

## ARMSTRONG

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The Oregon State Extension Program, located at the Lane County Fairgrounds, answers questions pertaining to crop maintenance. When specialists recommend pesticide purchases, the Eugene Farmers Co-Op on Prairie Road has horticulturists on staff to respond to the needs of local growers.

Organic agriculture is impossible when it comes to preventing scabs and controlling the worm problem susceptible to apples.

Gregg Martin-Clift works with Tom and Donna Armstrong, advising them on fertilizing and pest management. Integrative Pest Management is a key component to helping the Armstrongs use less pesticide to trap bugs and moths. Apples can be severely damaged by bugs and moths.

A seeing spray nozzle head that watches for trees and doesn't spray unnecessarily, enables the Armstrongs to minimize their pesticide use. Martin-Clift said that importing European red mites has also been an alternative to spraying.

"Using beneficial insects, like the European red mites, which are predator mites, controls mites and moths that can do overwhelming damage and can reduce the toxicity. The European red mites are the good guys," Martin-Clift said.

Donna Armstrong believes the community-at-large is like a family and each year they continue to get new, appreciative customers. When customers are unable to drive out to the orchard, Oasis Fine Foods is one of the local markets that acts as a distributor for the apples.

In an effort to think globally and act locally, buyer Elizabeth Alderson finds that carrying



Tom's Apples occupies much of Donna and Tom Armstrongs time. They are the sole operators of the farm they started in 1960.

Tom's Apples brings in droves of customers and supports a local grower.

"Oasis took a survey four or five years ago and found one of the primary reasons customers shop at Oasis is Tom's Apples. They grow a lot of old varieties of apples and newer varieties like Gala. Customers come here out of convenience," Alderson said.

The Gala apple originated in New Zealand and with the Jonagold it has become one of the most popular eating apples grown at Tom's Orchards. Through trial and error and planting dwarf trees, the Armstrongs have taken risks and introduced new varieties to the local market. Gala apples were largely unheard of in this area until Tom took a chance follow-

ing up a recommendation he read about in a trade publication.

*Good Fruit Grower* magazine, published in Yakima, Wash., is one of the largest magazines devoted to fruit production. It's mostly directed to farmers. Readers can get a full description of various apple crops.

Many people enjoy driving to Tom's Apples and prefer direct

contact with the Armstrongs and their orchard. Teresa Reynolds of Eugene comes to sample the apples and says that is her main reason for coming annually.

"I want them to be in business next year and I keep going back to be sure they will. It's worth the trip. I know the apples have been handled by fewer people than in the supermarket and I can sample the apples to see what types I want to buy. I like to make juice, applesauce and have plain eating apples in stock," Reynolds said.

The business occupies much of the Armstrongs' time, although the crop harvest starts at the end of July and last until late November. This year they'll probably sell apples until December.

They prune the trees in cold weather while listening to the birds and by April they start to see blossoms on the trees.

Tom and Donna Armstrong are not competitive people. They think they bring business out to other farms in the area and find those farms attract business to them, as well.

"We're interested in people buying our product and in putting out a good product. We're in this business because we like it and because we're making a living at it. Our main concern is putting out a good product," Donna Armstrong said.

Living simply so that others may simply live is a hard philosophy to live by and as this area develops, it becomes more difficult. The Armstrongs' children aren't interested in running the orchard for the long term. Keeping the orchard alive into the next century may be no easy feat.

For now, the caretakers are watchful of new weeds and offer tastes of their cider at an orchard just outside of the city limits.

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