

# Orchards thrive in micro-climate that mirrors other areas

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“The diversity helps us when there is a freeze,” Thomas said. “But most of the time we get a pretty good crop.”

Thomas Orchards sells its crop to stores in Central and Western Oregon, to stores in Montana, and it has a fruit stand in Great Falls, Mont. The orchard is also open to U-pickers during the harvest season.

Jeff Thomas, 37, grew up in the orchard and had no second thoughts about returning to it after attending Western Oregon University in Monmouth and earning a degree in physical and health education. He married Laura, who earned a degree in education at WOU and is now a teacher in Monument, Oregon, a small community of a couple hundred people several miles upriver from Kimberly.

“I don’t see me doing anything else for the rest of my life,” Jeff Thomas said. “I like the challenges of farming. Every year they are different.”

The work crew still includes Jeff’s parents, John and Lynda Thomas, and his

**Thomas Orchards**  
**Where:** Kimberly, Ore., along the North Fork of the John Day River  
**Owners:** Jeff and Laura Thomas  
**Acreage:** 100 acres  
**Fruits:** Cherries, apricots, pluots/plumcots, semi-cling peaches, freestone peaches, nectarines, plums/prunes, pears and summer and fall apples.  
**Market:** Wholesale to Central and Western Oregon stores and to Montana stores; a fruit stand in Great Falls, Mont.; U-pick

uncle, Jim Thomas. They owned and operated the business for a couple decades after taking it over from W.B. and Emily Thomas.

“My parents and uncle still work full days,” Jeff Thomas said. “They like what they’re doing.”

Thomas said the orchard may remain in the family for another generation. Josh, his 7-year-old son, has already said he wants to be a tree fruit farmer like his dad.



The 100-acre Thomas Orchards lie along the North Fork of the John Day River. It is about 100 years old and includes a variety of fruit trees.

Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

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