

Orchard renewal plantings boost Cherry Hill Farms

By **BRAD CARLSON**
For the Capital Press

Apple grower Daniel Rowley liked what he saw as 2018 got underway: an apparently ample “bud load” on trees, indicating plenty of potential fruiting sites.

“So far, it’s looking good,” he said.

Rowley, 33, will have a big year regardless of harvest outcome. He’s the current chairman of the Idaho Apple Commission. He and his team at Cherry Hill Farms expect to see some results of targeted “orchard renewal” planting commenced shortly after the Rowley family, long-experienced apple growers near Santaquin, Utah, acquired the operation west of Caldwell in 2012.

The 2012-14 plantings are “starting to hit their production,” he said. “Hopefully in the next couple of years, our

production will go way up compared to what it has been the last couple of years as these new orchards come into production and into maturity.”

Cherry Hill comprises four sites and 300-plus acres west of Caldwell.

Rowley arrived in southwest Idaho in 2010 after earning a master’s degree in plant science from Utah State University to go with his USU bachelor’s in ag business. He went to work at Caldwell Idaho Orchards, learning the area’s growing conditions and, with family, continuing to look for potential acquisition sites.

“We had our eyes on areas up here for quite a number of years,” Rowley said.

Increased urban pressure in Utah made it tough to expand there, he said. In southwest Idaho, the Rowleys found more space, higher winter temperatures, fewer

flower-killing spring frosts and a similar summer climate. Compared to its sister enterprise in Utah, Cherry Hill tends to enjoy a greater number of optimum growing days and produce slightly larger fruit.

Rowley, his younger brother Jeff and their cousin Sean Rowley manage Cherry Hill, which grows apples, peaches and some apricots and nectarines for Mountainland Apples. Mountainland is a grower-owned cooperative that stores, packs and markets to wholesale clients such as grocery stores.

Cherry Hill grows Fuji, Gala, Granny Smith, Honeycrisp and Red Delicious apples. Daniel Rowley said the hardest to grow is Honeycrisp, which the U.S. Apple Association in 2016 said was the fifth strongest-selling variety and fastest gainer of sales volume.

“When we get paid, that is a good day,” he said, referring to Honeycrisp. “But the other 364 days of the year, they are just a pain.” For example, their inefficiency at taking calcium from the soil leaves them susceptible to the Bitter Pit nutrient deficiency, he said.

Cherry Hill aims to produce higher-quality apples that grade highly at the packing shed and can generate premium returns. “We are trying to have a good-tasting piece of fruit, but in addition to that, we are looking for color — a clean piece of fruit with no markings,” Rowley said.

“We are learning, and always modifying things to make them better,” he said. The crew lately uses platforms instead of ladders for more tasks, striving for increased safety, efficiency and cost savings.



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Daniel Rowley of Cherry Hill Farms looks for buds in a Fuji apple block.

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