

# Andy and Sherrie Alberding: Orchard owners learn as they grow

By **CRAIG REED**  
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — When Andy and Sherrie Alberding finally purchased a country home and property, they also got themselves a new learning opportunity.

The property included 10 acres of mature hazelnut trees of the Ennis variety. The Alberdings are the owners of Sims Electric, a Roseburg-based business, so adding a hazelnut orchard to their responsibilities was a new experience, but they weren't shy about taking on the challenge of learning something new.

"I've wanted to buy property in the country since I was a kid," said Andy Alberding, now 46. "It's really cool to have some property where you have the opportunity to produce a product."

The Alberdings completed the purchase of the property that's in Garden Valley a few miles northwest of Roseburg in July. Two months later and it was time to har-



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**Andy Alberding, left, and Howard Sand check on the quality of the Ennis hazelnuts that were harvested last fall. Alberding purchased a hazelnut orchard and is learning about its maintenance and the marketing of the crop from Sand.**

vest the nut crop.

Neighboring farmer Howard Sand was there to help. Sand, who owns 50 acres of hazelnuts and has many years of experience with the

nuts, had been managing the 10-acre orchard for the previous owner and agreed to continue its management and to share his experience with the Alberdings.

"Andy has been a great student," Sand said. "Andy knows equipment. Last year during harvest, the next thing I knew was that Andy was on the sweeper doing a great job."

Sand helped the Alberdings market the nut crop.

Alberding said it was fortunate that he purchased an orchard that was pre-made — the trees were planted, the equipment was there and Sand was familiar with the orchard.

"I'm trying to talk to Howard enough so I can learn and help on weekends and in my spare time," Alberding said. "It's all the little details that take place during the week that I need to learn, details that keep the orchard healthy."

Those details include pruning, spraying and checking traps for insects.

Sand said his advice to anybody considering getting into the hazelnut business is to do research on hazelnut varieties. He said the market is currently trending toward the kernel product and the Ennis variety produces "a jumbo-sized nut."

The hazelnut trees in the Garden Valley area are still recovering from the damage they suffered from a heavy snow two years ago. Last fall's harvest was 25% to 50% less than average, depending on the age of the tree.

The Alberding orchard was heavily pruned back after the snow broke many branches and split some trunks. Sand said the trees are now showing "phenomenal growth" and will soon get back to producing an average or better crop.

"We absolutely love having something else to work on," Alberding said. "The orchard is a peaceful place to work."

"And yes, the family enjoys eating the nuts," he adds.

The Alberdings hope eventually to learn enough about the maintenance and harvest of the orchard to do most of the work themselves.

"I have no timeline for that, but at some point I hope to have enough time and experience, thanks to what we learn from Howard, to do it ourselves," Andy Alberding said.

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