air and land, he said. "We've always done

this, but are now using today's technology."

A big challenge in the tree fruit industry and other specialty crops is finding enough labor for required activities, especially in labor-intensive crops like apples. "These require a lot of hand labor such as pruning in winter, thinning in spring and summer and harvest in the fall," he said.

"We've been working on that challenge with new technology and platforms for pruning and harvest. These are not automated harvesters but eliminate ladder work and are more efficient. We used a platform for harvesting last year and can operate those any time, with lights at night."

When harvesting Galas in August it is really hot, and a lot of the crew members volunteer to work a night shift because it's cooler, he said.

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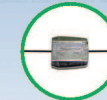
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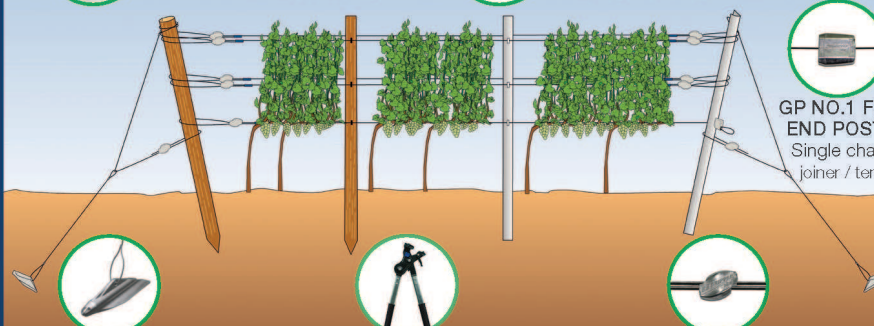
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