



California's Sierra Oro Farm Trail Helped Put Chestnuts on the Map

By Jamie and Nicole Johansson, Lodestar Farms, Oroville, California

In This Issue

- 1 The Story of the Sierra Oro Farm Trail
by Jamie and Nicole Johansson
- 2 President's Message
Roger Blackwell
- 3 Starting an On-Farm Market
by Carl DeKleine
- 6 Selling at Local Farmers' Markets
by Rose Powell
- 8 U-pick Operations: A How-To
by Greg Dabel
- 10 Missouri Annual Chestnut Roast Festival
Mike Gold and Hannah Hemmelgarn

Photo above: Chestnuts for sale at Harrison's California Chestnuts during Passport Weekend on the Sierra Oro Farm Trail. Photo credit: Suzanne Alfaro.

As olive farmers in Oroville, California, we've had our fair share of marketing challenges. We started as behind-the-scenes farmers in 1993, providing olives or olive oil for other California olive oil companies from Santa Barbara to Mendocino. Our orchards were nearly 100 years old at the time. These growers we contracted with were planting their first trees, so it took about ten years to start producing olives. (As the joke here goes, you plant grape vines for your kids, and olive trees for your grandkids.)

Olives were a new thing in California at that time – initially there were only about ten growers. It was great that way, though, because none of us really knew what we were doing, and we could all easily share information and figure things out together. The industry started to grow, but sales were difficult to make. Although it's hard to believe now, the number one question we would get at farmers' markets back

then was, "What do you do with olive oil?" It wasn't until the early 2000s and the rise of TV channels like the Food Network and celebrity chefs like Rachael Ray that olive oil really started to take off. I would read in food and wine magazines about all the great award-winning olive oils coming out of Napa and Sonoma and everywhere else, but it would drive me crazy because it was my olives they were using, but they weren't saying so. So we tried telling those producers that they needed to be talking about where their olives come from... which resulted in a number of cease and desist letters from their lawyers – not exactly a good look.

The whole situation really got me thinking: who is going to tell the story of Oroville? Unless we started telling the story ourselves, no one was going to give Oroville any credit. We were too small at that point to operate on a large scale and reach the number of people we

Continued on page 4...

THE CHESTNUT GROWER

October 2018

About Chestnut Growers of America, Inc.

The purpose of Chestnut Growers of America 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.

CGA began as the Western Chestnut Growers in 1996 in Oregon where about 30 or so chestnut growers understood the need to join forces to promote chestnuts in the U.S. Eventually they realized that they needed to be a national organization and solicited memberships from every grower in the country, which took the membership to over 100. The name of the organization was changed to Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., and it was granted 501(c)(5) status. Annual meetings take place around the country in an effort to make it possible for a maximum number of people to attend. A newsletter, *The Chestnut Grower*, is published quarterly and distributed by mail and/or email. We maintain an extensive resource site available only to members containing information helpful in growing and marketing. Visit chestnutgrowers.org for more information.

Board of Directors

President	Roger Blackwell	(810) 923-2954 rblackwel@comcast.net
Vice President	Derek Waltchack	(205) 223-2607 dw@shanwalt.com
Secretary/Treasurer	Jack Kirk	(804) 357-1137 jackschestnuts@gmail.com
Director	Sandy Bole	
Director	Greg Miller	
Director	Tom Wahl	
Director	Luke Wilson	

Committees

Editor/Webmaster	Rita Belair	chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com
------------------	-------------	------------------------------------

Annual Membership Dues

Single membership, \$35; Household membership, \$45; Associate membership, \$50. Members receive *The Chestnut Grower* quarterly. Emailed newsletters are included. Mailed newsletters are an additional \$5 per year. A \$5 discount applies if payment is postmarked or submitted through the website by Feb. 15. Foreign mailings may include a surcharge to cover the cost of additional postage.

Advertising Rates

Full page, camera ready	\$20.00
Half page, camera ready	\$15.00
Quarter page	\$10.00
Business card (4 issues)	\$15.00
Classifieds	FREE

Email ads to chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com.

Send payment for ads to Jack Kirk, 2300 Bryan Park Av., Richmond, VA 23228. Make checks payable to Chestnut Growers of America, Inc. OR visit www.chestnutgrowers.org/paydues.html to submit payment online via PayPal.

Deadlines

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

Editorial Opinion

The views, articles and advertising appearing in *The Chestnut Grower* do not necessarily reflect the attitude nor policy of Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., its members, officers, Board of Directors, or Editor. Chestnut Growers of America, Inc., and this publication are not responsible for errors and/or misrepresentations in advertising. The Editor reserves the right to reject or edit all material submitted for publication.

© 2018. Original articles may be reprinted with written permission of the author and this publication.

Message from CGA President Roger Blackwell, *Chestnut Grower*



Here we go again! It is harvest time USA for chestnuts! When you receive this newsletter many of you will be very busy harvesting chestnuts and starting to sell chestnuts in the marketplace. We are teaching more Americans about chestnuts and their value as a food source. Many of you are

planting new chestnuts trees in orchard settings across the country. Your customers are looking for more locally grown quality chestnuts to buy. The customers are asking for your chestnuts over the imports from other countries first. We need to help each other in developing our chestnut orchards and selling quality fresh chestnuts to the market.

This issue of *The Chestnut Grower* is all about direct selling and marketing. First up is the story of the Sierra Oro Farm Trail by Jamie Johansson, who presented at the annual meeting. We also have articles with helpful tips on starting an on-farm market, selling at farmers' markets, and u-pick operations. We will have more articles on other marketing strategies in upcoming issues.

Remember that the second week of October every year is National Chestnut Week (October 7-13 this year). This week is the perfect time to host events at your farm to promote and celebrate chestnuts.

This year in Michigan, the chestnut crop is another record crop. Do we know where our customers are going to be when we have more and more chestnuts? Marketing good quality chestnuts will require working on positive reasons why customers will want chestnuts. Right now different ethnic groups know chestnuts from their homelands. Currently, Americans who have grown up here in the United States don't know enough about chestnuts to want to try them. Do you roast chestnuts at public events? Do you have local news groups interview you about chestnuts during the holiday season? Are you prepared to talk about chestnuts as a good food source? Can you tell the story about what is a horse chestnut (buckeye) versus an edible chestnut? Study our archives on our website member page; CGA has a lot of answers for your questions.

Remember the main purpose of CGA is to promote chestnuts. This includes disseminating information to growers of chestnuts, improving communications between growers within the industry, supporting research and breeding work, and generally furthering the interests and knowledge of Chestnut Growers. CGA advocates the delivery of only high quality chestnuts to the marketplace.

I hope you all have a plentiful harvest this year and a wonderful holiday season.

Roger P. Blackwell

How to Start, Promote, and Grow an On-Farm Market

By Carl DeKleine, DeKleine Orchards, Hudsonville, Michigan

My family has a small part-time farm where we grow sweet and tart cherries, located near Grand Rapids, Michigan. Additionally, we have established a commercial chestnut orchard. I would like to share the story of our operation, how we market our crops, and some insight into planning an on-farm market. The term “farm market” is often broadly defined to include locations where many independent farmers bring their crops for sale, specialty stores which sell fruits and vegetables, road-side stands that sell seasonal crops, and farm-raised crops sold on the farm where they were grown. The last of these definitions describes our operation.

Our Story

Our start began in the 1940s, when my grandfather and father, Herb DeKleine, planted 60 acres of peaches. With no prior experience in growing or marketing fruit, they did not understand the huge future production volume of those trees. Through years of trial and error, all the peaches were eventually sold from the yard behind the house. On many occasions, there were cars in line far down the road and hundreds of bushels waiting for sale. The peach venture ended in the 1960s. In 1981, my father, then at age 72, decided it was time to plant cherries. One of his primary goals was to provide a learning environment for the grandchildren. My brother, Art, and sister, Margaret, our families, and I all joined this part-time effort. We all had other occupations, but we all shared the work and management.

After cherries were decided upon, an informal marketing plan was created. By



At DeKleine Orchards, a popular small farm stand turned into multiple buildings, including a pole barn, which was eventually converted into an on-farm cherry market with additional products. Photo courtesy of Carl DeKleine.

informal, I mean we sat around a table and discussed future volume, sales ideas, and plans for getting started. It was decided to sell all the cherries through u-pick sales and also purchase a small commercial cherry pitter to promote sales of tart cherries. A small 8x10-foot building was built and set near the end of the driveway. The building housed the pitter, pails for customer use, and a scale to weigh the cherries.

During the first two years, a small sign was placed in the front yard, and harvest lasted about one week. If you visualize a child’s lemonade stand, you have about the right picture. Local people began to learn of our farm. As production increased, two 4x8-foot plywood signs were placed at the nearest crossroads. More people were becoming aware of the operation and the unique service of pitting tart cherries. Customers grew to more than 500 per

year, and a second shed was constructed. Cherry production continued to increase, and so did our advertising. We began to place daily ads in a few newspapers during the season. By the 10th year, the orchard was in full production, and a 20x30-foot pole barn was built exclusively for cherry sales. Customers totaled more than 1,500 during a three-week picking season. Most of the customers were return customers with a constant increase of new people. Our total offering was u-pick sweet and tart cherries with the option to have the tarts pitted. No other crops or products were sold.

After a few years, we again evaluated the business, based both on family objectives and growth potential of the operation. Chestnuts were added as a major long-term part of the plan with significant production some years into the future.

Continued on page 8...

Mark Your Calendars!

For the Chestnut Growers of America 2019 Annual Meeting in East Lansing, Michigan, hosted by Roger Blackwell and Bill Nash.

June 7 - 9, 2019

More information coming soon!

National Chestnut Week

National Chestnut Week is the second week of October every year. This year, that will be October 7-13. See the Fall 2016 edition of *The Chestnut Grower* for background and event ideas. Past newsletters issues are available on the member page at chestnutgrowers.org.

Continued from Page 1...

really wanted to. We were driving all over California shipping olive oil everywhere, which often meant just barely breaking even on gas and time. We knew we needed to rethink our strategy. We started to realize that if we focused more on direct sales, we could make up for what we would lose from all that driving and shipping. So we picked up more farmers' markets and started thinking about opening up a tasting room on the farm. Oroville is pretty remote, but we knew that somehow we needed to get people to come to our farm.



Olive orchards at Lodestar Farms in Oroville, California. Photo credit: Jamie Johansson.

About this same time, there were a few wineries opening in the area that were just getting started with tasting rooms. So we decided to give it a try. We opened one in 2005, and despite our best efforts, just didn't see a lot of traffic, even from locals. Oroville was just too isolated, too far out of the way. One thing many of the popular wineries in Sonoma and elsewhere had in common was that they were close to large population centers, and people looking for things to do would just naturally come out to visit. Everybody was talking about community-supported agriculture, but it seemed like the only way to be successful was to be located next to high-density urban areas.

Our neighboring farms were having the same struggles. Eventually we had to put our heads together to figure out what to do, dropping our egos at the door. One idea emerged: start a farm trail map. As the saying goes, we hoped a rising tide would lift all boats. Having been fairly active in local agricultural politics and community economic development, we'd seen a number of farm trails try to get off the ground over the years. Many of those projects had gone nowhere, and we tried to figure out why. Two big things came up: first, the maps were too big, and second, the farms on them weren't really invested.

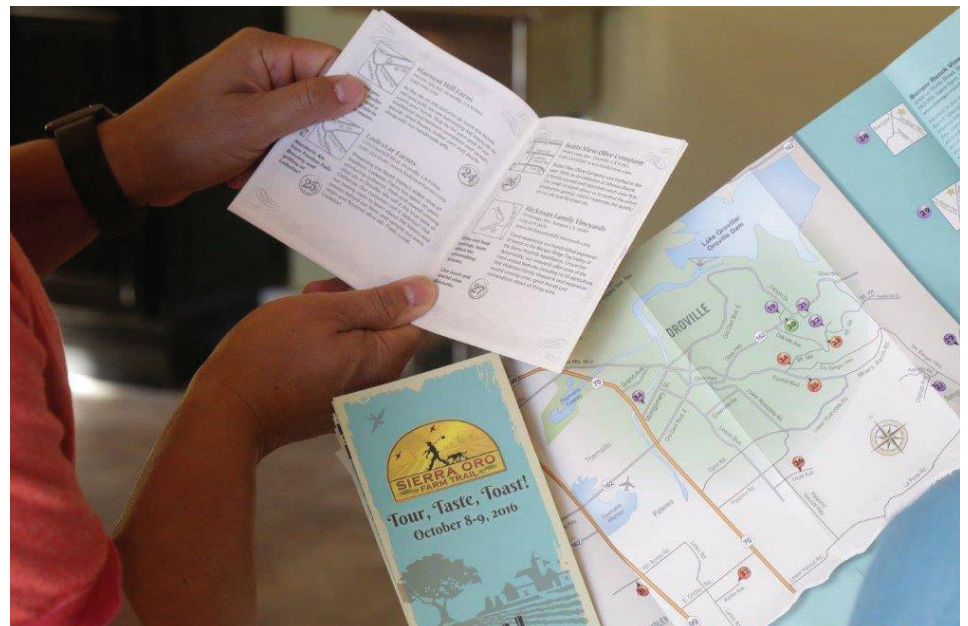
We knew if the map was too big, people would get confused. People will also get frustrated if they can't fit their trip into a nice day trip. The average day traveler is only going to go about an hour and half out of their way before they start thinking they need a hotel. So we decided to pretty much hold their hand at first – spell out where to go, where to stay, where to eat – and make it so that everything fit into convenient one or two-day trips from Sacramento, the major urban center we had to draw from. We didn't want to leave anything up to visitors because we didn't want any bad experiences.

The most important thing we realized was that for the map to succeed, farmers needed skin in the game – that is, they needed to be the ones funding it. Initially we tried going to the USDA for funding, but when that dried up, we learned you can't always rely on the government for money. Not only that, because none of the farmers were really invested, there was very little enthusiasm for the project. Once we had a map, who was going to distribute it? No one wanted to go out driving maps around without a good reason to do so. We tried to look for funding from the county also, but they didn't want to pitch in for a map that also represented other counties and might not benefit them directly. Even though the project was off the ground, no one was really pushing or promoting it.

After a few years of this, I finally got to talking with one of the wineries in the

area that was supposed to be on the map, and we decided to just take matters into our own hands. We thought we'd probably made enough connections and built up enough trust over the years serving on the Butte County Farm Bureau to just go to them and get this started on our own. We asked for \$2,000 to get started and promised we would be the ones to do everything. Fortunately, they agreed, with the only stipulation being that Farm Bureau members should be identified on the map – easy! We started off with seven farms and three wineries. We charged everyone \$400 and promised they'd make their money back, or we'd give them whatever they didn't make back. We decided to hold one annual event – a passport weekend, where people could buy passport tickets and have everything else free, including tastings, only spending on packaged products at each farm.

Our first year, we only printed about 600 passports and probably gave half of them away to the media or whoever else would take one, just to make sure we would have people showing up to buy stuff. No one really knew what was going to happen or what the turnout would be, but we gave it our best shot. Everyone had something fun going on – the wineries held tastings, some farms got live bands and went with more of a party theme, and one even brought in a mobile pizza oven and served pizza. We had a huge barbeque at our place, all the food featuring our olive oils.



The Sierra Oro Farm Trail Map has been a great success in growing the popularity of agritourism in Butte County, California and has become a significant source of income for participating farms. Photo credit: Mark Thau Photography.

The turnout was phenomenal. We counted 350 people at our farm, which was the most we had ever had come through. When it was all over on Sunday night, I went to visit the owner of one of the wineries on the map. The map had been a tough sell for him – as a savvy business person, he didn't want to throw money at just any hare-brained idea. When I arrived, he just looked at me and said, "What in the world was that?" That was the moment I knew we were on to something. He told me that weekend had been the busiest they'd ever seen. They had sold hundreds of cases of wine, so many that they were sold out. "What do I do now?" he said. I just replied, "Enjoy it - put 'sold out' on your gate, and charge five dollars more a bottle next year!" Everyone I talked to that day was over-the-top pleased with the results – everyone had had their biggest sale weekend ever.

Passport weekend has gotten better every year since. We have it every year on Columbus Day weekend, which is ideal because many federal and state employees get that day off. It's also easy to always know when it is – no shifting dates around every year. All you have to say when someone asks when it is is "Columbus Day weekend". It's also great timing as far as serving as a kickoff to the Christmas season, and we're able to plant the idea of Christmas gifts in visitors' heads, who often do return when gift-giving season kicks into high gear later in the year. Now we have to limit the number of passports we print – we limit it to 2,500 and sell out every year. We sell them online through the Farm Trail website, and some local businesses distribute them as well. The weekend has turned out to be a very significant portion of income for many of our farmers.

We've added more farms and wineries to the map every year as well and have had to lay down some ground rules. First, if you're on the map, you have to be open the week of passport weekend. We're pretty strict about this - if you're not open, you get a call saying 'Sorry, you won't be on the map next year.' You have to keep the gates open. We simply can't afford the angry letters and bad reviews we'll get from all the visitors who make the trip out to your farm and end up disappointed. Being on the map has to be a commitment you're invested in. Secondly, we want our participating farms to think beyond

“Having a chestnut farm on the map has been huge in terms of expanding awareness about chestnuts. Now every visitor that comes through the Farm Trail gets to sample them, learn a little about how to cook them, and spread the word to their family and friends.”



Jamie and Nicole Johansson welcoming visitors to the tasting room at Lodestar Farms during Passport Weekend. Photo credit: Mark Thau Photography

passport weekend and see the Farm Trail as a more year-round event. We have a lot of farms who want to join but only want to open up for passport weekend. We simply don't allow that because it goes against the basic principle that has worked so well for us – farmers need to have skin in the game. If you're a seasonal farm, that's fine – some farms can only be open for a month because they sell out quickly. But generally, you can't just get on the map to reap all the benefits of a one-day event and close yourself off otherwise. Thirdly, we ask that the farms on the map actually have a legitimate location for people to visit – they need to be formally recognized by Butte County and not just someone who puts up a popup tent to sell whatever's coming out of their garden.

A few years ago, we added Harrison's California Chestnuts to the map, owned by Sandy Harrison and managed by Flavio Alfaro. Having a chestnut farm on the map has been huge in terms of expanding awareness about chestnuts. It's certainly been educational for us, since we

previously had no idea where chestnuts grew or what you could do with them. Now every visitor that comes through the Farm Trail gets to sample them, learn a little about how to cook them, and spread the word about them to their family and friends.

This year we have 34 farms and wineries on the map, now known as the Sierra Oro Farm Trail. Many of those have been with us since the map was created, and they were motivated to join because they knew we had a great event they could participate in. We've now partnered with Explore Butte County to add a tourism angle to the map. They are able to direct people year-round to hotel booking and suggested restaurants to check out – we're fortunate to have a number of great farm-to-fork restaurants in the area. It's a perfect weekend trip for visitors from Sacramento – they can show up Friday night, stay in a local hotel or bed-and-breakfast, do half the Farm Trail on Saturday, enjoy a delicious meal that night, do the other half of the trail Sunday, then head back.

The next step of course is getting this message out further – beyond Sacramento. How do we tell the story of Oroville and Butte County to the wider public? One answer we've come up with in the past couple years has been to invest in making a series of videos that showcase individual farms (and one overall Farm Trail video using clips from the individual videos), funded solely by Farm Trail dues and passport sales. A lot of people didn't want to do them – the expense was considerable, but now that they have them and can use them for their own marketing purposes, they're starting to see returns on it. The videos are professionally done, using rich imagery and language that really connects with potential visitors. Explore Butte County as our partner is also sharing the videos as part of their agritourism advertising campaign. You can watch the video for Harrison's California Chestnuts at https://youtu.be/ryruVQO_q58.

Continued on next page...

Selling at Local Farmers' Markets: The Ups and Downs

By Rose Powell, Palmyra, Michigan

For the beginning grower, the day is filled with much excitement when the first nut is produced from those trees planted five or more years previously. However, as the years pass, and family and friends do not want more nuts, the joy of the nut production turns to thoughts of how to get rid of the nuts. The local farmers' market may provide an answer for the small grower.

How Farmers' Markets Work

Farmers' markets usually have a connection, be it supervision, regulation, or property location with the local unit of government. Our local market in Adrian, Michigan is held Wednesday and Saturday in a city-owned public parking lot. The parking lot is shared by public parking on Wednesday and with the Environmental Recycling Center on Saturday.

Each farmers' market is organized with bylaws which are set up by the vendors and either an elected or appointed market

master. The market master is responsible for having a well-run sale. Stall fees are collected by the season or by the week. Vendor space is assigned with the vendors who sell all season maintaining the same stall space. The market master is responsible for the advertisement and providing general information on the farmers' market. The market master receives the complaints and enforces the rules of the market.

Each vendor is responsible for setting up the equipment needed to operate their stall. This may include tables, artificial shade, baskets, bags, etc. The vendor has the responsibility to be set up on time and to sell items in accordance with the bylaws. Larger farmers' markets have a building or shelter and are open each day for twelve months.

Some farmers' markets in the area permit only home-grown produce, while our market permits out-of-state produce to be sold until home-grown in-state produce is ready for harvest.

Inspections by the Health Department and Department of Agriculture are made in accordance with the State and Federal regulations. Inspections may be made by the market master of the vendor's farm to check the growing conditions should questions arise about the items being sold.

Getting Started

Before participating in a farmers' market, you should establish some goals as to why you want to participate. Ideas to consider include supplemental income, as an advertisement for your home produce stand, as an outlet to sell excess products, or to enjoy the contact with the public.

Not all vendors are successful. One must have a personality suited for talking with potential customers. Also, it is important to be consistent with regular attendance, have the same stall setup appearance and be in the same location each week.

Nuts are a fall crop, as are pumpkins, gourds, and squash, which we had

Continued from previous page...

We hope that our story might inspire you to think about what you can do in your area to market your crop. We're definitely fortunate in Butte County to have the diversity of types of farms that we do, which is part of what has made the Farm Trail so successful. Many of our farms are small, which has proven that size doesn't matter – what matters is that you do it right.

Tips for Chestnut Growers

1. Think about how you fit in to existing agritourism.

Thinking about starting a farm trail or something like it can be overwhelming. Don't be afraid to try, but if it's too much, think about how you can get involved in whatever agritourism opportunities already exist in your area. Agritourism is becoming very popular in every area of the country – people want to see where their food comes from, and they want to visit farms. It doesn't take that many farms to put together an event that can bring people out for one day or one weekend. What works for your area may not be a farm trail

or a passport weekend – it may look like something completely different. That's OK – you'll be impressed by what people want if you give it a shot.

2. Look for funding for agritourism.

We've been fortunate with the Sierra Oro Farm Trail to be completely self-funded, and all payments from farms are spent directly to cover costs of production and marketing of the Farm Trail map. We only had to use county funds once. If you're looking for funding in your area, see what tourism taxes your city or your county collects and then apply to get a share of those. Government funds can be a really useful source, and if you can get something out of them, great, but you may find that your project will do better if it's self-funded.

3. Step up your website game.

One of the best things we've done for our business was improving our website, both for our farm and for the Farm Trail. It's really important how much you invest in your online presence – at minimum you should have a basic website and a PayPal account or something people can use to

buy online. I do think that people who come to our farm should be rewarded, so our products are more expensive online than if people buy them directly. Investing in online sales and therefore having year-round customers has made a major difference for us.



Sandy Harrison of Harrison's California Chestnuts offering chestnut samples to Farm Trail visitors. Photo credit: Suzanne Alfaro.

previously sold from home. To become a familiar vendor to the customers, plan for spring and summer products to sell until the fall crops mature. Thinking about this led me to provide greater care for growing my flower and vegetable gardens.

The vendor must know about the products being sold. When the environment is right, customers ask many questions, as they often lack knowledge about minor vegetables, how the product grows, and how to cook the produce. Everyone loves to receive free recipes. Know when to be charitable and give away a fruit, nut, or vegetable to gain a customer.

My husband, Mike, helped with roasting the chestnuts to give away as samples at the market. We took our generator and electric fry pan. While Mike scored the nuts (cutting the nut's shell to allow steam to escape) and put them in the pan to demonstrate for the customers, I talked about growing chestnuts and how to cook with them at home. We displayed posters showing the difference between water chestnuts, buckeyes, and the sweet edible chestnuts we were selling. Being asked to give a similar demonstration on nuts at a

4. Consider investing in promotional videos.

Videos have become one of our most effective marketing tools in the past few years. You can post them on your website, on social media, or send people the link when they have questions. For example, the video we had made for Harrison's California Chestnuts features an interview with Sandy Harrison and Flavio Alfaro talking about what growing chestnuts has meant to them, footage of harvesting and processing, and an invitation to visitors to share the farm experience with their family. 🍂

You can learn more about the Sierra Oro Farm Trail at www.sierraoro.org or about Lodestar Farms at www.lodestarfarms.com.



local elementary school was also helpful in educating people about chestnuts. An education program on paw paws and free samples of paw paws were also given to potential customers. Education of the public is a big key in being a busy vendor.

Pros and Cons

Like any business, the farmers' market has negative aspects with which you must contend. The weather is a major factor. Rain, wind, and hot sun shining on the produce are major problems which must be addressed. Finding suitable equipment with quick and easy set-up and take-down to deal with the elements in a temporary location is an on-going challenge. One must love to get up early, as it is important to be set up prior to the time sales begin. A portion of each weekend is spent at the farmer's market for six months of the year, which limits personal activities on weekends.

With each vendor in competition selling similar produce to the same customers, potential petty arguments can develop between vendors. The pricing of items is set by each vendor, and woe be the vendor who undercuts another vendor. Likewise with the vendor who leaves the immediate area of their assigned space to gain the attention of the customer.

The market master writes the public advertisements for the entire farmers' market. No one seems to be pleased with the vendor-buyer ratio. Some vendors say to advertise to get more customers, while others say more regular vendors are needed before more customers will come to the market.

Being located at the recycling collection point supplies the Adrian market with a steady flow of people. Farmers' markets in some areas provide heritage craft/skill demonstrations to attract people to the market. Each week a different craftsperson is involved in such activities as weaving, candle-making, blacksmithing, or garden planting. The demonstrations are free and entertaining for the public, and the products made are sold on location. Organizing co-op crop plots is another

◀ A promotional video for Harrison's California chestnuts uses striking imagery to entice visitors out to the farm to find out what chestnuts are and give them a try. You can view the video at https://youtu.be/r9ruVQO_q58.

method of getting people to attend the farm market.

The vendor-buyer ratio becomes a bigger issue as the crops mature and more produce is available to sell. When produce is left over, each vendor must have a plan to dispose of the excess. Pressure of needing to sell or dispose of all the products may create stress for the vendor. Avenues available to each vendor include food banks, nursing homes, food co-ops, and feeding to farm animals. I wrestled with the concept of selling good chestnuts as "critter food" which sold far better than chestnuts as "human food".

Participation at farmers' markets has many positive aspects. Most all people love to set one's own hours of work in preparation for sale days. One is working outdoors with products one enjoys. Satisfaction is experienced in making money and meeting people. One sees positive rewards for the return of hard work beyond the beauty of an orchard or garden. Over time, as the nut crop increases in size, multiple outlets for selling the nuts must be utilized, but farmers' markets remain a valuable outlet for small growers. 🍂

A version of this article originally appeared in the 94th annual report of the Northern Nut Growers Association in 2003. For more information on NNGA, visit nutgrowing.org.

An update from Rose Powell:

I am still selling at a farmers' market but have moved to the Madison Market, which is located in a shopping mall with 45-50 vendors setting up each Saturday. The Madison Market has the advantage of being along a major highway between Toledo, Ohio and the Michigan lakes summer resort areas. Instead of vendors fussing among themselves as in the early years, the mall store owners felt threatened by the market over losing parking space and customers. Now, the store owners have come to appreciate the farmers' market as an asset to share an increased customer base each Saturday morning.

The growth in the number of farmers' markets as acceptable places to purchase fresh produce over the past 15 years is remarkable. In our area, produce is even being peddled by licensed vendors in refrigerated vans on a regular route to housing units and locations where people congregate for social assistance. This is a new twist on the Old Country Peddler's horse-drawn wagon!

Continued from Page 3...

Evaluating the sales situation, we had more customers than cherries. Promotion consisted of the original street signs, ads in five newspapers, advertising handouts, a radio spot, and a listing in a Michigan u-pick directory. The core customer base was still loyal return customers.

Our new plans included increasing cherry production on the same 10 acres through improved farming practices and, at the suggestion of customers, converting the cherry barn into an on-farm cherry market with additional products. After implementation, the response was greater than expected. All our farm-grown cherries were still harvested by u-pick, but items sold in the store now included picked sweet cherries, frozen tart cherries in 4-cup bags, cherry pies, jams, jellies, cherry juice, dried cherries, cookbooks, literature, and many more products. Everything sold was related to cherries or produced on our farm, such as maple syrup from our maple trees.



Inside the cherry barn. Photo courtesy of Carl DeKleine.

We then decided to plant 10 acres of chestnuts. As they came into production, chestnuts became another focus of our operation, and we expanded our chestnut orchard over time as well. We now have 10 acres of cherries and 17 acres of chestnuts. Our marketing plan for chestnuts was to utilize the Chestnut Growers Inc. cooperative for the majority of sales, with small-grade nuts sold at our farm market. Late unharvested nuts would be sold through u-pick. An old wood-burning kitchen stove was installed in the barn to roast chestnuts for customer samples. For two years, all July cherry customers were given a brochure explaining chestnuts and announcing a future source of purchase.

Pros and Cons

Before choosing a marketing method, you should evaluate your situation and explore

the many different choices. If you are considering an on-farm market, there are many pros and cons to think about.

There are many advantages to starting an on-farm market. It is easy to start - you just do it (see suggestions below). The size of the operation will not be important until the local market is saturated. You can start small and stay small or grow larger. Little or no initial investment is necessary to start. Your market can be utilized to sell 10 pounds or 10,000 pounds, and this can be done with family involvement. Our family and many close friends arrive about the first day of July to help with the work. On-farm markets can be sized to your needs and combined with other marketing strategies. Since you are making the rules, plans and directions can be changed at any time.

Profit margins will be the highest if you retail your own crop. In this way, the distribution network is eliminated, and customers will pay competitive prices or even more. Another reason to retail your own crop is that customers love high-quality, fresh, locally-grown farm products. They really are the best, and of course, you are absolutely the best salesperson for your own crop. No one knows it better or is more involved, and in this way, quality can be controlled and guaranteed. Customers, if treated correctly, remain loyal.

As in any endeavor, there are disadvantages too. An on-farm market takes time (years) to develop and time (hours) to operate. This often entails the personal time required for retail and the timing of the harvest season, which may not coincide with your other interests or obligations.

You can't move your farm, and your farm location may limit your success. If you are located far from a populated area, the task becomes more difficult. However, people will drive long distances for a meaningful experience. If your production becomes very large, other marketing methods may become necessary. You may have to remodel or add on to your facilities to have efficient retail facilities and to hold the proper equipment necessary for a successful operation, but you can scale this to the size of your sales. Sales must stay ahead of production. Finally, sales saturation is always a possibility, particularly if you are thoroughly promoting your crop to all in the local



Art DeKleine with chestnuts road sign. Photo courtesy of Carl DeKleine.

area. If there are already numerous on-farm markets selling your type of nuts, a unique approach may be required.

Ten Suggestions

Growing nuts and selling them personally has provided some very meaningful educational opportunities for both our customers and us. So, how does one get started? Based on my experience, I've created a ten-point guide. Underlining all the steps are two fundamental and necessary techniques: the creation of plans, informal or written, and the use of outside advice. If you've decided to plant two nut trees and sell 10 pounds on a single day, great. If you've decided to plant 80 acres and sell thousands of pounds, wonderful. These ten suggestions apply to starting an on-farm market for both situations.

1. Estimate the volume of your crop over the period of time to full production and beyond. If a large venture is planned, this estimate should be incorporated into a cash flow chart and business plan.
2. Try to plan an alternative marketing channel in case production volume is greater than expected.
3. Read as much as possible about farm markets. Fruit and vegetable magazines, USDA publications, and university extension materials are good sources.
4. Set a price equal or higher than local retail store prices. You are providing personal sales, a quality food, education, known origin, and a unique experience. Your prices should reflect that.
5. Start small. Use existing facilities and supplies. The garage may be just fine. Avoid becoming too formal.
6. Plan and begin production based

A U-Pick How-To: Green Valley Chestnut Ranch

By Greg Dabel, Green Valley Chestnut Ranch, Sebastopol, California

“There is no local market for chestnuts.”

That was my answer when my son suggested joining the local farm trails and listing our chestnut ranch as a u-pick farm. The farm trails local guide booklet lists dozens of local farms providing u-pick and fresh products including blueberries, apples, flowers, Christmas trees, pumpkins, and more.

“I can’t imagine enough interest in chestnuts,” I repeated to my son, who persisted with the u-pick farm trails suggestion.

Our Green Valley Chestnut Ranch began as an experiment in 1983. The property had been a commercial apple ranch since 1854. Some of our trees are over 100 years old – and still producing delicious fruit. Unfortunately, the price of apples had declined significantly, and local apple processing plants had closed. What do you do with 30 acres of apples?

The Farm Advisor suggested several options: wine grapes, Christmas trees, vegetables, and...chestnuts. We removed 3 acres of the ancient Gravenstein apple trees and planted Colossal variety chestnuts. A year later we had enough chestnuts to flavor our Thanksgiving turkey stuffing.

The following year we put a classified advertisement in *Sunset Magazine* and sold 200 pounds by direct mail. In the third year we began using a brand-new media called ‘the Internet.’ Sales were good. At the time, there were no other sites offering fresh chestnuts grown in the USA. Always looking for new markets and marketing techniques, I begrudgingly agreed to try farm trails and u-pick.

“We will try u-pick, but we will only be open two weekends in October.” I was emphatic and an unbeliever. “And we will

be open only from 1-4 p.m.” We chose the two weekends on either end of National Chestnut Week. I was still not convinced this was a worthy effort.

At 10 a.m. on the first opening day, my son urgently called me on the two-way radio. “Dad, you gotta get down here to the barn. There are already eight carloads of people waiting for the ranch to open.” I ran out of the house. Folks were milling around and wondering why we were not yet open.

Ever since, Green Valley Chestnut Ranch has been open for u-pick on two weekends in October. Business is brisk. Most years over 50 percent of our sales are u-pick. We offer already-picked chestnuts for sale at the barn, but most people want to pick themselves. We provide leather gloves and plastic 5-gallon buckets. Families will wander through the 3 acres picking



Visitors prepare for a u-pick adventure in the chestnut orchard by selecting leather gloves and buckets. Photo courtesy of Greg Dabel.



Visitors gather around for samples of fresh-roasted chestnuts. Photo courtesy of Greg Dabel.

chestnuts. When they return we weigh their bucket and charge by the pound.

During the 2007 harvest we counted nearly 300 visitors. They came to pick chestnuts, sample our chestnut puree and chestnut honey. We offered a table of samples, crackers, chestnut muffins, etc. We sold dozens of chestnut splitters (designed and produced on our ranch), chestnut cookbooks, chestnut honey, hot cider, and...2,000 pounds of chestnuts.

They came from miles around. We had busloads of people from around the San Francisco Bay Area. Some folks came 100+ miles just to pick chestnuts. And a lot of the same people have come back every year.

One year we set up a picnic area next to the barn and a self-guided tour of the orchard. Signs were posted throughout the chestnut orchard giving visitors the history of chestnuts, cooking ideas, harvesting information and storage tips.

By the end of our two u-pick weekends we are exhausted – and out of chestnuts. 🍂

A version of this article originally appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of *The Chestnut Grower*. Learn more about Green Valley Chestnut Ranch by visiting chestnutranch.com.

on your production volume. After a few years, you will know exactly how much promotion is necessary.

7. Plan a traffic/sales flow now and into the future. Provide plenty of parking space.
8. Listen to customers. Your very first customer, as well as your 10,000th,

will tell you exactly what they like and want.

9. Get creative (or copy). Look for sales ideas and improvements such as u-pick, rent-a-tree, free samples, farm tours, prepared foods, or different displays.
10. Get started and have fun! Walk out

and hammer a sign into your front yard announcing nuts for sale. It’s easier than you think. 🍂

A version of this article originally appeared in the 94th annual report of the Northern Nut Growers Association in 2003. For more information on NNGA, visit nutgrowing.org. Learn more about DeKleine Orchards at dekleineorchards.com.

Chestnut Snickerdoodles

Thanks to Sandy Harrison of Harrison's California Chestnuts for providing this recipe and the delicious Chestnut Snickerdoodles that were enjoyed at the 2018 annual meeting!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup butter
- 1¼ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1¼ cup flour
- 1¼ cup chestnut flour
- 2 tsp cream of tarter
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt

For topping:

- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Combine sugar and cinnamon in a cereal-sized bowl and set aside.

Cream together the butter, sugar, and eggs. Sift the dry ingredients together and add in ½-cup portions to the creamed butter mixture, stirring well before adding another portion. Mix well, to a consistency that allows you to form balls with the dough. Form 1" balls of dough and then roll in the cinnamon-sugar topping.

Place the balls on an ungreased cooking sheet. Bake 15-20 minutes. The cookies should be a light golden color when done. Initially they will be soft, so take care when removing them from the cookie sheet to cool. Cookies will become crispy as they cool.

Chestnut Roast Festival to Celebrate University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry's 20th Year

Dr. Michael Gold, Interim Director and Hannah Hemmelgarn, Education Program Coordinator, University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry

Each fall, the University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry brings together local specialty crop producers, researchers, educators, crafts people, and conservationists to celebrate the chestnut harvest with roasted chestnuts, music, farm tours, educational speakers, and product booths at the Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center farm in New Franklin, MO. This year, UMCA will also be celebrating its 20th year as an established "big C" Center at the University of Missouri.

If you are in the area, you are invited to join us in our celebration of 20 years of sustained effort advancing agroforestry at this year's Chestnut Roast Festival, Saturday, October 6th from 10am to 4pm. Included in this year's Chestnut Roast Festival program are Research Center farm tours, tree crop cooking demonstrations, native tree and plant sales, soil erosion rain simulations from NRCS, a corn maze and pumpkin picking patch for kids, historic Hickman House tours, and so much more! For more information, visit the event page "Chestnut Roast Festival 2018" on Facebook or view the event flyer at CenterForAgroforestry.org.

For Sale / Seeking

SEEKING: Scion wood of Bergantz chestnut. Exchange possible. Contact: Davor Juretic, juretic.davor@gmail.com.

FOR SALE: Comm Chestnut Orchard + Home. N. Calif. Klamath River frontage. Appx. 800 Trees Colossal/Nevada. Trees are 20+ years old. Modern home 3+2; appx 2000 Sq. Ft. Off Grid - Solar Power; 55 Acres Total. Viewable on Google Earth. Website: rockybarchestnuts.com. Link to Flickr for additional photos. Seller carry; \$595,000. Email: Dhenn@dantel.com; Tel: (352) 633-6185.

YOUR AD HERE

CGA members can post equipment or other items they want to buy or have for sale, free. Send your submissions to chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com.

FOR SALE: Facma trailed harvester in great shape. Extra hoses for one or two-person setup. Contact Devon Milligan at (706) 681-1542.



2018 Member Directory

An updated 2018 Member Directory was sent to all CGA members via email. Please check your listing for accuracy. Send any corrections to Jack Kirk, Secretary/Treasurer, at jackschestnuts@gmail.com. If you would like to receive a printed version of the directory, please send a request to Rita Belair at chestnutgrowersofamerica@gmail.com

Washington Chestnut Company

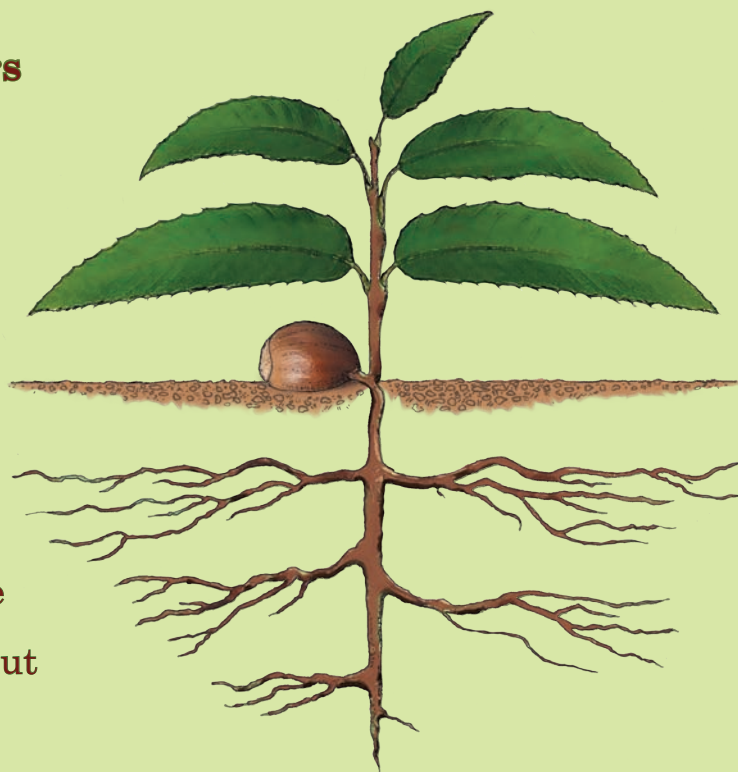


Quality Chestnut Trees from a Reliable Source!

Washington Chestnut Company has become an industry leader in the propagation of chestnut trees. The chestnut trees we offer are grown in the Pacific Northwest, free of exposure to chestnut blight and gall wasps.

Available Cultivars

Colossal
Bouche de Betizac
Prococe Migoule
Maraval
Marsol
Marigoule
Marrisard
Bisalta #2
Bisalta #3
Belle Epine
Gillet
Szego
Regis Montis
Regina Montis
Marrone di Comballe
Marrone di Marradi
Pure American Chestnut
Bergantz
...and more!



Our web site has full descriptions of each cultivar and lots of help with growing chestnut trees.

www.WashingtonChestnut.com

Washington Chestnut Company

6160 Everson Goshen Rd., Everson, WA 98247

Phone (360) 966-7158



Chestnut Growers of America
16 Pond Road
Deering, NH 03244

THE CHESTNUT GROWER

October 2018



Our Nuts are Bigger!



DUNSTAN CHESTNUTS™

- Proven growth and production throughout the U.S. for decades
- Completely blight resistant
- Large, sweet, easy to peel nuts, better tasting than European hybrids

www.chestnuthilltreefarm.com

1-800-669-2067

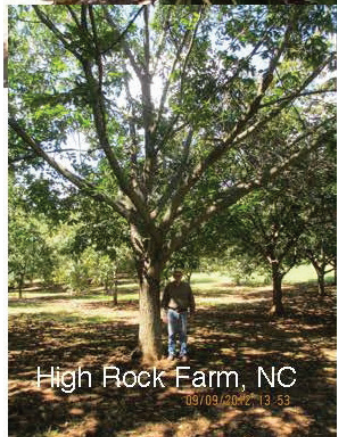
email: chestnuthilltreefarm@gmail.com



Wilson Orchards, VA



Delmarvelous Orchards, DE



High Rock Farm, NC

09/09/2017 13:53



Chestnut Ridge of Pike County, IL