



Hazelnut Trees

JEFFERSON - Large inshell variety with a very high resistance to eastern filbert blight.

SACAJAWEA - Early kernel or inshell variety with a high level of quantitative resistance to eastern filbert blight.

YAMHILL - Early kernel variety resistant to eastern filbert blight. Very productive small stature tree

DORRIS - Nut yield & maturity similar to Barcelona. Excellent texture and flavor, resistant to eastern filbert blight.

WEPSTER - Early Kernel variety dropping a week before Barcelona. Resistant to eastern filbert blight. A more vigorous and upright growth habit than Yamhill.

MCDONALD - Early kernel variety with a high 52% shell out percentage. A grower friendly tree with an open growth habit. Mcdonald carries the Gasaway gene.

York, Eta, Theta, and Felix available

All varieties were developed by the Oregon State University breeding program.

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David Leder/For the Capital Press

A packing line employee boxes "A-grade" Fuji apples at the Valicoff Fruit Co. warehouse in Wapato, Wash.

Stone fruits help drive Valicoff Fruit's growth

Apples, pears still key part of production mix

By **DAVE LEDER**
For the Capital Press

The Valicoff family has been growing produce in the Yakima Valley since the 1930s, but the company didn't really hit its stride until the mid-1980s, when it became Valicoff Fruit Co.

The family-owned apple, pear and stone fruit operation based in Wapato, Wash., started out growing vegetables under the name Valicoff Gardens before transitioning to tree fruit in the 1940s.

Owners Rob and Ric Valicoff — whose grandfather Stoyan Valicoff, a Bulgarian immigrant, started the company — introduced the fruit-packing side of the business in the 1980s and eventually moved into a 20-acre facility off U.S. Highway 97 in 2010.

Today, Valicoff Fruit Co. ships its apples and pears around the world and sends its cherries, nectarines, peaches and apricots all over

North America.

Business is good, and getting better.

"One of the big reasons we've been so successful is that my family has been around for a long time, and we've been able to nurture a lot of great relationships in the industry," said General Manager Brett Valicoff, 31, son of Rob Valicoff Jr. and a fourth-generation grower.

The younger Valicoff started working for the family business when he was 9 years old, and after graduating from college and spending a couple years in construction management, he returned to Wapato in 2011 to become the GM.

"This is a great industry to be involved in and I'm proud to help continue my family's legacy," he said. "I missed that hometown feel that you find in this industry. Everyone kind of helps each other out."

Brett Valicoff spends most of his time managing the warehouse operations, while his dad and uncle manage the orchard side of the business. Apples are its largest commodity, but what sets Valicoff Fruit Co. apart from other Yakima Valley growers is its commitment to stone fruit. Despite the in-

herent risks that go along with farming stone fruit — susceptibility to weather damage, for example — Rob and Ric Valicoff committed themselves to becoming one of the largest stone-fruit suppliers in the Pacific Northwest.

In fact, Valicoff Fruit Co. was the first grower to sell its peaches and nectarines at Costco during the mid-1980s.

Around that time, the brothers implemented a vertical integration business model, which contributed to exponential growth over the past 30 years.

"My dad and uncle have done a great job of moving the company into the future, and my goal is to make it even better than when I started," Brett Valicoff said.

One aspect that helps the company stand out is that it packs all of its stone fruit by hand. Rather than sending the fruit over a packing line, all of Valicoff Fruit Co.'s cherries, nectarines, peaches and apricots remain on the tree for a week longer than their competitors' fruit.

"That extra growing time makes our fruit larger and gives it an even sweeter flavor," Brett Valicoff said.