

Frecon Orchard

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advantage is that we seldom need to take frost-control measures," Henry said. Good air movement pervades the hilly areas while frost settles in the low areas.

A housing development at the foothills was at one time orchards. When he reached retirement, the elder Frecon laid out a residential development. That created an increased customer base, but Torrie said, "You only keep them if you please them."

Pleasing "them" applies not only to the produce sold but to neighboring relationships. Neighbors are allowed to stroll through the orchards and walk their dogs.

Sometimes fellow orchard growers fail to recognize the philosophy of establishing good neighbors when it conflicts with the bottom line. The Frecons overheard an orchard grower touring the orchard, criticizing the Frecons for not utilizing a large area of frontage surrounding the property.

"We left open land to be a good neighbor," Torrie said. "We don't want to spray chemicals that drift onto the neighbors' (land)."

"It costs us to respect our neighbors, but it pays to keep good neighbors," Torrie said.

"People often assume that orchardists have nothing to do during the winter, but that's when we prune every tree by hand," Torrie said.

Grafting is done in March until bloom.

At this time of the year, the orchards are a spectacular sight with acres of blooming trees. Barbara Gilbert, a 30-year employee of Frecon Orchards, enjoys late-season pruning. As she pruned Saturn peach trees, Henry talked

about the many varieties that the orchard grows.

"People want a large red freestone peach, so we keep trying new varieties," Henry said.

One of the most successful ventures has been planting the Saturn peach about six years ago. The freestone, white-flesh peach is shaped like a saucer with a small seed that pops out when broken apart. The peaches are sold in half-pint, pint, and quart containers instead of the usual peck and half-bushel baskets. The small, sweet peach is an excellent peach to offer samples to customers because it has no mess and the flavor is fantastic.

But the novelty peaches have a downside. The fruit is difficult and time consuming to pick and is susceptible to rot.

It's a big investment to plant trees and wait for a crop. Henry buys 2-year-old trees, plants them, and waits an additional three years for a crop. Top-grafting new varieties into established root trunk while allowing old main leaders to produce is more economical and one that the Frecons use quite a bit.

They are experimenting with drafting sweet cherries on dwarf rootstock. That would enable pickers to pick cherries from ground level rather than climb high ladders to harvest the crop.

This year will be the first harvest on the dwarf cherry trees, and the Frecons are eager to see how the concept will work. The main problem with grafting is that grafting doesn't always take.

"Trees are susceptible to lots of stresses," Henry said. "I figure a peach tree is good if it lasts 15 years. Apple trees are hardier and last about 20 years."



Torrie is in charge of the retail store. In addition to produce raised on their farm and by local farmers, Frecon Orchards Outlet offers a wide variety of unique food items and gifts. The store ships fruit baskets with specialty foods and coffees throughout the states and even to other countries.

New varieties are being released all the time, and the Frecons said the newer varieties are often better and improved over old stock.

Varieties are selected not only for taste but also to keep a continuous supply of fruit available during the growing season. Peaches are picked from July through September.

Labor problems make it difficult to meet the demands of growing 100 acres of apples, peaches, tart

and sweet cherries, berries, nectarines, plums, and apricots.

In addition to the orchard, the farm plants three acres of pumpkins, four acres of sweet corn, and buys a lot to resell from other farms.

This requires manual work. In the orchard alone there is planting, thinning, pruning, and mowing between trees. The store is kept open year-round and has a thriving mail-order business. In addition to

family members, employees vary from six in the off-season to 15 during peak times.

Abandoned farms surround one side of the orchard. Although the area is beautiful to look at, it creates problems for the orchard. The uninhabited area is a breeding ground for deer—a considerable pest in orchards. Deer eat young trees, the buds off trees, and rub the bark off with antlers.

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