

Jones Farms: Celebrating 75 years of change

By **DAVE LEDER**
For the Capital Press

GRANGER, Wash. — When you consider where Jones Farms Inc. is today compared to when the business started 75 years ago, it's hard to overstate how much things have changed.

Company president Dennis Jones' grandparents began farming alfalfa seed in Brownstown, Wash., in 1946 before relocating a few years later to the family's current 320 acres between Granger and Zillah, Wash.

Jones' father expanded into sugar beets, potatoes and mint a few years later, and he eventually started growing wheat, sweet corn, watermelons, cantaloupes and peppers.

But it wasn't until the mid-1950s that Jones Farms discovered its first major cash crop: cherries.

"We have really evolved over the years, and now we grow more than 100 acres of cherries," said Jones, 72, who owns the business with his brother, Will. "We also have 100 acres of apples, but we didn't really get into those until the '80s."

Jones Farms sells 10 varieties of cherries but limits its apple crop to Honeycrisp and club varieties such as Jazz and Envy. The family also maintains 26 acres of peaches, apricots and nectarines, 16 acres of pears and smaller assortments of peppers, tomatoes and sweet corn.

Most of their apples and cherries are sold to Allan Brothers Inc. in nearby Naches, while their peaches and nectarines are distributed direct-to-market and through wholesalers.

"We sell the peaches and nectarines at our fruit stand,



Dave Leder/For the Capital Press

Dennis Jones, right, and his brother, Will, own Jones Farms Inc. in Central Washington. The farm is celebrating its 75th year.

and we also send them to farmers markets and roadside stands," Jones said, noting that everything but the peaches, nectarines and vegetables is certified organic.

"We have customers from Oregon, Idaho and Montana who come here every week to buy our fruit so they can sell it to their customers back home.

We have gotten to know a lot of families that way over the years."

While the number of wholesalers has dwindled as the older generation retires, Jones Farms still works with about 100 family-owned businesses around the Northwest.

"We talk to these folks every week, so we have really

gotten to know them," Jones said. "They're all family businesses just like us, and that makes it fun."

Treating his employees like family is equally important to Jones. More than 20 of his field workers have been with him for at least 20 years — some for 30 — and he said that investment in personnel has paid tremendous dividends, both for the laborers and for the business.

To show its appreciation, the family hosts an annual fall festival at the Yakima Valley farm. Originally called the "Pig Barbecue" when it started in the early 2000s, the event — highlighted by a carnitas (roasted pork) feast — has grown to include all-comers.

"It has become kind of a neighborhood thing, where we invite all of our customers and friends," Jones said.

"We couldn't have the party last year due to COVID, but before that, we hosted one for 18 or 19 years in a row."

Jones said the past year has presented some new challenges for the business, but his long-term outlook remains positive. Even though he didn't plant 75 acres of ground last year, his direct-to-market and fruit stand sales stayed consistent.

In fact, cherry sales were way up, while peach and nectarine sales at the fruit stand were "sensational," due in large part to the canning craze brought on by the pandemic.

"I think a lot of people were just searching for something to do last summer, and they were really appreciative that we stayed open," Jones said. "We don't know what to expect this year, but hopefully, people will keep coming to visit us."



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