

# Gooding Farms: Hops bring sisters together

By BRIAN WALKER  
For the Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Gooding Farms boasts 1,300 acres and 12 hop varieties, including a gem that was developed in its own fields.

The Idaho Gem variety, named after the Gem State, allowed the farm to diversify and reach new markets.

“When we founded our own hop variety, that allowed us to capitalize on the New England IPA-style beer and other Pale Ale and IPA styles that have become popular,” said Michelle Gooding, one of three sisters involved in management of the company.

Idaho Gem features stone fruit, red berry, citrus, mojito and even powdered sugar aromas. Its flavors are soft and smooth.

Other varieties that Gooding Farms grows include Citra, Galena, Mosaic and El Dorado.

The family roots of Gooding Farms run deep, dating back to 1895 when Nick Gooding grew hops in St. Paul, Ore., in the Willamette Valley.

Gooding Farms, a six-generation operation, moved to southwest Idaho in 1944 after the family noted the ideal hop-growing environment during an earlier trip.

“Hops grow based on day length,” Michelle said. “We have to hold them back in the spring so they don’t bloom too early. This is also why most hops are grown near the 45th Parallel in both the northern and southern hemispheres.”

Row crops actually consumed all of the farm’s acreage in 1990 except for 190 acres of hops.

“Dad (Mike) fought hard to keep hops in Idaho and to keep the farm going his entire career,” Michelle said.

She said the return of her



Gooding Farms

**Gooding Farms near Parma, Idaho, is a sixth-generation operation that includes Diane, Michelle, Mike (father) and Andrea.**

sister Diane and the rise of the craft beer revolution in 2011 provided the farm a much-needed boost and opportunity to diversify.

“Those coinciding events undoubtedly saved the farm,” said Michelle, who returned to the farm in 2015. Sister Andrea returned in 2019.

Andrea’s return marked the first time since 2002 that the three sisters worked on the farm together. The farm expanded to eastern Oregon in 2020. About 950 acres of the farm’s acreage is in southwest Idaho between Parma and Wilder. The remainder is near Adrian, Ore.

Industry involvement is evident with the sisters.

Michelle is the president of the Idaho Hop Growers Association. Diane is on the Wilder Irrigation District Board and Hop Research Council. Andrea serves on the Wilder Housing Authority Board. Mike is the chairman of the Wilder Rural Fire District.

Gooding Farms has 115 employees during harvest and 30 full-time. Among those employees is Alvin Smallwood, an 83-year-old tractor operator who has worked for four generations of Goodings and began working at the farm in 1952 at age 16 hanging hop sacks.

“Alvin is part of the family,” Michelle said.

The farm primarily supplies large third-party processors and distributors all over the world.

“We also do direct sales with larger regional craft breweries and Anheuser-Busch,” Michelle said. “We have seen an increased demand for aroma varieties, allowing us to shift our acreage composition. We plan to focus on producing the highest quality hops while improving our soil health and biodiversity.”

The family also plans to expand the farm with animals and hay crops while also having a retail presence at Red Top Market that opened in 2020.

Changes on the farm in recent years included having solar power installed in 2018 on the dryer roof and shop to offset 40% of the power usage. The farm planted its first organic hop crop in 2020.

Still, multiple challenges are ahead.

“Increases in input and labor costs are big challenges for us,” Michelle said. “Additionally, the increase in land prices near the farm and urban sprawl make it difficult to expand the operation. We are also in the middle of a drought, which will cause more difficulties this year.”

Gooding Farms has seen an increase in idled acres and contract reductions during the pandemic.

“When the taprooms were closed it was difficult for small craft breweries to make ends meet. Alas, many went under,” Michelle said.

For hop growers that meant less hop sales, as craft breweries are some of the highest hops per barrel users despite them being small operations.

“Some breweries adapted and began canning, but that also faced its own challenges with the aluminum can shortage,” Michelle said. “We had some employee shortfalls during harvest when people were sick, but for the most part we have weathered the COVID-19 storm fairly well.”

Michelle said the family tradition of hard work and togetherness should pay dividends in the future.

“Full-circle farming is the goal, actions that support and continue the farm for generations to come,” she said. “We are passionate farmers. We love what we do, and we are trying to make a positive impact on the community and industry as we go forward. With a focus in minimizing our carbon footprint and improving soil health, we hope that the farm will be here for many more years to come.”



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