Hermiston family uses farm to give back to community

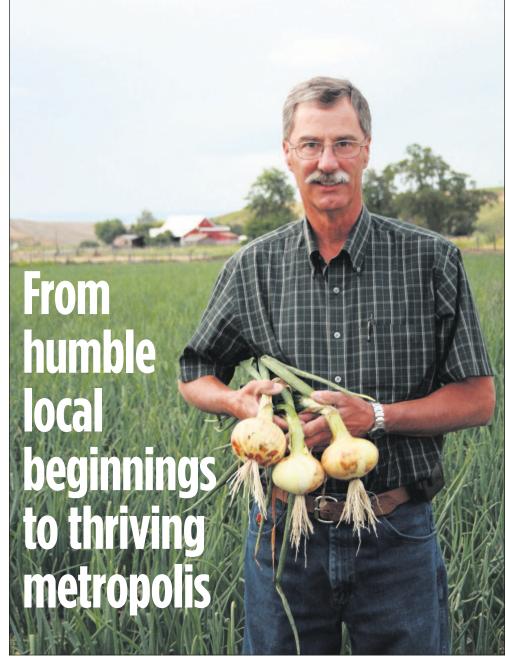
The Wick family poses for a photo. Pictured, from left, is Sam Wick, Mike Wick, Shari Wick and Jadie Wick. The farm has

"The thing that was admirable to

me about him and his mother, who was

Silverdale Farms cross-breeds hearty sheep variety in Hermiston

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2015



Bill Dean, vice president of sustainability at River Point Farms, holds a clump of onions.

Hale Farms and **River Point Farms** owners prove hard work pays off

BY MAEGAN MURRAY HERMISTON HERALD

were grown and packaged

by a farm headquartered in Hermiston. River Point Farms, a Hermiston-based operation, grows and packages about 20 percent of the nation's red onions, along with a large amount of its yellow onions. It supplies 100 percent of Subway's red onions for 36 weeks out of the year, red onions for every Chipotle restaurant in North America year-round, yellow whole-peel onions yearround to each Whataburger store, which are estab-

name a few. Business, however, wasn't always booming. The venture started from another farming operation owned and operated by some of the same founders as River Point Farms.

lishments based largely in

the South and Midwest, and provide about 50 percent of onions used in

Tostitos products, just to

Bob Hale, one of the owners and founders of River Point Farms along with local farmer Bob Levy, said they started up a farming operation called Hale Farms in 1977

one day earn a successful day turn their very small operation into two thriv- near Echo. ing organizations they

operate today. "I graduated from college in 1975, and we bor- ed their income with rowed 100 percent to buy off-farming jobs until an The next time you are the farm, 100 percent to adjacent farm came up in a Subway, Chipotle or buy the equipment and for sale, which allowed are munching on some 100 percent to operate it," them to double their opchips and Tostitos salsa, Hale said. "We worked eration and begin farming chances are good that the extremely hard for the full-time. As they made in those products first 10 years, being driven mostly by the fear of lationships that allowed

with the idea they would they could. In those early years, they grew hay, sugliving. He said they never ar beets and grain on their imagined they would one 500-acre irrigated farm in the Butter Creek valley

> make it," he said. They

them to grow their business, they developed a

Hale said, in the beginning, the goal was to just motto that Hale said realearn any kind of a profit ly allowed them to excel.

supplement-

"We were just trying to

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Local couple explain changes

HERMISTON HERALD

The Wick family of Hermiston

proves every day that a farm can be

more than the crops or livestock it pro-

For more than 20 years, the family

Shari Wick and her husband, Mike,

has used its farm off of Prindle Loop

to give back to children in the commu-

who inherited the farm from his par-

ents, have hosted student field trips at

As they raised their own two chil-

dren, they also welcomed 10 foster

children so that they, too, could expe-

rience a consistent family environment

The Wicks also balance normal

farm operations with holding full-time

jobs and other activities. Shari Wick

has taught in the Hermiston School

District for the last nearly 30 years,

while Mike Wick has worked in agri-

culture, now serving as the manager of

wouldn't have had it any other way,"

FARM BEGINNINGS

Mike Wick said his parents pur-

chased the farm when he was 2 years

old after looking for a place that had

milder winters for their cattle. He said

his father was a cattle rancher and

"It's been a lot of work, but I

the Westland Irrigation District.

and and life on a farm.

Shari Wick said.

to the industry

BY SEAN HART

tinues to change.

HERMISTON HERALD

through the years

A local couple have years of

Tom Watson worked for Superior Farms, purchasing and feeding lambs before they were Cane of Appreciation for sersent to slaughter, for about 40 years. He served on the board before he retired, and, although sold about "half a dozen years each year. ago," he said the company is still the largest lamb processor in the United States with a large facility in California.

been in Mike Wick's family since the 1950s.

When Wick was 13 years old,

however, his father came down with

farmer and thought that Hermiston in February of 1977. During that time, onto this place through all of that,"

would best meet their needs after living Wick's mother was responsible for all Shari Wick said. "She finished raising

viral encephalitis, which put him into

near Condon, Oregon.

experience in the sheep industry and continue to breed a flock in Tom and Karin Watson, who have owned Silverdale Farms in Hermiston for about 20 years, have worked with sheep

School for 28 years and recently became one of four women to ever receive the association's

vice to the sheep industry. Even in retirement, they of directors for several years continue to be involved with sheep at the fair and breed a the Hermiston operation was small flock of about 150 ewes

a coma for nine years before he died a saint, was that they were able to hold

SHEARING THE INDUSTRY

Tom Watson said national Karin Watson served as the policies and trends and inter-Feeders Association for 23 matically reduced the size of years before retiring in January. the national sheep industry in She helped organize and prothe last 70 years. Ten facilities mote the NLFA Howard Wy- on the West Coast processed man Sheep Industry Leadership lamb meat when he started in



the farm duties while raising her three the three boys by herself ... It has meant

a lot to our family to still have it."

something to him.

nection to it," he said.

Mike Wick said the fact that the

farm is still in their family means

"I'll always kind of have that con-

This pregnant Texel ewe was about to give birth earlier in March at Silverdale Farms in

California remains. He said about half of the lamb meat consumed in the

SEE SILVERDALE/A9



SEAN HART PHOTO Karin Watson holds a new lamb at Silverdale Farms in Hermiston



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'It's not a job, it's a lifestyle'

Ditchen enjoys the business challenge, outdoor office and visible accomplishments of farming

After a brief stint playing professional baseball, he returned home to go

After graduating from Oregon State

University with a degree in animal

husbandry and farming, he met and

married his wife, and they settled down

on the family farm, only to have their

Until then, Mike Wick had man-

aged the farm largely on his own, rais-

ing some of his own cattle, while also

leasing out portions of the land to inter-

ested farmers and cattle ranchers. After the Wicks' twins, son Sam and daugh-

ter Jadie, were born, Mike relied more

on leasing out the land than managing

it himself as he had less time to ded-

icate to the family farm, but that also

gave the family an opportunity to reach

GIVING BACK

Shari Wick said raising the children

while trying to manage the family farm

have kept she and her husband busy,

but the difference they have made in

SEE WICK/A9

twins three years later.

out to others.

work worthwhile.

followed by nine others.

to school and then take over the family

BY SEAN HART HERMISTON HERALD

Darrin Ditchen controls the 3,000-acre irrigation system at Golden Valley Farms in Stanfield with the touch of Ditchen, whose grandfa-

people's lives has made all the hard ther started Golden Valley en said, the selling price for When their children were in second Farms in the Willamette the commodities grown, grade, Shari Wick said she became at-Valley, has managed the such as grass seed at Golden family business's eastern site Valley Farms, remains flat or tached to one of her students who was having a rough time at home. After since he finished college in even decreases. becoming certified foster parents, the 1999 and said farmers must Wicks took in the student, who was evolve to overcome constant said. "Usually, farmers adapt challenges. "They all got to experience farm life

challenges every year," he the same amount of people. said. "The day you think you We have to become more efa new challenge in front of are very efficient-minded you. You learn something people, at least I am. A lot of new every day."



Darrin Ditchen, whose father started Golden Valley Farms

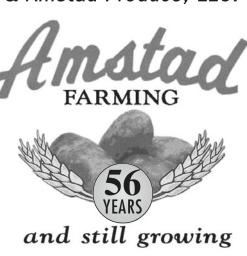
in the Willamette Valley, works on the farm's eastern site in Stanfield, which is now managed by his son, Darrin. continually increase, Ditchbusiness plan. That's what

we do around here. We're always looking for ways to improve and to be efficient.' Ditchen said Golden Valley Farms tries to im-

"We've had to adapt," he prove each year, and new technology has helped. He said a digital upgrade in the by covering more ground, "There's always new covering more acres with farm's center-pivot irrigation system has vastly increased efficiency. The pumps speed have it figured out, there's ficient. I would say farmers up and slow down based on water pressure, he said, and every ounce of water is accounted for. my friends are always look-While business expenses, ing for what we can do betsuch as fuel and labor costs, ter. I think that's just a good

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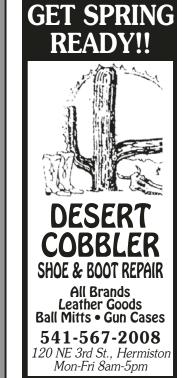
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