

At Evans Fruit Co., it's about family

By DAVE LEDER
For the Capital Press

Family comes first at Evans Fruit Co., a 69-year-old growing and shipping operation based in Washington's Yakima Valley.

The company started small back in 1949, when Bill and Jeannette Evans planted their first 10-acre apple orchard in their late teen years. Over time, with the help of family and friends, Evans Fruit has become an internationally known grower-shipper that produces apples and cherries.

Today, the Evans family farms more than 8,000 acres across Central Washington, employing 800 to 1,000 people year-round and providing fruit to customers all over North America, South America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.



David Leder/For the Capital Press

Joe Evans, operations manager for Evans Fruit Co., examines a batch of Red Delicious apples as they move down the line in Tieton, Wash.

"Being family-owned and -operated is what sets us apart, and we all want to carry on the tradition that my grandparents started when they

were young," said Kimberly Hiebert, 35, the accounting and human resources manager who directs the company's day-to-day operations along

with her brother, Joe Evans. "We pride ourselves on family, and we believe it takes all of us to run a successful company."

Hiebert's and Evans' mother, Barb Evans, works part-time in the fields and runs her own small apple orchard.

Now 88 years old, founder Jeannette Evans remains involved on a daily basis, handling strategic decisions and helping out in the orchards and packing plants. Bill Evans also was involved every day until he died in late 2016.

Their two daughters, Julie Evans and Vickie Loges, and their children also work for the company, along with a long line of extended relatives and family friends.

"A big reason for our success is that we're a family-owned operation, and we want to do whatever it takes

to stay on top," said Joe Evans, 32, the warehouse and orchard operations manager. "We're a pretty close-knit group and we have every intention of being around for a very long time."

While family has been the linchpin for success over the years, Evans Fruit is equally committed to producing a superior product.

Since the beginning, the company has targeted specific strains of fruit and then combined those varieties with the best root stocks available. They meticulously search for the ideal elevations to plant their orchards and grow their fruit in nutrient-rich soils to produce apples and cherries that will stand apart for their flavor and quality.

"We have customers overseas who call us asking when we're going to start packing

specific apple varieties because we have found ways to optimize those varieties," Joe Evans said. "We focus on the best strains available, and our customers rely on us for that quality year after year."

Another point of pride for the Evans family is that no other grower in the world can match their volume of red apples, including — but not limited to — Gala, Fuji, Red Delicious, Braeburn and Honeycrisp. A new variety, Cosmic Crisp, will be planted this spring and be available for sale in a few years.

Hiebert said Bill Evans always made a point of telling his friends and colleagues just how many red apples Evans Fruit produced every year.

"He was very proud of the fact that he was the largest red apple grower in the world," she said.

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