

# Frecon Orchard

(Continued from Page B4)

"One deer can eat 11 pounds of buds a day," Henry said of the damage.

The Frecons have tried numerous ways to discourage the deer and resident ground hogs from damaging the trees.

"Some of the ideas have been a deterrent but most don't work, and look strange," Torrie said.

At present, they are having limited success by tying soap bars on the trees. The soap is tied on at a deer's nose level and is effective for several weeks until the aroma fades.

The Frecons utilize every type of marketing possible. They sell to brokers, direct, wholesale, auctions, small wholesalers, ship by tractor-trailer to fill orders and have tractor and trailers pick up, and they provide produce to chains in the immediate area.

"Retailing would be nothing without the farm. The farm would be nothing without the retailing," Torrie said.

"I think part of the success of our operation was that we separated the farm into different corporations years ago. That gives the second and third generation more oppor-

tunity to make something for themselves. Although some years one of the corporations may be more profitable than the others, we have been fortunate enough to stay big enough to make it all pay," she said.

Torrie got her start in the business when she started working for the Frecons in the packing house and market after high school. Henry was her boss, and the couple eventually married.

He said, "If you want a good hands-on manager, the best way to hire a good one is to marry one."

The couple has been married 30 years and have four children. One has graduated from college and works in the computer industry, two are in college, and another is in high school and continues to help part time in the store.

Torrie said that she doesn't know if any of their children will continue the farm market operation.

"Profitability is not what it used to be. It's so labor intense. In reality, farming has hit a critical state with less than two percent of the population in farming," Torrie said. "It is demanding, time consuming, and employee problems are never ending.

"To be successful in farm marketing, you must love the lifestyle. You must love farming and the human race and believe that your products are worth a fair monetary value," Torrie said.

The store is located about two miles from the main farm. The produce is trucked from the farm and unloaded with forklifts. The first floor includes display, work, and storage areas. A front porch offers additional space for seasonal items such as bedding plants and flowers.

Visual displays help sell items, and Torrie works hard to create attractive displays.

In addition to produce, some of the items offered in the store are hand-dipped caramel apples, Frecon's own special-blend of cider, own name jams and jellies, fruit butters, fresh baked goods, and specialty food items.

They offer unusual snack items such as herb and cheese soup mixes, imported bread sticks, and items related to fruit uses such as a rolling pin, apple peeler machine, and pie dish.

One of their most successful ventures is packing gift baskets and boxes.

To draw in customers, seasonal highlights include giving away a Mother's Day gift basket. All mothers who shop in the store from

May 1-9 can register to win. A Father's Day picnic basket is a similar give-away to fathers who shop in the store and register.

Apple harvest time includes demonstrations on using apples. Customer Appreciation Days are Dec. 15-24. Free cider, popcorn, and holiday goodies are offered to customers who stop by.

Although the Frecons see strong support in the area for homegrown and locally-grown produce, they are concerned that the majority of consumers don't seem to be as concerned about quality as price.

In recent years, competition is more fierce with produce being shipped in from California and from international markets such as Chile.

"We like when peaches from outside the area taste good because it affects our sales. There is nothing

like a homegrown fresh peach, but if someone tastes an unflavorable imported one, they are prone to stop buying peaches altogether rather than try another one," she said.

In her 30 years working in the retail store, Torrie said that they have received only three checks that weren't good. "That builds confidence in our fellow man. We have lots of satisfied customers. In this business, you always have something to do and plenty of friends and acquaintances to share a laugh."

Frecon Orchards Outlet is located 1/4 mile west of Boyertown on Rt. 562, at 501 S. Reading Ave. The store is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, Saturday from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Phone (610) 367-6200.

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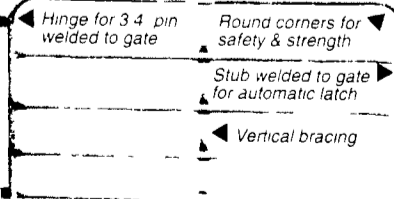
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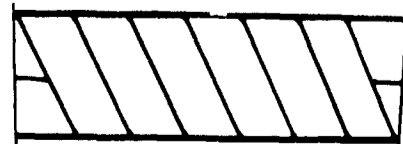
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