

Symms Fruit Ranch: Lots of varieties — even quince

By **DIANNA TROYER**
For the Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — Planting a quince orchard was a fortuitous hunch for Dick Symms, whose family operates Symms Fruit Ranch near Caldwell.

Award-winning hard cider companies rely on the one-acre plot with about 400 trees to make quince juice for their increasingly popular beverages.

“My grandfather decided to plant the quince orchard in 2008 as a new unique addition to our farm,” said Eva Symms, a sales associate who is among the fifth generation of Symms relatives to work at the cherished family enterprise. “I haven’t heard of any other quince orchards in our area.”

A quince resembles a bumpy plump golden pear. The hard fruit is cooked to soften it. It is popular among Spanish cultures to make membrillo, a thickened juice used to make candy or a sliceable jelly eaten with cheese and crackers.

The orchard has grown considerably since 1914 when her great great grandfather, Richard Symms, moved his family from Kansas to Idaho and started the ranch.

“We’ve been fami-



Symms Fruit Ranch

Dick Symms planted 400 quince trees in 2008 to diversify Symms Fruit Ranch near Caldwell, Idaho.

ly-owned and -operated ever since,” she said.

He launched the business on an 80-acre homestead with 8 acres of fruit. Today the Symms ranch encompasses 5,200 acres of orchards and farmland.

The family grows 25 varieties of fruit including apples, apricots, cherries, peaches, nectarines, plums, prunes, pears and wine grapes. The business is a vertically integrated grower, packer, and shipper with fruit sold nationwide and in 30 countries.

Symms estimates they harvest 15 to 20 tons of quinces, mostly for local Mexican food markets and breweries.

“Quince cider is one of

our best-sellers even though it’s not a mainstream fruit for many people,” said Emily Mason, who buys quinces from the Symmses for her business, Cedar Draw Cider near Buhl, Idaho. “It tastes a bit floral like an intense pear but with tropical notes like a guava.”

Mason named her quince cider War Worthy because “it’s an ancient fruit rumored to be the golden apple that sparked the Trojan War.”

Another award-winning cidery, Meriwether Cider Company in Boise, sells 750 ml bottles of quince hard cider and membrillo made from the Symmses’ crop.

“The fruit turns from

green to a soft yellow when it’s ready to be picked in late September or early October,” Symms said. “I’ve made a quince pie, and it tastes a lot like an apple pie but with a slightly different flavor that makes it stand out.”

In two to three years, the



Symms Fruit Ranch
Quinces resemble plump golden pears with bumps and are popular with hard cideries and candy makers.

Symmses anticipate harvesting a recently planted new variety of apple, Evercrisp.

“It’s a combination of two popular varieties, a Fuji and a Honeycrisp,” she said. “It should work well for us.”

The other apple varieties include Honeycrisp, Braeburn, Rome, Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Pink Lady, Gala, Jona-

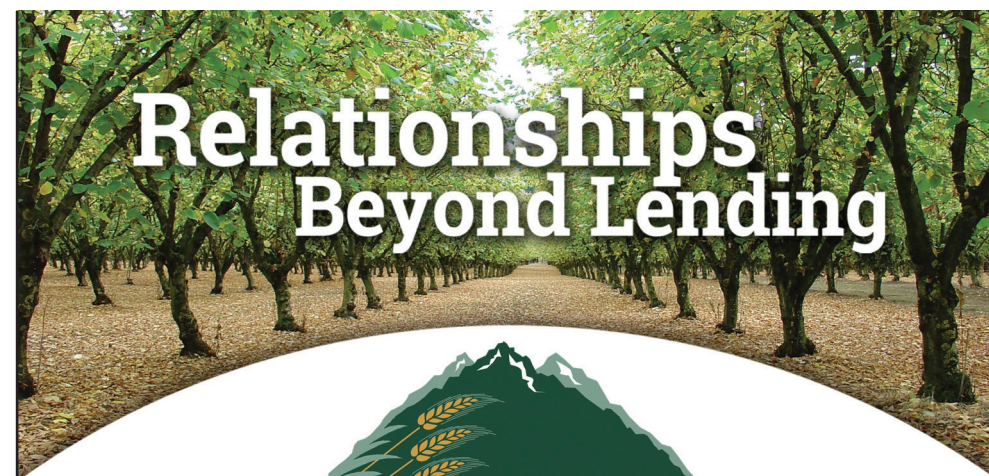
gold, Jonathan and Fuji.

Symms and other family members grew up working on the farm.

“We’re all bonded by our love for the farm,” she said.

Her father, Dar Symms, is company president. He oversees the packaging of cherries, peaches, apricots, plums, pears, and apples. Her uncle, Jamie Mertz, supervises the outdoor operations and fruit harvest. Her cousin Sally Symms is also part of the fifth generation and runs the sales office. Her great uncle, Jim Mertz, offers expertise and advice with daily visits to the office.

“Working closely with family comes with its challenges, but we all pull our own weight and trust each other’s judgment,” Symms said. “Most of us grew up on the farm working with our cousins and making the best memories.”



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