



Our farm, as it exists today, is the result of the vision and sweat of five generations. George and Cora Tonnemaker came to Washington and planted an orchard on Knights' Hill near Buena in the Yakima Valley in 1903. Their son, Orland farmed, taught agriculture classes and worked as an agricultural extension agent throughout Central Washington. While helping to lay out farm units in the new Columbia Basin Irrigation Project he determined to purchase the land which is now Tonnemaker Hill Farm located on the north slope of the Frenchman Hills northeast of Royal City, Washington. Orland and his wife Pearl purchased the land in 1962. Orland believed that this undeveloped land would be perfect for an orchard that could be passed down to future generations. He and Pearl, though past 60 years of age, built a farm from the light soil, sagebrush and rock of the Frenchman Hills.

Today, few of the farm units in the irrigation project remain with the families that first farmed the virgin ground. The physical and financial hardships of farming this new ground derailed the dreams of most of those pioneers. Orland and Pearl had the advantage of an extended family willing and able to help. Their son, Gene, spent much of his free time helping in the early years. Gene and his wife, Joyce, had two sons, Kole and Kurt, who spent much of their spring and summer vacation time working the farm also. The whole family, including Gene, his wife and sons, Genes' sister, Nadine, Nadine's daughter Sandy and Sandy's husband Art, would often converge for fruit harvest. Orland and Pearl also relied on the Smith family who farmed close by and became like family. Through the grace of God and with the hard work and frugality of Orland and Pearl, the farm survived the difficult early years.

Orland's dream was to plant a cherry orchard to leave as a legacy. He and Pearl planted the first orchard on the north slope of the Frenchman Hills. The self anointed experts of the day proclaimed that the North Slope was too cold with too short of a growing season for an orchard. Orland remained steadfast in his belief that the ground was ideal for the orchard. Today, the naysayers have been swept aside as the majority of the over 20 mile length of the North Slope is planted to orchard.



The original 1967 orchard planting consisted of 4 acres of sweet cherries (Bing with Van pollinators), 6 acres of pears (Bartlett and D'Anjou), and 4 acres of apples (Red Delicious and Golden Delicious). These crops were marketed wholesale through warehouses in the Wenatchee area. In addition, about 50 trees of mostly peaches but also including nectarines, apricots, prunes, plums, pie cherry, Bosc

pears, walnuts, McIntosh, Jonathan and Lodi apples were planted for family, friends and neighbors. Most of the original planting is still in production today.

Just selecting the site and planting trees hardly enabled the farm to survive. State of the art orchards of the 1960's were not expected to bear fruit for several years. Orchards usually required 5 to 7 years to produce a profitable crop. In fact, a common saying of the day, "you plant pears for your heirs", succinctly described the seeming eternity that needed to be endured between planting and profitability. Other crops had to provide income while the orchard matured. Also, unlike today's fencepost to fencepost plantings, Orland planted only the best drained hillside for his orchard. He recognized the futility of planting the frosty low spots with vulnerable fruit trees. Instead he planted field crops such as alfalfa, wheat, corn, dry peas, dry beans and clover seed. To minimize erosion problems, he grew perennial alfalfa in the light, sandy soil on the steep hillsides and frost pockets. The other row crops rotated with alfalfa on the higher ground not devoted to orchard.



Alfalfa and other row crops were harvested and sold within the same year as planting. Orland and Pearl often said that alfalfa sold to dairies west of the Cascades built the farm.

Through the late 1970's, the farm began to flourish. As the orchard came into bearing, Orland's vision of an outstanding sweet cherry orchard came to fruition as his cherries were regularly the most profitable in the warehouse. During the cherry harvest of 1981, Orland passed away unexpectedly. Grandson Kole, having recently graduated from the University of Idaho with a B.S. in Plant Science, took over responsibility for the day to day operation of the farm. Pearl remained on the farm and active in decision making until her passing at 100 years of age in 2004.

Throughout the 1980's, the farm continued to produce good yields of high quality hay and produce. However, by the mid to late 1980's, the farm gate price of apples and pears began to falter as large companies made massive plantings of apples. Farm gate prices fell drastically in years with apple production far surpassing demand. It soon became apparent that over-supply and massive plantings would eliminate small family operations. In a few short years a unique industry, comprised of many small farms where the owner and family provided most or all of the labor, was lost. The farmer with calloused hands was replaced by a manager with a new pickup, a fat checking account and a cell phone. The farmer who knew each and every part of the farm was replaced by farming corporations that swallow whole farms as casually as if ordering a meal from a menu. The farmer who dealt directly with anyone working on the farm was replaced by layers of management designed to dehumanize relations with farm labor. The owner/operator who, with his/her own labor, made a modest living for a family was replaced by huge crews happy to work for wages insufficient to raise a family on in the United States. The farmer who cared for the land in hopes of passing it to the next generation has been replaced by corporations who use the land as a disposable private resource to be exploited

without regard to any succeeding generation. Family owned and operated orchards that had provided a modest living for 2 or 3 generations became obsolete and non viable in less than a decade.

Conditions at the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's demanded drastic changes in crops produced, production methods and crop marketing in order for the farm to survive.

The 1985 cherry crop saw the first large direct marketing effort. It soon became apparent that supermarket chains adamantly opposed buying farm direct produce regardless of quality. That surprising revelation fueled new direct marketing approaches such as attending farmers markets. In the past, fruit was loaded on a truck in the orchard to begin its journey through many hands before arriving



on the table of the actual consumer. The actual consumer seemed so remote from the farm, an afterthought in commodity based agriculture. Through farmers markets, the impersonal act of sending a truck of fruit down the road to unknown and unseen consumers began to be replaced by face to face contact with the person who actually eats the fruit. Quite a revelation to deal directly with people who care if the fruit is fresh and tastes good as opposed to multiple distribution layers filled with buyers and sellers who give little regard to the eventual consumer. Keeping these experiences in mind, Kole and Grandma Pearl decided to expand the orchard in 1988. From that planting forward, all plantings had taste and direct marketing as primary considerations.



Farmers cannot eliminate the middleman. Farmers can become their own middlemen. That is exactly what Kurt agreed to do in the early spring of 1992. Kole would handle the production and Kurt the marketing of crops from Tonnemaker Hill Farm. The new plantings were coming into bearing and someone needed to take up the challenge of direct marketing the new crops.

Unfortunately, after one of the mildest winters and earliest blooms on record, the morning of April 7, 1992 brought the most devastating spring frost ever experienced on the Frenchman Hills. The abnormally advanced growth stage of the fruit crops led to near total crop loss across virtually all varieties. This followed the poor 1991 crop which was annihilated by winter kill at Christmas 1990. Kurt was ready to go but had nothing to sell.

After the perennial fruit crops were lost two years in a row, Kole and Sonia decided to start growing vegetables for sale. The vegetables could be planted after spring frosts and would produce something to sell in years when the fruit trees were damaged. In 1992, the farm had 1/2 acre of vegetables. Today, over 20 acres is devoted to a large assortment of vegetables, all of which are sold directly to consumers or restaurants.

Vastly more people have become interested in purchasing food directly from the producer over the last 20 years. Along with the desire for fresh, good tasting produce, increasing numbers of consumers want to know that their food is safe and that the farms are being good stewards of the land. Frustration at the seemingly endless list of chemical inputs conventional orchards required mainly to attempt to perfect the cosmetic appeal of fruits led us to abandon conventional pest control in the early 1980's.

Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's Tonnemaker Hill Farm practiced IPM (Integrated Pest Management). This system used all available methods for controlling pests including traditional cultural techniques (pruning and cultivating for example) and cultivation of beneficial insect populations as well as conventional pesticides used in conjunction with insect growth models. This system emphasized minimizing pesticide use by targeting specific parts of the insect life cycle and relying instead on non chemical control methods as much as possible. By the mid 1990's Tonnemaker Hill Farm was using so few conventional pesticides that taking the next step to Organic Certification seemed logical. The vegetables were always grown without the use of pesticides applied to the produce. In 1997 the first part of the farm began transitioning to Organic Certification. Eventually all the crop ground was transitioned with the last field - Alfalfa hay - being certified for the 2008 harvest.



Today, we are quite pleased to grow our produce organically. However, organic production is more costly and more susceptible to disaster than conventional production. Ultimately, the knowledge that our family, employees, and customers need not worry about possible adverse effects of conventional pesticides, makes the production difficulties gladly bearable. We strive to work with what nature provides instead of fighting nature with large amounts of artificial inputs.

With more intensive production of hand harvested crops comes the need for help willing and able to do manual labor. Much has changed since Orland or Kole could do most of the work with one to two hired men. For years, Kole along with Gary and Floyd Stretch were able to keep up with the crops. Now, every summer we hire many high school and college students, mostly from the surrounding area. Many would be pleasantly surprised to know that yes, there are some fine young people in this coming generation. They are responsible for picking squash, cucumbers and melons, for weeding and for working at the farm stand and farmers markets.

Kole & Sonia's sons, Luke and Ethan, have supervised the 6 week cherry harvest for years now and are also responsible for setting irrigation, bringing fruit in from the field and selling at farmers markets. We value our employees including some Hispanic families that have helped with harvest for over 30 years. Since we opened an on-farm stand in 2001, Maxine Buckley (who was hired as Grandma Pearl's caregiver) has made farm stand customers feel welcome. In spite of our somewhat remote location, the farm stand has become a busy place in the harvest season with many visitors or residents of the Potholes Area stopping by.

Tonnemaker Hill Farm has gone through many changes since Orland and Gene cleared fields by dynamiting huge glacier deposited boulders from the virgin ground of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. Instead of a few varieties of fruit sold wholesale, we now produce well over 100 varieties of tree fruits many of which are grown for retail sales only. Instead of growing only commodity crops on open ground we now produce many types of melons, tomatoes, eggplant, summer and winter squash, cucumbers and over 230 varieties of peppers all sold directly to consumers. Instead of planting varieties suited mainly for the wholesale trade or long distance shipping, we choose varieties with taste as the primary consideration. Instead of



concentrating on the cosmetic appeal of our produce, growing, harvesting and transporting decisions revolve around freshness and taste. We value the chance to meet those who eat our produce and value their business and input.

Today, Tonnemaker Hill Farm is operated by Kole Tonnemaker and his wife, Sonia. Their sons, Luke and Ethan, also work on the farm and sell at farmer's markets in Eastern Washington and Idaho. Kurt Tonnemaker and his wife, Michele, operate Tonnemaker Family

Orchard, the direct-sale arm of the farm. Their sons, Joseph and Clayton, help sell at farmer's markets in Western Washington.

To find out more about our produce and varieties that we grow, please click on our [Produce](#) tab above. For market locations or directions to the farm, please click on our [Locations](#) tab above.