

# Roadside Fruit Stand Becomes Thriving Family Farm Business

BY JOYCE BUPP

York County Correspondent

LOGANVILLE — Brown's Orchard retail market has come a long way.

What began as a tiny stand offering fresh fruit by the roadside has grown to a thriving family farm business, and a new, greatly-expanded market. In the rustic atmosphere of wood tones and fruit bins, customers browse through mouth-watering selections, from a bag of crisp spinach to home-baked apple dumplings to fresh fruit packages.

Final touches are going on the new market just in time for strawberry season, the first major fruit crop that heralds the beginning of the fresh produce harvest. Brown's first strawberry plantings went in the ground 25 years ago. But, the berry plantings, popular as a U-pick crop with local strawberry lovers, are just a small part of this market-oriented family business.

Since 1948, four generations of the Earl Brown family have called this beautiful, rolling, orchard land along the Old Susquehanna Trail home. That year, Brown, his wife, Margaret, and their three sons moved here from their former home in York city. A foreman for the York Safe and Lock Company, Brown purchased the 38-acre orchard from relatives after the company closed its doors.

At their York home on Pine Street, the Browns had already established a reputation for the chickens and turkeys they raised

and retailed. For several years, poultry continued as a major sales item for the small retail stand.

Even before the family had relocated to their Loganville farm, eldest son Stanley, began working in the orchard over that summer.

"I guess that's somewhat why he's always felt such a part of the fruit-growing business," reflects Stan's wife, Nona.

Original orchard acreage has expanded twice over the years, first in 1959, when Stan returned to the business after service in the armed forces. The purchase of a second farm in 1972 nearly doubled the acres under cultivation, now totaling 180 acres of tree fruits, berries, and truck crops.

Strawberries headline the home-grown seasonal array of fresh fruits and vegetables, usually beginning — weather permitting — this last week of May. Customers may either purchase these ready-picked at the retailing stand, or travel the short distance to the extremely clean and carefully-mulched plantings.

Often, the rows ring with children's laughter and neighborhood news, as families make an outing of the berry harvest. Old friends become reacquainted as they fill their boxes and buckets. Berries are sold U-pick by the pound, and thousands of pounds annually leave the Brown's contoured plantings to become shortcake, jams and pies.

Fortunately for customers, no one counts how many are eaten on the spot.

Cherries — tart and sweet — are beginning to ripen as the strawberries fade. Recent plantings of blueberry bushes add another new choice for customers.

Peaches come into their golden glory in early July, with some 25 varieties stretching the season through September. Nectarines, plums and pears, along with sweet corn, squash, tomatoes and cantaloupes all add to the Brown's cornucopia of home-grown items. Pumpkins, curly-necked and round "face" types, fill the market area with the feeling and colors of fall and draw youngsters eager to select the perfect jack-o-lantern material.

But it is the apple crop — at least 15 varieties — that provides the mainstay of the Brown's retail business. The first summer varieties come off the trees in July, and picking continues as varieties ripen on into October. With the technology of carefully controlled cold storage, fresh apples are available through late spring, making them virtually a year-round sales item.

That favorite apple by-product, cider, pressed from a selected blend of their own home-grown varieties, is also a leading item for the Browns.

Because of the scarcity of fresh items through the winter and late spring to hold customer interest, Stan and Nona over the years have incorporated a number of innovative marketing touches. The success of their merchandising, plus the need for increased display and parking areas, and more efficient storage, handling and packaging facilities, have come together in the new retail facility.

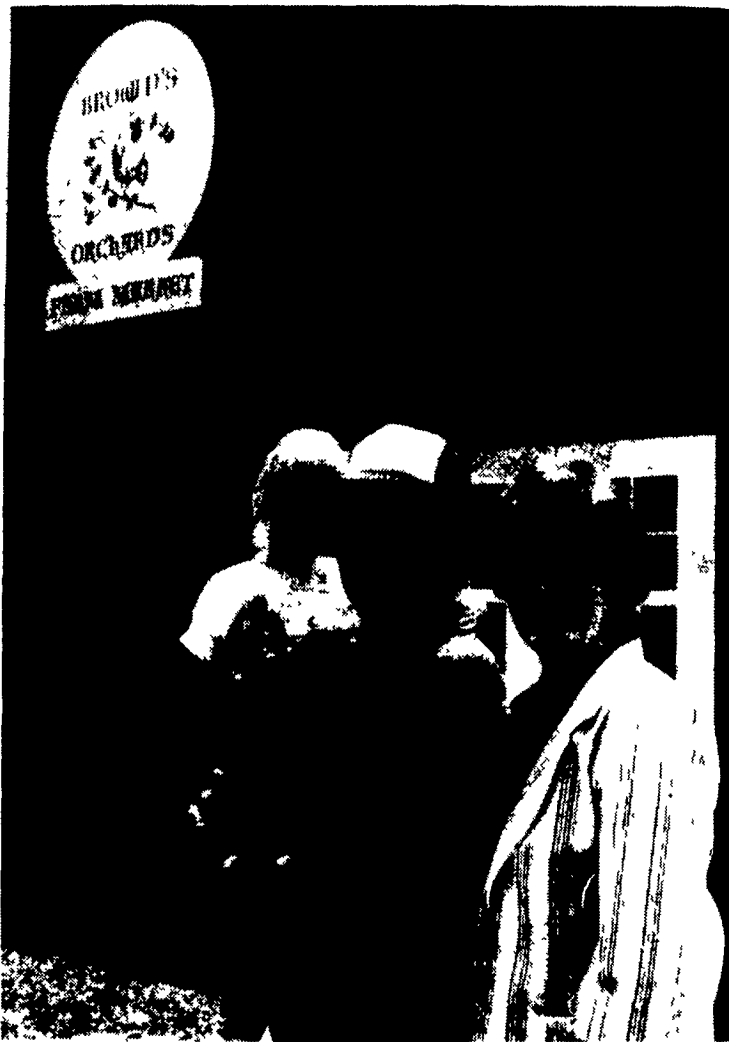
Eight years ago, aiming to move more fresh fruit during the winter holidays, the Browns began offering customers a selection of fresh fruit baskets.

"We started with just a small number," remembers Nona. "And each year it's grown; this year we had fruit basket items spread all over the partly-finished interior of the new market."

An entire corner of the new retailing area is devoted to the fruit basket line. Selections range from a classic dinner-roll basket filled with choice fruits to ideas as creative as a giant toy truck with a load of apples, citrus, jellies, cheeses or wine.

Fruit boxes — primarily apples — are also available, and many are shipped each year to lucky Florida recipients. Occasionally a box of hand-picked, shiny apples is even packed off to some distant corner of the world.

Another fast-growing Brown retailing angle has developed into the "Orchard Bake Shop."



Stan and Nona Brown, with granddaughter Amanda, are gearing up for the grand opening of their new Brown's Orchard and Farm Market.



Strawberries open the fresh fruit season at the Brown's retail market. Four-year-old Amanda, the fourth generation of Browns on the Loganville farm, prepares to sample a fat, juicy berry.

## Homestead Notes

This fruit-based baking business had its roots in a fund-raising venture started by the Brown's daughter, Linda. While in high school, Linda earned extra cash during the summers by baking items related to the retail produce, such as shortcakes and zucchini bread. Enthusiastic customer response told the Browns that this was a market waiting to be served.

So when plans for the new retailing facility began to take form, Nona Brown's kitchen took on a bakery look as employees began daily turning out such goodies as apple dumplings.

Customers arriving at the Brown's market are now greeted with the heavenly aromas of fresh-baked apple dumplings, breads and cookies, with plans for a doughnut corner to open at a later date. And the Brown's kitchen is quiet once again, with the baking team moved into a commercial

bakery area just off the retail sales room.

Green plants are another line added in recent years, to round out gaps created by scarce spring fresh produce items. Blooming potted plants, market packs, and hanging baskets all add customer interest, variety and color to the market. In still another section of the market, an array of jams, jellies, preserves and relishes forms a mouth-watering display.

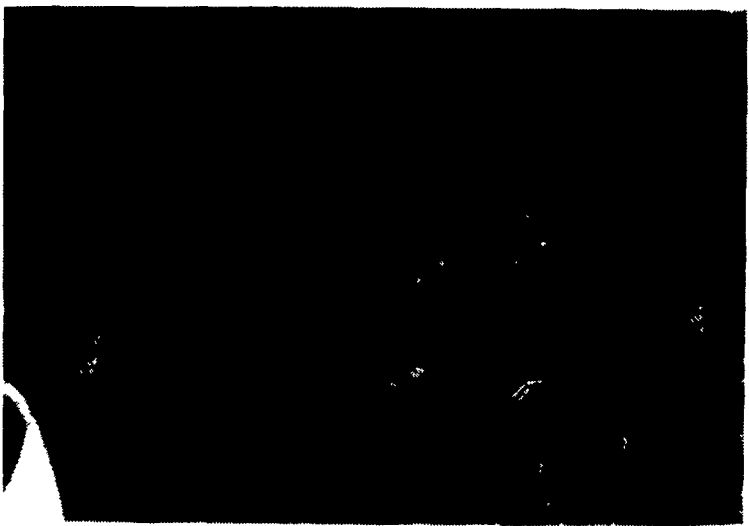
Focal point of the jellies display is an heirloom Hoosier cabinet that once belonged to Stan's grandmother. It was rescued from nuts and bolts storage use in the family garage, refinished, and given a place of honor in the new market.

Use of the heirloom cabinet typifies the homey theme of the brown — no pun intended — interior and exterior of the retail building. Hanging banners of a

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Nona Brown has tastefully arranged the market's jelly display around a family-heirloom Hoosier cabinet.



Designing fruit baskets is just one of Bill Ream's responsibilities as general market assistant.