

# Trail

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An active hive, with busy bees at work behind glass, can also be found at the honey stand.

The bees benefit the orchards by doing what comes natural — pollinating. Other bees are trucked to pollinate almond trees in California and cherries and blueberries in the The Dalles, Hermiston and Boardman areas.

They also sell bees. “Tomorrow morning someone is coming to pick up half a dozen queens,” Allen said. “I sell mostly queens this time of year. In the springtime we sell starter colonies.”

Allen said he couldn’t operate his business without the mentors who have helped him over the years, so he likes to give back and in the spring and fall lead hands-on beekeeper workshops.

The business is a part of an “agritourism” movement, which is growing in popularity and involves commercial enterprises at a working farm or ranch allowing visitors, in varying degrees, to observe and enjoy. One might just call it friendly folks sharing the work they’re involved in.

Activities for those stopping by may include educational experiences, on-farm direct sales or outdoor recreation.

Thomas Orchards’ well-known fruit stand opened on June 25 this season.

Located in Kimberly off of Highway 402, they’re open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week, and presently, visitors can buy apricots and cherries, which they can pick themselves, if they’d like. There are also pack-



Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter  
**Jeff Thomas of Thomas Orchards works at the business.**

ages of dried fruit and jams.

Near the end of July peaches will also be available, followed by plums, nectarines and Bartlett pears in August. Early apples, including golden delicious, cameos and ambrosia are ready in September with peaches and pears, and through the end of October, apples and pears are still in harvest.

Jeff Thomas said his top priority is producing high-quality fruit, but he said the orchards are also a place where people have the opportunity to see how the fruit is grown.

“A lot of people have a disconnect between the city and where your food comes from,” he said. “They can see how it’s grown and what we do. Obviously, you want to sell fruit, and you want to educate people in what you do.”

He said the “greatest generation” followed by the Baby Boomers grew up canning fruit.

“With my generation, ‘the Gen Xers,’ you start to see a little dis-

connect,” he said. “We were the first generation with year-round produce — apples, grapes, tomatoes out of Mexico.”

Thomas said he’s now seeing millennials, in their 20s and 30s, who are part of the “buy-local movement” and want to pick and even grow their own fruit.

He’s planning to host a Camp and Can event with a food preservation specialist to teach people how to can.

“It’s a small part, compared to our wholesale, but it may be the most important part because people get to see where their food comes from,” he said.

Happy Hens owners Grima and Dan Horgan have a “fresh eggs” sign at their driveway off of Highway 26 west of Dayville.

Grima keeps 70 cage-free chickens and grows a large garden, selling eggs and produce at her door and at the John Day Farmers Market on Saturdays through the summer months.

She said she enjoys eating fresh

fruit and vegetables she grows, including watermelon, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber, cilantro, tomatoes and more.

“It’s fresh and the best taste,” she said. “The things we grow are tasty.”

She added, “I know what I put into the ground — no chemicals in the ground — I enjoy feeding people good stuff and no chemicals.”

Rose and Darrell Howe offer a look at life on the ranch for their visitors at Triple H Homestead ranch in Monument.

They rent a five-bed bunkhouse, which looks like a barn from the outside, and guests can tag along as they work on the ranch, gathering eggs, feeding cows and pigs and making milk-based soaps and lotions.

Rose said she started equestrian clinics 10 years ago, and that’s how the bunkhouse started.

She no longer hosts the clinics, but about five years ago, they made the bunkhouse a vacation rental and it is now listed as an

Airbnb.

The rental includes four twin beds and a double bed with handmade quilts as well as a kitchen so visitors can do their own cooking.

“It seems to appeal to folks with young children, because they get to see me milk in the morning, they get to ‘have a go’ at milking,” said Rose in her English accent. “They get to help feed the cows and feed the pigs, gather eggs from the hen house and, such as today — a cheese and butter-making day for me — they are welcome to come in and watch the process.”

“When we know we’re going to have the younger children here, I’ll let them come down to the chicken house and gather the eggs from the chicken boxes,” she said. “It’s amazing how many children don’t know where their food comes from.”

Experiences such as these, and more, can be found along the John Day River Food Trail and beyond.

John Day Food Trail business owners and others include: in the Dayville area, Prairie Springs Fish Farm, Bergin’s Organic Custom Seeds, Guyon Springs Inn, Fish House Inn & RV Park, Dayville Café, Dayville Merc and Happy Hens Egg Farm; in the Kimberly area, Sheep Rock Unit of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Land’s Inn Oregon, Stellar Cabin Hideaway, John Day River Trading Post, Sage River Ranch, Thomas Orchards, Apricot Apiaries, Campbell Ranch and North Fork Ranch; in Monument, Triple H Homestead and Hunter’s Rendezvous; and in the Spray area, which is in neighboring Wheeler County, Nighthawk Valley Homestead and Historic Corncob Ranch.

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