

City couple finds themselves on orchard

By LACEY JARRELL
Capital Press

David and Nicole Stewart just embarked on the adventure of a lifetime.

In January, the couple traded in their Philadelphia row house for a three-bedroom farmhouse and a 19.4-acre orchard in Grenada, Calif.

Neither has much experience with farming, but after learning Hunter Orchards, an established organic farm well-known for its peaches, was for sale, they decided to dive in.

"It kind of had everything we were looking for; we just didn't realize it was now," said Nicole, a former lawyer who imagined settling on a farm in retirement.

Kirsten Olson and her husband, John Tannaci, who owned and operated Hunter Orchards for 25 years, sold the farm to the couple. To ensure the orchard succeeds, they have agreed to mentor the Stewarts.



Lacey Jarrell/For the Capital Press

John Stewart mechanically weeds rows at his farm, Hunter Orchards, in Grenada, Calif. Stewart and his wife, Nicole, purchased the farm in January.

"They are exceptional students," Olson said. "They are attentive and ask fabulous questions."

David joked that he and Nicole are still getting their "farm legs," and that this year's warm weather and early onset of blossoms is giving them a run for

their money.

"With the weather this year, things are about a month ahead of time," Nicole said. "It is overwhelming, but in a great way."

The orchard features 10 acres of peaches, apricots, nectarines, pears, plums, cherries and apples. Shortly after the Stewarts

purchased the farm, the couple also installed a 2,100-square-foot high tunnel where they grow squash, beets, lettuce, potatoes and garlic.

"I had no idea how much I would love farming," David said. "I think when you stick your hands in the dirt and you put a seed there, and that seed turns into a beautiful radish and someone buys it, you feel like that whole cycle is life."

"It's hard to think of a more essential job in the world than creating food. The value that you put on the work you're doing goes up exponentially."

Right now David's main focus is pruning the fruit trees and preparing the orchard for

harvest. Former owner Tannaci is teaching Nicole how to use turbines to keep a killer frost from striking the trees. If everything goes according to plan, the trees will produce well.

Olson said the biggest surprise for Nicole and David will be the intensity and delight of harvest.

"We know it's going to be insanely busy, but we're looking forward to getting out there," Nicole said. "We're nervous, but in an excited way."

The orchard has established vendors at the Mount Shasta Farmers' Market and in San Francisco. Nicole said the cou-

ple is planning to reach out this year to Ashland and Grants Pass markets. She noted that the local desire for organic and year-round crops is growing.

"Maybe as some of the trees age out, instead of replacing them with more peach trees, we'll put in another high tunnel so we can do more vegetables locally," she said. "We're really excited about that, too."

The transition from city life to rural living has been easier and more rewarding than the Stewarts imagined it could be.

"I miss family and friends, but I don't miss the city at all. I love the peace," she said. "It all feels like it was meant to be."

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