

## HARVEST

Our last newsletter ended with the harvest of the nonpareil variety of almonds. We harvested the final two varieties—Fritz and Monterey—in early September. We started using a hydro-mechanical vibrating shaker to harvest the nuts because the trees are larger and striking them with a rubber mallet was problematic. We still harvest onto a tarp which protects the food safety aspect of the nut. After sun-drying, the almonds were hulled and shelled, placed in cold storage for about a week, and then hand-sorted. The almonds were then packaged and placed in their long-term cold storage unit in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Thankfully we do have some wonderful news to report concerning our almond yield. While last year's harvest had a very poor yield due to numerous factors, this year's harvest exceeded expectations. We expect to have a supply through March (maybe later), unlike last year. We are so thankful for this tremendous blessing and we are very pleased to be able to satisfy your almond cravings with no restraints, now that all three of our products (raw almonds, raw almond butter, and smoked almonds) are available on our website.

## AUGUST-OCTOBER

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## FEEDING THE SOIL

Immediately after harvest ends, the chaos really begins with sorting, packing, marketing, and orchard preparation for next year. Preparation begins with soil testing, then adding compost and nutrients to the soil.

Farmers are always experimenting to discover how their soil might react to different protocols and hopefully improve the health of their orchard. Last spring, we experimented by disking under half the orchard after the cover crop matured and the sheep had grazed. The other half was left as it was (without disking it). This fall we tested the soil in both halves and found that there was no difference between the two.

Therefore, we will no longer be disking in the spring. This will save time and money and help preserve topsoil. However, we will still disk every fall to work in the compost and other supplements and provide a good bed for the cover crop.

In another experiment, we are trying to use less water and help the tree absorb nutrients better. When we planted our annual cover crop this year we inoculated the seeds with a naturally-occurring, beneficial fungi before planting them. Mycorrhizal fungi are a fungi that form a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship with plants' roots. These fungi attach themselves to the roots of plants (and then spread to our trees) and basically become extensions of the roots. These fungal extensions increase the surface absorbing area of the roots 100 to 1,000 times. Therefore, mycorrhizae increase the trees' capacity to find and absorb water and even help to break down important nutrients for the health of the tree, such as nitrogen and phosphorus.

Other applications we utilized included our annual spreading of compost and a few new applications. These other applications were a little horse manure, potash, and gypsum. These were applied to the orchard floor by a broadcast spreader pulled behind the tractor with a spinner on the back to distribute the material. Lastly, these applications and the cover crop were disked into the ground to integrate them into the soil.

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Top to bottom: Brian with his harvest; a tree ready to be shaken; the almond boat

## RAIN ... OR THE LACK THEREOF

The late spring and fall are by far the busiest time of the year on an orchard. Right after our harvest was finished, we began work on building a cold storage unit in our new barn. This unit will enable us to store more almonds on site, with a longer term supply at our Sierra Nevadas site. It will also be powered by our new solar system. In the midst of building the cold storage unit, we spent two full weeks preparing for next year's harvest by distributing our various aforementioned applications to the orchard floor and disking them in.

Recently, we had another family friend and priest come and bless our orchard. Hopefully his blessing will give us much needed rain. Our average rainfall to date is four inches by the end of November. This year we have only received 1/3 of an inch in October and so far none in November. If the predicted El Niño does occur and affects California, it will most likely only affect Southern California. Unfortunately, most of the water reserves are in Northern California.

We are always being asked how the drought is affecting us. While the drought does require us to spend more money on pumping water and buying fertilizers and nutrient applications, in truth the drought is affecting the trees most by placing an undue stress on them, caused by the lack of regular rainfall. Thankfully, thus far our well has been performing at normal levels.



## FARM TO FORK

Many of our customers are familiar with the Farm to Fork movement spreading across the nation and even to other parts of the world. Our family farm has been a part of that movement since 2009, when we planted our current orchard.

This is what makes us different from other farms:

- We only sell our own products, and we sell directly to the consumer
- Each member of the family is directly involved in caring for the orchard
- We are always looking for natural ways to improve the health of our orchard
- We harvest onto tarps (critical for food safety when buying an unpasteurized product)
- We have a Food Safety Plan (<http://chorganicalmonds.com/HowWeFarm.html>)
- Our raw almonds are truly raw (unpasteurized), our smoked almonds are made on site with organic almond wood and organic olive oil, and our almond butter is made on site using a stone grinder so that the almonds are not heated to a point at which pasteurization occurs (and healthy enzymes are destroyed)—so the product is truly raw.

Some customers have asked if you can make almond butter at home with a food processor or blender. Yes, you can; however, it is not a good idea. When you use a machine like that, it heats up the nuts due to the heat from the motor and the mechanical high-speed blade spinning around. Then the almonds are no longer raw because you have heated them above the enzyme level at which the enzymes start to die (90-100 deg.). We use a stone grinder because the pressure of the stone gently releases the oils in the nut and does not create heat. It never gets hotter than room temperature, the live enzymes are preserved, and you eat healthier food.

We are proud to be a part of bringing our farm to your table, and we hope you have enjoyed this newsletter. Hopefully by the next one we will have several more inches of rain to report.