

# Siemers' Farm transforms into agritourism

By **KATÉ LYONS-HOLESTINE**  
For the Capital Press

In 1980 Siemers' Pick and Pack opened with the inten-

tion of catering to local residents seeking apples, cherries, strawberries, potatoes and other produce in bulk to fill their shelves and preserve their own

foods for the coming year.

"I remember working orchards and farms up here as a kid," said Byron Siemers. "A couple farms had quite a big

business built up of people coming from town to buy produce since World War II. They would come to Green Bluff to save money and buy in volume from the orchards to can their own food."

Today, most visitors to Siemers Farm, aren't seeking to roam the orchards and pick their own apples or purchase produce to fill their pantry shelves. They now visit to ride the train, select the best apples from bins, choose pumpkins straight from the patch and have a picture-perfect, old-fashioned farm experience.

The transition from a full-time working farm selling produce to make a steady living to a destination farm considered an annual family event was gradual, but necessary.

"I'm not sure what we call it, agritourism or entertainment farming," Byron said. "If we aren't doing the fun stuff, the value of the farm is only in the produce. There isn't enough agricultural value here without the fun, and we still grow the produce."

In the early years, Siemers Farm subsisted on growing and selling apples, cherries, peaches and strawberries from their own land and leased orchards. They also grew and marketed potatoes, carrots, beets and a variety of squash. Like many small, dry-land farms, costs sometimes exceeded revenues. In 1991 and 1992 the farm received disaster funding for failed strawberry crops due to inclement weather.

"I didn't know what we needed, but Donna did," Byron said. "She could see what the farm could be. Those were tough times. If we didn't make it in the spring with strawberries, we didn't make it. There were a couple years where our income didn't reach the poverty line."

Byron is a well-known figure on Green Bluff, an agricultural area about 30 miles north of I-90 and Spokane, Wash. Siemers Farm is one of the longest, continuously active members of the Green Bluff Direct Marketing Association, an organization of Green Bluff Farms devoted

to promoting agriculture and agritourism. The GBDMA sponsors the annual Cherry Picker's Trot and Pit Spit fun run each July. Byron has led the runners with the pace car — his John Deere tractor pulling an outhouse — for as long as most Green Bluff residents can remember.

"There are so many other big outfits that to be a successful small farmer you have to find or develop a niche market or create a unique fit in the agriculture industry or you won't make it," Byron said.

After those difficult years, Donna promised her grandchildren they would save 5 percent of the 1995 wholesale strawberry sales for a big vacation.

"I was standing in line at Disneyland waiting to get on rides with my grandkids when I realized the changes we needed to make at home," Donna said.

Donna had been a sociology instructor at Eastern Washington University. She used her education and experience to

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