

## Best Attendance in CGA History at 2016 Annual Meeting

The 2016 annual meeting was held at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. Turnout was excellent, with the greatest number of members ever in attendance. The new slate of officers was introduced and approved, including two new members, Jack Kirk (treasurer/secretary) and Derek Waltchack (Director). Sandy Bole's report on the state of the treasury after a review of financial records was that everything is in perfect order.

Saturday morning presentations from Greg Miller, Charlie Novo-Gradac, Roger Blackwell, Bill Nash, and Mike Gold were informative and thought-provoking. Greg reported on the results of cultivar trials and had some good ideas for measuring yield. Charlie talked about the challenges they have faced in managing a chestnut orchard in an unlikely place – Kansas – but was happy to report that they have now caught up with predicted yields for their farm. Roger and Bill gave a joint presentation from Dr. Dennis Fulbright, who was unable to attend, about the success they have had managing a chestnut growers' cooperative in Michigan

and the benefits of sharing costs (especially of a FACMA harvester) between growers. Finally, Mike Gold gave a report on the results of the annual market survey that showed how the chestnut industry continues to grow but is still not meeting growing demand (full report starting on page 3). PowerPoints from all presentations will be available soon in the members-only section of the website.

After lunch, the group travelled to the University of Missouri Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center (HARC), where Mike Gold displayed a FACMA harvester and gave an overview of its use. The group then toured the mature repository (germplasm) orchard, where over 60 cultivars are present. Next up, Bill and SueEllen Stouffer

showcased their young orchard in Napton, MO. Their unique approach of alley cropping with wheat made for a beautiful exhibit.

On Sunday, folks travelled to Chestnut Charlies in Lawrence, KS, or to Forrest Keeling Nursery in Elsberry, MO to learn more about their practices and see their operations up close.

The meeting was not all business, though. Everyone enjoyed catching up with each other and swapping tips at the Friday night mixer, and the Saturday night dinner at the Broadway Brewery was a great time.

The silent auction was a great success this year and yielded a healthy profit for CGA. Thanks to all who donated items! ✨



The annual meeting brought a great turnout by newer and veteran growers alike. See more photos from the meeting starting on page 6.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



I want to start by acknowledging the very impressive annual meeting just held in Columbia, Missouri. Mike Gold did an outstanding job putting everything together. The presentations were excellent and thought-provoking. The debate about grafted trees versus seedlings over the long term will be interesting to follow. It makes sense to graft, and it is clear that some growers have had success doing so, but others have seen delayed graft failure that is heart breaking. More research is needed and the presentation by Greg Miller about understanding DNA and developing clonal root stock defined the need for that research. Maybe the CGA needs to look at getting more involved in that going forward.

We also saw the debate about possible sizing standards for bulk sellers versus U-pick operations or internet selling. We heard how different varieties further complicate the issue as some European varieties are generally larger than Chinese varieties. And we heard about the need for standards for quality control - to somehow get all growers on the same page about timely harvesting, cleaning, and sorting, as well as keeping the nuts properly chilled and treated (using something like StorOx) to inhibit mold development, and how to contain and inhibit weevil infestations.

We were all very impressed with the work Mike has done at his research facility during the site visit to the University of Missouri's Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center. I finally saw a sterile male chestnut tree! The farm developed by Bill and SueEllen Stouffer was extraordinary: the "gold standard" for new chestnut farms! It was also exciting to see what Charlie NovoGradac has done with his innovative use of compressors to control the defrost cycle, as well as his dry cleaning machine and his sorter. Chestnut Charlie is a genius!

Big changes are underway for the CGA board this year. I do want to acknowledge the loss of Ray and Carolyn Young from the board. Both have been a driving force for the good of the CGA for so many years that it's not hard to look back and see that where we are now is largely because of them. Carolyn's work on the newsletter and website and Ray's handling of the finances have been outstanding. Their knowledge of the history of the CGA and their energy have made the CGA the great organization that it is. I would also like to recognize Bob Wallace. Bob is the reason almost everyone I know, especially in Florida, got into the chestnut world. I can't think of anyone who has done more to encourage the growth of the chestnut industry, especially in the south. His mark - and the Dunstan tree - has been left everywhere - practically around the world! We will miss him on the board. Also, Roger Blackwell has done a great job these past two years as president and his continued presence on the board will be appreciated.

One of the guiding principles of the CGA is to "improve communications between growers". Having the annual conference is essential to that end as is the newsletter and the website. With some of the upcoming additions to the website, I think we will see improved communication opportunities which will help the CGA grow. The CGA also aims "to support research and breeding work". We heard about the need to replace our already obsolete varieties. How can the CGA get behind this important work?

Finally, feel free to call or email me about any issue you think the CGA should be focusing its efforts. As you can see above, the CGA has a full plate going forward and with your help, we can eventually solve these issues.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. English".

David English

## Chestnut Growers of America, Inc.

chestnutgrowers.org

### Board of Directors

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<i>Secretary/Treasurer</i>	Jack Kirk (804) 357-1137   jkirk@essexbank.com
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<i>Director</i>	Lee Williams

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Single membership, \$30; Household membership, \$40; Associate membership, \$50. Members receive The Chestnut Grower quarterly. Foreign mailings may include a surcharge to cover the cost of additional postage. Membership applications may be obtained online at chestnutgrowers.org.

### Advertising Rates:

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Half page, camera ready	\$15.00
Quarter page	\$10.00
Business card (4 issues)	\$15.00

### Deadlines

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Mailed</i>
Winter	Dec. 10	Jan. 1
Spring	Mar. 10	April 1
Summer	June 10	July 1
Fall	Sept. 10	Oct. 1

### Editorial Opinion

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# The Annual Market Survey Reveals Steady Growth in the Chestnut Industry

by Mike Gold, Associate Director, The Center for Agroforestry, University of Missouri

*The Annual Market Survey tracks the growth of the chestnut industry over time and provides chestnut growers with information about how it's changing and where more progress is needed.*

*To get a better picture of the current market, we again reached out to past and present CGA members. Many thanks go out to everyone who filled out the latest survey. 73 useable surveys were collected and analyzed; 84% of respondents were current CGA members, and 16% of respondents were past members who do not have active memberships this year.*

*Here are some highlights of the results.*

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## **Production Operation**

Growers responded from 17 different states, from coast to coast. Responses included: Missouri (8), Iowa (8), Michigan (7), California (5), Illinois (4), Ohio (4), Florida (3), Oregon (3), Virginia (3), Washington (3), Alabama (2), South Carolina (2), Tennessee (2), and one each from Idaho, Kansas, North Carolina, and Oklahoma.

Respondents reported a total of 655 acres planted in chestnuts, 384 acres of

which are in commercial production (Figure 1). That's a 41% increase in the total acres reported planted in chestnuts since 2013.

In terms of orchard size, most growers still have small operations: less than 5 acres (45%), between 6 and 10 acres (21%), between 11 and 20 acres (20%), between 21 and 50 acres (12%), and more than 50 acres (2%) (Figure 1). Growth in the number of 21-50 acre farms has been notable

– an increase from 6% to 12% since 2013. Still, 66% have less than 10 acres planted.

62% of respondents don't plan to expand their orchard next year. Those who do plan on expansion (38%) indicated new plantings ranging from less than 1 acre to 20 acres for a total of 91 more acres.

22% of respondents use organic production methods. 23% of them

*Story continues on next page...*

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are USDA certified and 77% are not formally organically certified. 78% of respondents use conventional production methods. 78% of them use inorganic fertilizer, 54% use insecticide, and 80% use herbicide.

### Harvest and Yield

Survey data revealed that a total of 477,424 pounds of chestnuts were harvested in 2015 (Figure 2). That represents a 64% increase from the number of pounds reported in 2012. In 2015, 5% of growers harvested over 50,000 lbs., 21% harvested between 10,001 and 50,000 lbs., and 13% harvested between 5,001 and 10,000 lbs. 61% reported a harvest less than 5,000 lbs.

Compared to 2014, the yield of chestnuts in 2015 was higher for 63% of respondents, the same for 22% of respondents, and lower for 15% (Figure 3).

### Marketing

48% of respondents market the chestnuts themselves, 21% market their crop exclusively through a co-op, and 19% market a portion of the chestnuts through a co-op and a portion by themselves. Since 2012, the number of growers marketing all their chestnuts themselves has declined, and participation in co-ops has increased. However, the majority of growers still do all their marketing individually (Figure 4).

### Sales

In 2015, 41% of respondents earned less than \$5,000 from chestnut sales (excluding shipping and delivery), 31% earned between \$5,000 and \$25,000, 13% between \$25,000 and \$50,000, 5% between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 10% earned more than \$100,000 (Figure 5). Of those amounts, value-added products still contribute very little to gross annual sales, with 74% of growers not utilizing value-added products at all, and only 3% with value-added products contributing to more than 50% of their sales.

## The 2015/16 marketing season

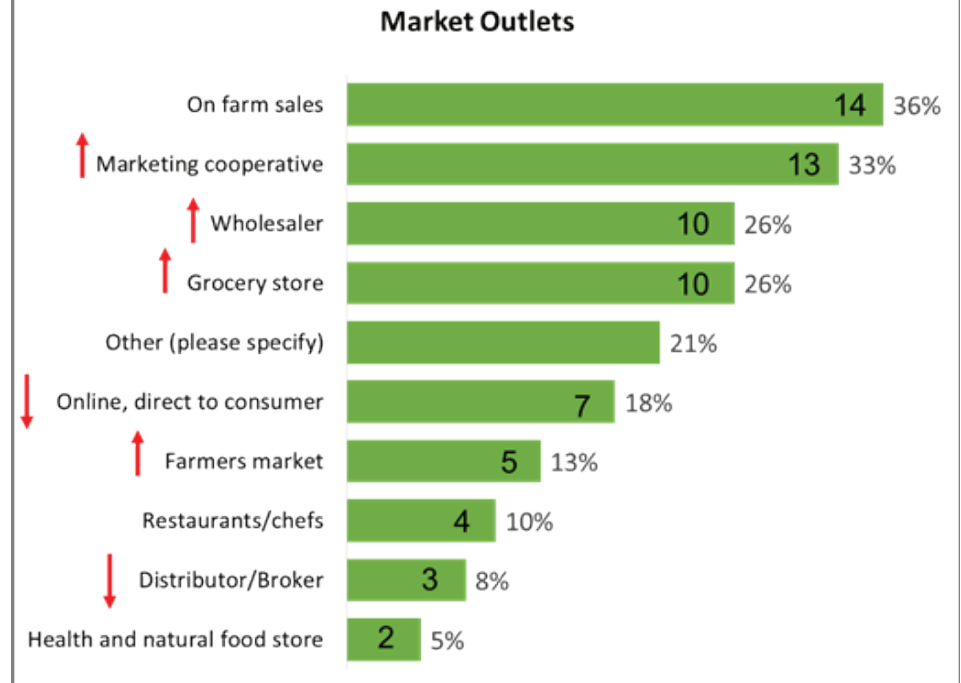


Figure 7. Market outlets. Arrows indicate trends in popularity since the previous year.

### Market Outlets

36% of respondents sold their chestnuts on their farm, 33% through a marketing cooperative (prices received ranged from \$1.90-\$4.00 per pound), 26% in grocery stores (\$2.00-\$6.00/lb.), 26% through wholesalers (\$1.00-\$5.80/lb.), 18% online (\$3.50-\$6.85/lb.), 13% in farmers markets (\$2.00-\$7.00/lb.), 10% to restaurants (\$3.50-\$5.50/lb.), 8% through distributors/brokers (\$0.75-\$3.25/lb.) and 5% through health food stores (\$4.25). Sales to marketing cooperatives, wholesalers, grocery stores, and farmers markets are up, and direct online sales and sales to distributors are down (Figure 7).

### Demand for Fresh Chestnuts and Value-added Products

62% of respondents reported increased demand for their fresh chestnuts in 2015/2016, 22% unchanged demand, and 13% decreased demand (40 respondents). 62% of respondents felt that demand for fresh chestnuts is in excess of supply, 10% equal to supply, and 10% below supply (Figure 6). The number of growers reporting that demand is in excess of supply has

jumped from 49% in 2013 to 62% this year.

We also asked about the demand for value-added products. 42% reported strong demand, and no one reported weak demand. 43% said that demand for value-added products was in excess of supply, 14% said it was equal to supply, and 14% said it was below supply. Even though demand is high for value added products, it is still mostly fresh nuts being sold.

### Conclusion

This year's survey results provide clear evidence that the chestnut industry is growing steadily in terms of acres planted and pounds harvested. And although it is important to keep some gap between supply and demand, it is clear that there is still plenty of demand both for fresh nuts and value-added products that it is not currently possible for growers to meet. Moving forward, let's think about how we can get the word out to more people about chestnuts. The more people are exposed, the more they buy, and the more we can invest in providing chestnuts to the market. ☀

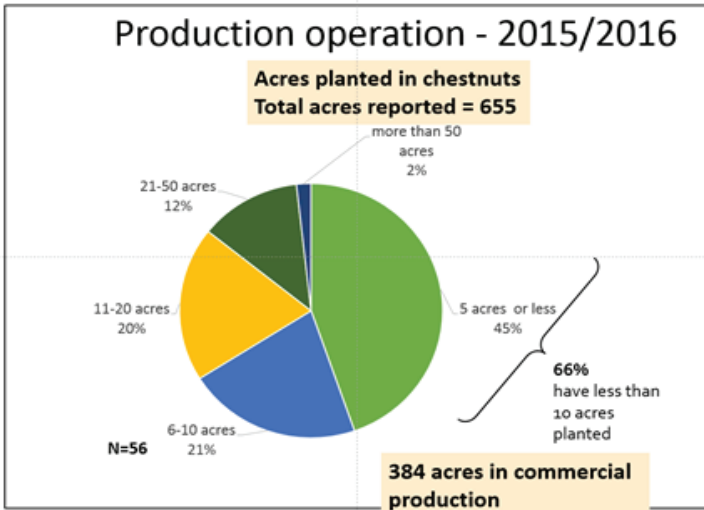


Figure 1. Acres planted in chestnuts.

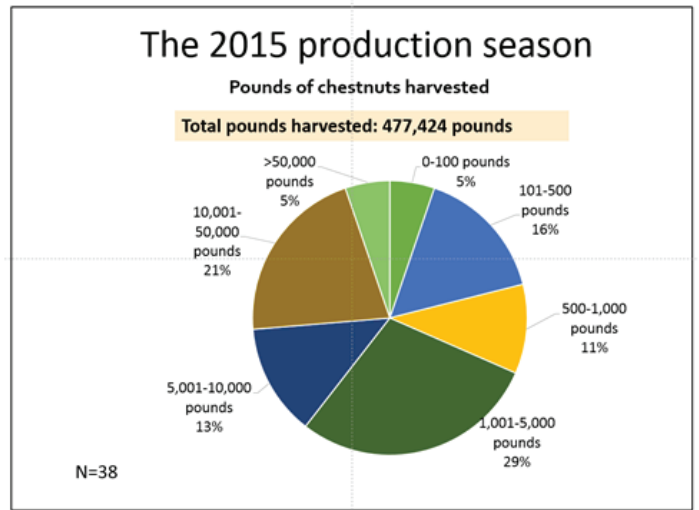


Figure 2. Total pounds harvested in 2015.

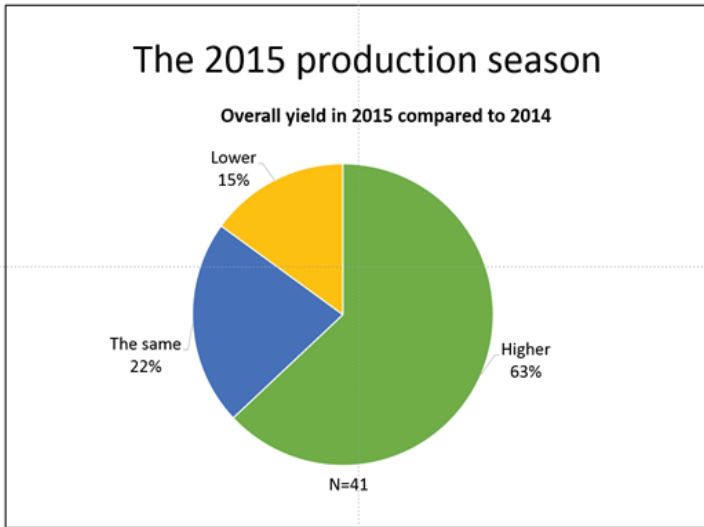


Figure 3. Overall yield in 2015 compared to 2014.



Figure 4. How growers marketed their chestnuts in 2015.

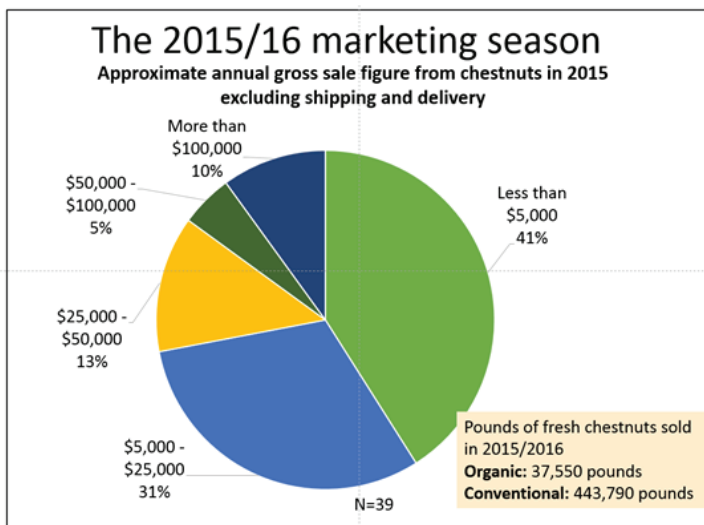


Figure 5. Annual gross sales figures.

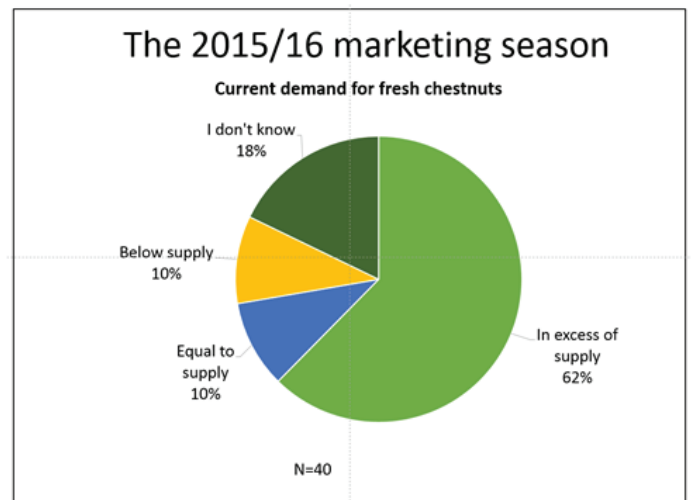


Figure 6. Current demand for fresh chestnuts.

## Scenes from the weekend in Missouri...



Chestnut growers catch up and swap stories from the past year at the Friday night mixer.



Charlie NovoGradac's presentation inspired many members to make the long trip out to Kansas to see his orchard on Sunday.



After hearing from several speakers about how impressive Szezo cultivars have been, these Szezo seedlings had to be split up and sold individually in the silent auction!



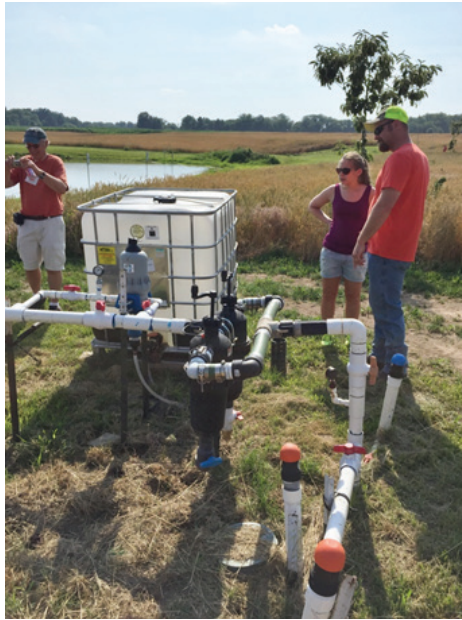
Mike Gold explains: The FACMA harvester sweeps burs into a row, vacuums them up, separates the nuts from the burs, and then throws the debris back under the trees. To use it effectively, the ground needs to be near perfect – mowed, flat, and clean.



Examining one of the cultivars in the HARC repository nursery.



The Stouffers have been experimenting with planting additional crops in their orchard. They tried pumpkins, then sweet corn, and then finally landed on wheat. After it's harvested, it makes a great surface for picking up chestnuts.



Checking out the Stouffers' fertigation system. The centrally located 6.5 acre water reservoir seen in the background is used to irrigate the whole 130 acre farm. The fertigation system adds nitrogen.



Bill and SueEllen Stouffer explain that for Cedar Hill Farm, Qing has meant "Chaching!"



Wayne Lovelace demonstrates excellent root growth and structure achieved through Forrest Keeling's system of air pruning and transplanting/repotting several times.



Successful budding on Colossal trees at Forrest Keeling Nursery.



◀ Forrest Keeling's enormous operation involves maintaining over 60 acres of trees in 3-gallon containers.

▶ An impressive heat wave happened to be moving through Missouri the whole weekend. Thanks to Bill and SueEllen for providing shade and cold drinks at their farm tour!





The cooler at Chestnut Charlie's has two compressors. Most coolers only have one. Having two helps control the defrost cycle more efficiently, resulting in more consistent temperature control.



Chestnut Charlie's nut sorter.



Examining a dry cleaning machine fabricated by Charlie that saves a tremendous amount of time during the cleaning phase of the nuts.

### **SAVE THE DATE!**

You will want to save the date for the 2017 annual meeting at Greg Miller's orchard in Carrollton, Ohio:

**June 9-11, 2017**

### **A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD**

The board is looking for ways to help new growers and experienced growers alike, and to promote the transfer of information between those with more experience and those new to the industry. We also want to connect new growers with other growers in their local area. We are working on ways to make these conversations available to everyone so all growers can benefit and the industry as a whole can grow.

If you are good at growing trees but are nervous about marketing your chestnuts, we can help get you into a co-op. We don't want to see anyone stuck with nuts they can't sell.

Keep in mind though that quality is essential. If you have a quality product, there are people here to help – you are not on your own! Networking is the key to getting everything sold.

What will help you succeed? Get in touch with us and let us know!

### **OUTGOING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

This is my final message as President of Chestnut Growers of America. I want to thank you for all your support over the last two years as the President of CGA. I hope that I have helped to move our organization forward and will continue on the CGA Board as a member. Our 2016 Annual Meeting in Columbia, Missouri was a huge success and well-attended. I want to thank all the presenters and Mike Gold for hosting a fantastic meeting for all of our CGA members. Mike continues to be a great supporter and researcher for the chestnut industry.

As usual, one of the best things about our annual meeting is the opportunity to talk with fellow growers, and Friday night's welcome party was fun for all. Everyone had a wonderful time discussing chestnuts and more chestnuts.

We all need to thank both Carolyn and Ray Young for all their efforts throughout the many years for their work on Chestnut Growers of America. Also, we need to thank Bob Wallace for his participation on the CGA Board.

Please welcome our new Secretary/Treasurer, Jack Kirk, and our new board member, Derek Waltchack. Both new members to the Board are up to the challenges of continuing to make our organization grow the chestnut industry.

Remember the purpose of CGA is to promote chestnuts, to disseminate information to growers of chestnuts, to improve communications between growers within the industry, to support research and breeding work and generally to further the interests and knowledge of Chestnut Growers. CGA advocates the delivery of only high quality chestnuts to the marketplace. As members of CGA, I hope you can help us grow CGA and bring new members to our organization.

### **Want To Buy/For Sale**

The board would like to add a section to The Chestnut Grower where members can post equipment or other items they want to buy or that they have for sale. Send your submissions to the editor (contact info on pg. 2).

I hope you all have a wonderful summer and many chestnuts in the coming harvest season.

Best Regards,

Roger Blackwell



# The Chestnut Proliferation Project Grows the Chestnut Industry on the West Coast by Giving Away Free Trees – and Advice

by James Most, Eastsound, WA

In an effort to promote chestnuts as a crop on the West Coast, the Chestnut Proliferation Project is distributing young chestnut trees to farmers and ranchers keen on diversifying their land with chestnuts as a long lived, drought tolerant tree crop. Supported by a grant from Nutiva, these trees are being distributed for free along with consultation and establishment support.

The Chestnut Proliferation Project was started by James Most and Sara Joy Palmer, husband and wife farmers on Orcas Island, WA. They started propagating chestnut trees in 2012, seeking to promote chestnuts as a sustainable agricultural crop. Funded by a grant from Nutiva in 2014, they expanded into a new nursery site and began propagating 750 trees to be given

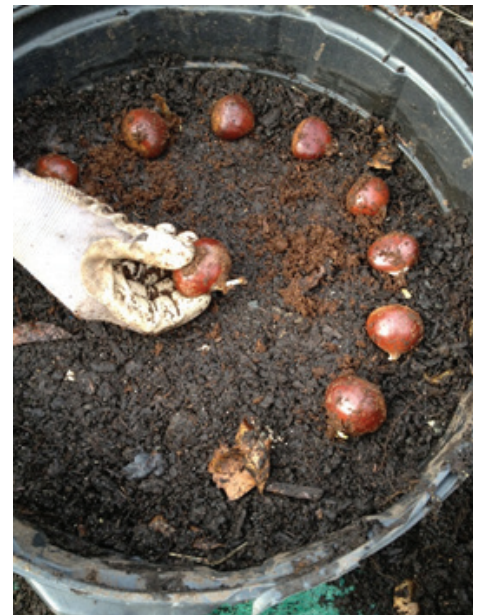
away free with consultation and establishment support to farmers and ranchers on the West Coast.

In February 2016, a first batch of 200 trees was distributed to 10 locations in California, Oregon, and Washington. Recipients include a horse powered organic vegetable farm in Walla Walla, a community supported farm and ranch in the Klamath mountains, a soil building farmland project outside Chico, and an auto mechanic shop/ cattle ranch transitioning to farming near Bellingham.

In February 2017, the remaining 550 trees will be distributed, for which recipients are still being sought and selected. So far, the Chestnut Proliferation project has been met with tremendous amounts of enthusiasm and support, and James and Sara Joy have

already begun propagating seedlings to be distributed in 2018 and beyond (it takes 3 years to raise a sapling from seed).

For more information, email James at [jamesmost@gmail.com](mailto:jamesmost@gmail.com). ☼



*Planting germinating chestnuts after stratification.*



*Two-year-old chestnuts putting on lush growth in nursery beds.*



*Digging chestnut trees bare root, and finding healthy root development and lots of mycorrhizal fungi.*

# Meet the Board

Meet your 2016-2017 Board of Directors:



## David English

*President*

I have been growing chestnuts for 25 years and just this year had to sell the farm. I have become more involved with the CGA over the last several years and have had the pleasure of meeting and working with several members who have been in the business far longer than I have. I look forward to working with the new board members and serving the membership this next year.

I am very interested in meeting with members to learn what matters to them in the CGA. Especially if there are ways to make the CGA more relevant in this growing and expanding industry. I am also continually amazed at the number of people wanting to start growing chestnuts. What are they thinking? I know they are not doing it for the experience, or as a hobby, or just for the fun of it. What really drives them and what can the CGA do to help them succeed? I can't wait to learn from these younger, newer growers!



## Roger Blackwell

*Vice President*

My current farm, New Era Chestnuts, LLC, is located in Montague, Michigan and is owned by my brother-in-law Doug, his wife Kathy, and my wife Sue and I. Our chestnut orchard is 8 acres on a 35 acre plot of land located two miles inland from Lake Michigan. We have 800 chestnut trees. The majority of our trees are between 12 to 15 years old. All the trees are grafted European/Japanese cultivars; the majority are Colossal with Nevada as the primary pollinators.

Our orchard is probably one of the best locations in the state. I have not had any irrigation until three years ago for new trees planted. In the last 8 years, our trees have grown an average of one inch in diameter and some have grown even larger. The orchard production has improved from 4 pounds per tree 8 years ago to over 42 pounds per tree in 2014.

I am currently on the Board of Directors of Chestnut Growers, Inc., a chestnut marketing cooperative started in 2002. The cooperative is important in that a group of growers can share the same equipment to process, grade, and market the chestnuts. Also, not every grower will have the same amount of chestnuts each year. As a group of growers we can maintain a regular customer base and have a reasonable amount of chestnuts to bring to market each year. Ultimately, we save by working together and in some ways improve the wholesale pricing of chestnuts in the state of Michigan. As a group we are a strong marketing force of chestnuts in the State. We are very optimistic about growing a commercial chestnut industry in Michigan, and we are looking to expand in the area where we have been successful along the Lake Michigan coastline.



## Jack Kirk

*Secretary/Treasurer*

Around 2005, as I began winding down my career in financial management and strategic planning in the corporate world, I searched for a pre-retirement or retirement project that would be both rewarding and entirely different from the corporate world. After lots of research, and developing a detailed business plan, I settled on "Chestnuts".

In 2010, I found a wonderful piece of property east of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, about 25 miles south of Charlottesville. In 2011, we began planting Dunstan seedlings. We completed our plantings in 2015. Our first small commercial crop was sold out last year. We are one of the many "new" growers in the Chestnut business.

Ray Young's advice has always been to not quit your day job when you start a Chestnut farm. I have taken his advice and am still winding down my career. Hopefully, the nuts will fall in greater quantities in the future and soon I will be able to kiss the corporate world good-bye.

As a new kid on the Chestnut block, I have many questions about the Chestnut business, especially how to balance the evolution of the business, from planting and growing, to harvesting, processing, and storage, to marketing and sales, with limited investment dollars. I imagine many of you have faced the same dilemma (unless you are independently wealthy). I

have found members of CGA to be helpful and candid with answers. Thanks for all of your help.

I am filling Ray Young's position as Secretary/Treasurer. As you well know, there is no way I can replace Ray. Honestly, I don't think anyone could. He has been a tireless worker and advocate in promoting Chestnuts! However, I will do the best job I can; don't hesitate to email or call me if I can help.



### **Sandy Bole**

#### *Director*

Chestnuts became the answer after several years of planning for an interesting and challenging retirement project for our country land. They seemed to be a natural fit for Ben's background in farming and my interest in nutrition. In planting our orchard, we chose to grow our trees organically using sustainable methods.

We joined the small Western Chestnut Association shortly after our orchard began production. As growers and researchers around the country met, the CGA evolved. It has been extremely satisfying to watch this organization become a viable source of information for all aspects of the chestnut industry.



### **Tom Wahl**

#### *Director*

I was born and raised in Iowa and graduated from Iowa State University in 1984 with a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology. For the next 16 years I worked for various government agencies in wildlife research, wildlife management, forestry, and park management. My wife, Kathy Dice, and I bought a farm in Louisa County in 1986. I quit my day-job in January 2001 to work on the farm full time. We raise high value tree crops such as chestnuts, heartnuts, persimmons, and paw paws, and also operate a small tree nursery.

My interest in sustainable agriculture started with my work in natural resources. I recognized that conventional agricultural practices were destructive of wild plants, animals, and even the very resources upon which agriculture depends.

I began working to find a way to make agriculture work in harmony with natural systems. I joined Practical Farmers of Iowa in 1995 and in 1996 was awarded a SARE grant for my project Comprehensive Integrated Agroforestry. In 2015, we received the Sustainable Agriculture Achievement Award from Practical Farmers of Iowa.



### **Derek Waltchack**

#### *Director*

My full time job is running a commercial real estate firm, Shannon Waltchack, located in Birmingham, AL. But in 2013, I began developing Alabama's only commercial chestnut farm. Named after the nearby town, Alpine Farms has 900 chestnut trees with plans to have 2,000 trees in the ground by 2018. I chose to plant Dunstan, Qing, Gideon and Greg Miller's 'extra special' seedlings as he tries to determine the best cultivar for Alabama. In addition to chestnuts, Alpine Farms grows pumpkins and has 10 beehives.

I joined CGA in 2013 and I am particularly interested in encouraging other farmers to start growing Chestnut trees in the south. My wife, Rushton, and I have 5 children who range in age from 3 to 11 years old. You can follow me on Twitter at @dwaltchack.



### **Lee Williams**

#### *Director*

I started my five acres of trees from seed stock I gathered in Eastern Washington. That was in 1989, and I put my first trees from the seedling beds into the orchard in 1991. We are in the desert and have to irrigate weekly. We've had great years and bad years, usually due to high winds for crops. Currently we dry all our crops and sell processed products to the brewing and distilling industry.

I retired from an active veterinary profession in late 2005 after 42 years to begin Trails End Chestnuts. Now I tend chestnuts trees, process dried nuts and travel a couple times a year with my wife of 56 years, Lynda. I have some more years left to enjoy my venture with our orchard and the great people I have met in the industry.



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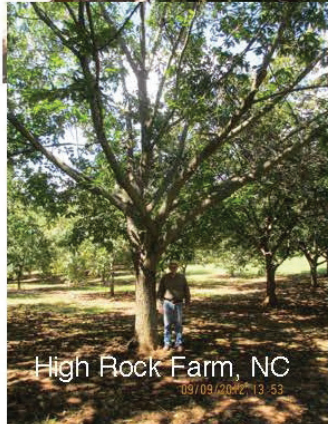
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Chestnut Ridge of Pike County, IL