

At Dickman Farms, diversification is key

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

When German immigrant Ed Dickman purchased 63 fertile acres near Silverton, Ore., in 1929, he had no idea what a legacy he had begun.

As the years commenced, Ed's son Paul started a small dairy and planted some berries and vegetables.

"Grandpa sold the cows when my dad, Michael, and his brother Mark were teenagers," fourth generation farmer Corey Dickman said. "They turned their focus to vegetables."

Dickman Farms now spans 3,000 acres, about 40 percent in vegetables and the balance in grass seed, wheat and hazelnuts.

Green beans, cauliflower and hazelnuts are sold to local processors. Turf grass seed generally stays domestic, but some is exported, and their soft

white winter wheat goes into noodles and pastas around the globe.

Onions are a relatively new crop at Dickman Farms and in a few short years production has grown to 250 acres. These red and yellow onions are sold mostly under the Curry & Co. label and may be found at many Northwest grocery stores while a small portion goes to Pacific Rim countries.

Corey and his father, Mike, manage day-to-day operations with lots of help from family members and other employees. These include Corey's mother, Susan; his sister, Megan Hannon; his brother, Ryan Dickman; and his uncle, Mark. Most of them live on the property or close by.

"It's a great place to be and it's a great place to live," Dickman said. "We can grow just about anything we want and

that gives us opportunities."

Dickman Farms has six full-time employees and another 6-8 through the summer, but finding qualified help is no easy task.

"I would hire two full-time employees right now if they had the right skill set and aptitude," Dickman said. "We steer away from labor-intensive crops and have found ways to mitigate the labor issue with automation and additional machinery."

Dickman finds satisfaction in working outside and being self-employed.

"I get up every morning trying to solve the next problem or challenge we are faced with whether that be taking advantage of new and exciting opportunities or being able to create additional efficiency on our family farm," he said. "Farms these days cannot stand still. Farming is

changing and evolving at an ever-quickening pace.

"I love farming and agriculture, but first and foremost we are running a business," Dickman said. "In years past you could put your head down and work hard and do well for yourself. These days you still have to put your head down and work hard, but it must be at the right things.

"For example, adopting new technology is very important, but you also have to understand the value proposition of that technology and have a good grasp on the return on investment," Dickman said. "Also, successful succession is key for family farms to continue on to future generations. I am blessed to have had very forward-thinking predecessors that saw the value of this and have allowed me the opportunity to learn, grow and develop as a fourth-generation farmer."



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press
Corey Dickman, right, his wife Kelly and daughter Delaney at Dickman Farms. Corey is the fourth generation and runs the farm with his father, Mike Dickman.

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