

# Science backgrounds help organic farmers

By ERICK PETERSON  
For the Capital Press

Wanting a peaceful life where they could live near their aging parents, Rebecca J. Hunt and her husband, Jimmie Wellman, found land in Wapato, Wash., where they now own and operate a 13-acre organic ranch.

It is called Sunnyslope Ranch, this place of 2,300 trees. They bought it in 2005 and grow cherries, apricots, peaches, nectarines, apriums and pluots. Apriums and pluots are crosses between apricots and plums, but the apricot is dominant in one and the plum is dominant in the other.

Hunt's background was in chemistry and Wellman's background was in microbiology when they lived in California.

In 2005, when they were looking to leave their industry, they started looking for land where they could settle with



Erick Peterson/For the Capital Press

Rebecca J. Hunt is the co-owner of Sunnyslope Ranch in Wapato, Wash., with her husband, Jimmie Wellman.

their parents living nearby. Initially, they were not thinking about being farmers, but then they saw a farm for sale and they started considering the possibilities.

"I thought, 'How hard could it be? Let's be farmers.' It was a turnkey operation for sale, and we just went for it," Hunt said.

Some things were predictable and not at all hard, even for her as a newcomer, Hunt said.

"Farming is science," she said. As scientists, they were not baffled by the intricacies of growing.

Still, she was surprised by the stamina necessary and the many hours required, but she said she

## Sunnyslope Ranch

**Owner:** Rebecca J. Hunt and Jimmie Wellman

**Location:** Wapato, Wash.

**Products:** Cherries, apricots, apriums, peaches, nectarines and pluots

**Acres:** 13

**Started:** 2005

got used to it. She also became accustomed to the various parts of the job that are not directly associated with growing, such as marketing, sales, transportation, financing and collections.

The many different tasks keep the work from getting dull, she said.

The ranch had been organic for 20 years, which appealed to the new owners.

Organic farming is a personal issue for Hunt and Wellman, who are adamant about healthful living, but it is also good business, and the two issues are intertwined.

A lot of people are interested in health, the environment, sprays, fertilizers and more, she said. They want more control over their food, and they want to know that their food is not contributing to any pollution.

She wants people to know that she is concerned about these issues, too.

"We live here," she said. "Whatever we put on the trees,

that's what we are breathing. Since we live here, we care about the environment. It's also a decent market strategy."

Wellman said that he keeps sprays to a minimum, just doing enough to prevent mildew and aphids.

"For us, the purity of the product is paramount," he said.

They do not have any aspirations for great growth or change in the foreseeable future. It is enough for them, Hunt said, to live well and in a way that benefits themselves and their parents, pets and community.

"At this point, we're going to do what we've been doing. It's been enough to keep us busy," she said.

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