

Garrett Ranches: Focus is on tree fruits

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

WILDER, Idaho — Garrett Ranches is a fifth generation family business. It was started by H.W. Garrett in Walla Walla, Wash., as a fruit orchard after he arrived from the Midwest in the early 1900s.

In the mid-1940s the farm operation expanded to the Central Cove area of Idaho near Wilder, where H.W.'s great-grandson Gary and great-great-grandson Corby continue the farm and orchard today.

“Our fruit label, the Double A brand, started in 1914 and there’s still a railroad stop near Walla Walla called Garrett, where the railroad went next to one of our packing houses,” Corby said.

The farm at Walla Walla mostly grew Italian prunes.

“My great-grandfather operated that with his father for many years,” Corby said.

In the mid-1940s they bought the farm near Wilder and one near Grand



Garrett Ranches

Corby, Kasey and their father, Gary Garrett of Garrett Ranches in Wilder, Idaho.

Junction, Colo., and grew peaches there.

“Here in Idaho they grew mostly Empress plums and early Italian prunes for markets in Philadelphia, New York and other big eastern cities,” he said.

Corby’s grandfather, Frankie Garrett, enlisted in the Navy in 1942 and fought in the South Pacific.

“He survived the war and came back to the farm to help his dad. In the 1950s they were running three farms — in Idaho, Washington and

Colorado,” he said.

Frankie’s father then passed away and Frankie was left with all three fruit ranches.

“He restructured and reorganized and kept everything together, but by the mid-1960s focused more on the Idaho ranch. He eventually sold the Colorado place and parts of the Washington place and moved to Idaho full-time,” Corby said.

Frankie acquired more than 500 acres in Idaho and grew more varieties of fruit.

“This is where I was raised, and my dad, Gary, operated it the past 40 years and shifted more into apples, peaches, apricots and cherries. We began packing our own apples and peaches and shipping them all over the country. At one point in the 1990s we were shipping apples all over the world,” Corby said.

The home place has perfect conditions for growing fruit, with southern exposure and good sandy soil. “There are many fruit farms here in this sunny slope area called Central

Cove. We are a quarter-mile up off the Snake River, with plenty of irrigation water,” he said.

“My grandpa, Frankie, grew up on the fruit ranch near Walla Walla and also raised cattle, rode horses, and liked to rope in the Pendleton Roundup every year. When the family moved to Idaho they built a big arena and he’d go to Mexico to buy cattle and haul them up here for roping,” Corby said.

“Fast-forward a bit. My dad operated the fruit ranch his whole life and will be 70 this year. We had to change a little. Most farms had to either get larger or smaller,” he said. “We decided to get smaller, and in the past 10 years cut down most of our apple trees and focused on more varieties of fruit.”

Now they grow six varieties of peaches, four varieties of apricots, five varieties of cherries and continue to expand into local markets.

In the past six years Corby started growing vegetables as well as fruit, selling sweet corn locally.

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