

BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES

Due to the drought, harvest arrived two weeks early this year. Here is how our harvest went: The first variety, Nonpareil, was harvested by the first week in August, and the Monterey and Fritz varieties followed suit 30-45 days later. Just like always, we harvested by hand with family members and friends helping bring in the crop. If we have plenty of helpers, harvest of one variety can be finished in a single day. Skilled hands use mallets to knock the base of each main branch and other helpers use sticks to knock down nuts still clinging to the branches. When the tarp is full, it is dumped into the tractor bucket, which then pours the almonds out on a concrete pad to dry in the sun. The almonds sun-dry for roughly ten days to remove any moisture still in the nut. Conventional farmers also sun-dry their nuts, but they leave them on the orchard floor and later sweep the nuts up. By doing this they are simultaneously sweeping up dirt, bird droppings, bugs, and whatever else happens to be on the ground with the almonds, increasing the chance for salmonella poisoning (not to mention the unsanitary and distasteful effect on your mouth). With our harvest methods, this does not happen.



Harvesting the crop with friends and family

Because of the drought and other related factors, the almond crop was much less than we anticipated and hoped for. We received only 20% of what was received the previous year. Farmers all over California are experiencing similar yields. Owing to the poor crop, we will only be selling to customers of our roadside stand (including online customers).

AUGUST-OCTOBER

In this issue:

Bringing in the Sheaves

Separating the Chaff

Spraying and Compost

What's Next?



SEPARATING THE CHAFF

After our nuts are dried, they are taken to a certified-organic huller and sheller in Dunnigan. Here they are run through a machine that removes the hull and shell from the almond. The hull is turned into cattle feed, while the shell serves many purposes, including becoming a component in an environmentally-friendly paint remover. When the nuts are returned to us, they are stored in a freezer for one week to kill any microscopic organisms that may be present. After this, the next step is sorting them. The family does this by hand on a conveyor belt we purchased. The sorting process consists of removing almonds damaged by the huller and sheller and clean chipped ones. The chipped almonds are used in our almond butter while the damages ones are fed to the chickens. We store the bulk of our almonds in cold storage in the Sierras and always keep a supply in cold storage here in Esparto. The final step the almonds take happens when we package them and send them to you, the customer. Any youngster who helps with the packaging gets to slip in his or her own business card as a reward.

CAPAY HILLS ORCHARD

24155 County Road 22
Esparto, CA
chorganicalmonds.com

Tel: 530-507-8222
Mobile: 530-908-9448
E-mail:
capayhillsorchard@gmail.com



Top to bottom: the compost is spread on the orchard floor; the reddish leaves of the Fritz variety stand out amidst the others; the harvest spread out to dry

SPRAYING AND COMPOST

A major factor leading to a decreased crop yield this year was a deficiency in nutrients in the orchard. This deficiency was caused by a lack of nutrients from compost reaching the trees' roots. Normally rain water brings the nutrients from the surface compost down to the roots, but this last winter there was very little rain water, which led to a nutrient deficiency. This deficiency in turn added to the effects of the drought to produce a low crop yield. This year, more than 300,000 pounds of compost was laid on the orchard floor. We hope and pray that rain will come and carry the nutrients to the trees' roots. During these past three months, there have been several rain showers, but none of them lasted long enough to register anything in the rain gauge. Many free-growing trees of all kinds in the Esparto area are looking like they won't be able to last through another dry winter. The drought has even caused them to take on a more colorful appearance, changing colors when they never have before. My dad says that if you aren't a praying person, now is the time to begin.

In addition to the yearly compost spread, we have also taken to spraying the trees. Now don't worry, we aren't spraying them with anything harmful either to you or the tree. We are spraying them with a foliar application of micronutrients. The stomates (pores in the epidermis of the leaves and stem) in the leaves allow for the infusion of nutrients. This regimen helps the trees get the micronutrients they need and has already resulted in promising growth and buds for spring.



WHAT'S NEXT?

What's happening next? The upcoming winter months of November, December, and January are typically quiet months in an orchard. However, while the trees themselves are in a dormant, sleeping stage, there is still much work to be done. Pruning will begin in December. Pruning the trees consists of clipping off any excess branches and running them through a chipper, which then tosses the bark onto the orchard floor to decompose naturally. Also in December, a cover crop of nitrogen-fixing plants will be sown onto the orchard floor and disked in. The cover crop will include radish, vetch, and clover plants. To end this three-month period another spray will be applied to the trees. This one will be oil-based and will help prevent fungus from growing. We remain hopeful and prayerful that we will also have a few inches of rain to report by the next newsletter.