

ALL IN THE FAMILY

102 years of hop farming BY MARK FRISBEE

It is not too uncommon to see children follow in their parents' footsteps; however, it is far less common for that path to lead back three or four generations. Such is the case for the Goschie family who have been harvesting hops from their Silverton area farm for more than 102 years.

Gayle, Glenn and Gordon Goschie now own and operate Goschie Farms, which was started by their grandparents Paul and Wanda Goschie in 1885 and then passed to their parents Herman and Vernice in the early '40s. Of the 1,000 acres of farmland at Goschie Farms, about one quarter is used to grow hops, which yields about 400,000 pounds of hops each season.

In Oregon, farmers are able to grow all the types of hops in the spectrum. Goschie Farms focuses on the aromatic type of hops and grows specific varieties for different brewers. Traditionally the hop farming industry is done on a contracted basis where the hop fields are planted and harvested for a specific brewing company. The Goschies grow most of their hops for Anheuser-Busch and have had a direct relationship with them for more than 20 years. In addition to Anheuser-Busch, Goschie Farms has supplied hops for Coors, Widmer, and Pelican Brewing companies.

"It is a unique experience in agriculture to be dealing directly with the company who uses our product. In all of our circumstances with hops we are dealing directly with the brewers who use our hops," said Gayle Goschie.

"Hops are really the fastest growing plant in the world. Its really cool because it is such a short window of time that this vine puts on tremendous growth that you can actually see it grow during certain points of the growing process," Gayle explained.

Hops are perennials so the plants are in the ground year after year. In early spring the Goschies begin to work the fields and the shoots begin to emerge. By about the first of May it is time to start to wind them to strings attached to 18-foot poles with wires and cables draped across the top of them. At this point the shoots are about 12 to 18 inches tall and have to be hand trained to grow in a clockwise direction. "If the vine were trained in a counter clockwise direction it would not chose to follow its way up the string, the vine is actually following the natural sunlight in a day," she said.

By the middle of June or early July the vines will have climbed to the top of the 18-foot poles. At this point the sunlight and the height of the plant will trigger the plant to start putting arms out. The arms are where the hops, which are the flowering part of the plant, will eventually hang. From there the plant continues to mature and at the end of August the hops are harvested. The whole vine is extracted and stripped of all its leaves and hop cones which then are separated. The hops are placed on a

drying floor that has a wire mesh bottom that allows forced hot air (145 degrees F) to be pumped through the floor. After the drying process the hops are cooled and packaged in 200-pound sacks ready for transport to their contracted buyers.

Sustainability is an important part of the Goschie family's farming practices. "My generation of farming has changed quite a bit from my father's generation of farming, and in many cases it is quite interesting because we are looking back to my grandfather's generation and looking at sustainable practices — and realizing how important that is to the whole farm," said Gayle. The Goschie's have begun composting more than ever, benefiting the farm overall. The leftover straw from their grass seed harvest is combined with harvested hop vines, composted and returned to the hop fields. In addition, the straw and hop vine mixture is

used as bedding in the farm's natural hog operation.

Gayle takes pride in the fact that Goschie Farms has just this year begun an organic yard of hops in response to growing demands. It will be a small part of their operation, but Gayle sees the future of hop farming heading in that direction. "It is happening in all of agriculture ... it is the right direction to go and it is the smart direction to go," she said.

Is the fourth generation of Goschies ready and willing to take over the operation when the time comes? "We hope so," she said. "The next generation is still young so it is hard to say at this point but we hope we can be able to instill an excitement and an enthusiasm in farming that will pass on to the next generation as it was passed on to us."

Goschie Farms is located at 7365 Meridian Road NE, Silverton, OR 97381. Phone (503) 873-5638.

GAYLE, GORDON AND GLENN GOSCHIE



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