

Expanding Peach Operation is a Family Affair

By Robyn Rominger

A progressive California farmer hopes that peaches can be part of a long-term, diversified strategy to provide a profitable opportunity for the next generation.

Jeff Cederlind of Cederlind Farms in Winton is expanding his peach operation with the help of his three sons, all of whom are in their early 20s.

"We wanted to expand our operation and the boys wanted to continue to grow peaches," Jeff said.

Jeff is a second-generation farmer, following in the footsteps of his father, Dennis. "Dad bought his first piece of property in 1959 in the Turlock area. We got into peaches in 1999 with 20 acres. Here we are, 15 years later, with about 210 acres," he said.

Cederlind Farms grows about 770 acres of crops and produces turkeys, with operations in both Merced and Stanislaus counties. The family farm includes Jeff, his wife, Cindy, and their three sons: Mark, 24, Derek, 22, and Kyle, 20.

"I knew what I wanted to do since preschool," said Jeff, who began farming full-time after graduating from Turlock Christian High School in 1986.

Cindy grew up in the Chicago area and after graduating from nearby Trinity International University, she moved to California and began teaching first grade at Turlock Christian School. She and Jeff met at church and eventually got married. After nine years of teaching, Cindy decided to become a stay-at-home mom. Today, with her children grown, she manages the payroll for Cederlind Farms.

The Cederlinds have about 145 bearing acres of cling peaches and have recently expanded their operation by 65 more acres.

"Right now, there is a demand for new orchards. The price for peaches has increased and the canneries want you to plant," said Jeff.

The decision to plant more peaches was influenced by family considerations as well.

"We wouldn't pursue peaches if it wasn't family-positive because peaches are a lot of work. It's five months of intense farming," requiring precise irrigation and fertilization at critical times during the growing season, he noted. "The sizing of the fruit is something you really have to keep your eye on, to make sure they're going to make it to size."

The Cederlinds also produce winegrapes, almonds and walnuts, and they own a custom grape-harvesting operation.



Derek, Cindy, Jeff, Mark & Kyle Cederlind.

"We're fairly diversified, which is a good thing," Jeff said. "We want to stay diversified because you never know from one day to the next what could happen to different markets. It's a bit more of a challenge to farm that way because you're thinking about many different directions."

In recent years, there has been a strong demand for almonds, which are mechanically harvested and "very profitable," he noted. "We're bucking the trend a little bit. We have a lot of young almonds planted, but to stay balanced and diversified, we are growing more peaches."

"And we're planting them with the idea of machine harvesting in the future if we have to go in that direction—if the labor isn't available," Jeff added.

CCPA President, Rich Hudgins, notes that "A lot of people want to be diversified, but it's tough because of the uncertainty regarding our labor situation."

He adds that the state's peach acreage has been affected by competing crops. "It's less labor-intensive and less risk to grow almonds and walnuts," he said. "Most growers are not increasing their peach acreage because almonds and walnuts are doing so well."

Jeff is betting that in the future, some of the labor risk may be mitigated by mechanical harvesting.

"Jeff is a very progressive grower. He's going to plant more peaches—that's pretty progressive at this day and age. Not a lot of people are. I think he's trying to build a future for his kids."

Noting that Jeff's three sons are young farmers, Hudgins said, "A lot of guys who don't have younger children might not want to do it. It becomes more of a young man's game and if they take the risk, they may reap the rewards. There's a reward in it right now because the price is up significantly in 2015."

The Cederlinds grow 13 varieties of cling peaches for Del Monte Foods and Seneca Foods. Their peaches are harvested the first of July through the end of August. They carefully manage their harvest schedule because if there

is a break during the peach harvest, laborers may leave to work on other crops in the region such as sweet potatoes.

"They're going to go where there are crops; therefore, we try to get things organized during planting, so we don't have big gaps in the harvest and have the labor leave," Jeff said. "If we didn't have harvesting, pruning and tying work for them, we could lose them to other crops."

Water availability is also a major concern. Due to reduced surface-water supplies, the Cederlinds converted their peach orchards from flood irrigation to drip irrigation this year. They also put in a new well.

Rising costs for labor and other inputs pose a challenge for peach growers. "Our expenses are going up 8 percent to 10 percent a year, so the peach prices in the future will need to continue to follow that for us to be profitable," Cederlind said.

Foreign imports of peaches, especially from China, continue to be an on-going issue. "Does America want dependence on foreign food? In foreign countries, they don't have the same regulatory requirements as we do here," he said.

Along those lines, regulatory compliance is a challenge, from pesticide-use reporting to operating smog-free tractors. "Those are things we really have no control over—we're pretty much forced to do things."

Cindy added, "It's more paperwork."

"And of course, Mother Nature always has the final say," Cederlind said.

When Jeff isn't farming, he enjoys playing golf. He coaches golf at Turlock Christian High School, and he coached Mark and Kyle when they were on the school's golf team.

Jeff and Cindy find much satisfaction in the fact that their children want to continue their family tradition of farming. "We farm together," Jeff said.



Jeff Cederlind holding peach.

In recent years, there has been a strong demand for almonds, which are mechanically harvested and "very profitable," he noted.

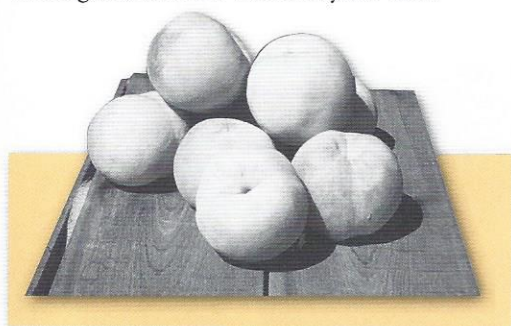
Continued on page 23

Keynote Speaker - 93rd Annual Meeting

Continued from page 17

adjudicate your right to pump groundwater in future years. The current litigation process takes anywhere from 15-30 years depending on how many players and a huge amount of cost and agony in the process. So, there is a need to clean up these procedures.

The year 2015 is going to be a challenging year, like 2014 was, because it is likely the drought is going to continue and there are going to be just as many policy questions coming out as there were last year. One



Grower Profile

Continued from page 5

Eldest son Mark is in charge of pest control and fertilizer management. "I'm also interested in propagation and genetics," he said. "Two years ago, I made 500-600 trees, mostly almonds, and I made about 150 grafted grapevines."

Derek manages irrigation and farm-safety compliance. "I'd like to farm as long as I can and I'm hoping to buy ground for myself and farm it in the future. I've been involved since I was a little boy. My brothers and I always loved going to work with Dad. It was something really cool that we did. It was the same thing for my dad—he went to work with his dad. It was passed down—it's a family tradition."

Kyle is in charge of mechanics. "I pretty much knew that I wanted to be a farmer since kindergarten. As a little kid, I always wanted to figure out how things worked, and I

of the things I say to encourage people is, there are a lot of folks like me who are fully engaged in the discussions – people who are a part of the water infrastructure. In the law business we refer to ourselves as the hydraulic brotherhood, but it is time for some real parties and interests, real farmers and people who are on the ground making decisions every day about how they use their water supplies, to get engaged in this process in a much more active way.

I encourage individual farmers and the state's Ag organizations to escalate your game and stay actively involved as the State's groundwater regulatory apparatus is put in place. It is the only way to assure that groundwater rights for farmers will be preserved in the coming years. Thanks for the opportunity to visit with you this afternoon. 🍑

The year 2015 is going to be a challenging year, like 2014 was, because it is likely the drought is going to continue and there are going to be just as many policy questions coming out as there were last year.



Cindy & Jeff Cederlind.

enjoyed hanging out with Grandpa. Today, I'm the mechanic in the family. I work on the tractors and all the farm equipment, especially during the grape harvest, keeping the harvester going--I'm on call at night. And I'm in charge of fixing and servicing and moving the equipment during the day." His mechanical aptitude is not limited to farming. Earlier this year, Kyle also worked on a car, truck and RV for the Stanislaus County Fair destruction derby.

It's clear that Mark, Derek and Kyle intend to carry on the family farming tradition, and the youngest Cederlinds can rightfully claim to be third-generation peach growers in California. 🍑