

A HEALTHY HARVEST

Good news! Our harvest this year was much better than last year's! We estimate that we will have almonds through July 2018. Thank you so much for sticking with us over the years, through the good times and the times that required a bit more patience! We greatly appreciate your faithfulness to us, and please know that we will always do everything possible to provide you with the highest quality service and product! A healthy harvest is the result of a crazy amount of work, worry, prayer, and often the unknown. It is a team effort among family members, crop advisors, and many others. There are many long days and nights that can't really be described. We continue to ask for your prayers as the almonds for next year's crop begin developing. The bees in February, the winter temperature and humidity level, all play a part in the health of the tree. We have been doing our part to foster a healthy bee population by creating a year-round bee habitat in our native hedgerow and seeded cover crop, and by eliminating all spray applications during bloom.

AUGUST-OCTOBER

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POST HARVEST BUSY TIMES

Contrary to popular belief, post-harvest is not a relaxing, quiet time on the farm. Or at least it isn't for a small, family-owned and family-farmed organic almond orchard! On the next page, you'll get a full story illustrating this, but for now here's a general overview of what happens in the weeks following harvest.

Almonds must be harvested at a specific time for each variety, and it fluctuates each year. All our three almond varieties harvest within 45 days of each other. If you harvest too early the nuts won't shake off, if too late some will fall onto the ground and others be subject to sticking to the tree. Unlike other orchards, we harvest the nuts onto tarps rather than the ground. From the tarps the almonds slide into a long wheeled, powered cart called an almond boat (pictured above), which has a conveyor belt inside. The belt carries the nuts to a bin at the end of the boat. A tractor with a fork lift picks up the bin and carefully spreads the almonds out on a drying pad, where they sun dry for about two weeks. At this point the almonds are still in a shell and a hull. We stir them every day to ensure that all nuts dry adequately. The sun-drying step is crucial because an almond with a higher moisture content will not last long nor have optimal taste.

After drying, we use the front loader of our tractor and a rented conveyor belt system to load the nuts onto a semi-truck trailer, and then off they go to the huller-and-sheller (which is a certified-organic facility). This is the only time the care of our almonds is trusted to another company and we spend many hours each year researching the best company to care for our almonds in this step. It takes about 10-14 days until the nuts are hulled and shelled and ready for pick up. The shelling company retains the hulls and shells to be sold primarily as organic cattle feed. Transporting the almonds back to the farm changes every year depending on the crop yield and availability and price of the transport. This year we borrowed a neighbor's flat-bed trailer to carry the full bins back to our orchard for sorting.

Once back on the farm, the almonds are hand-sorted. Nuts that are chipped or broken but still clean and edible are ground into almond butter. Our free-range chickens eat the inedible nuts. Next they are frozen in our freezer-capable cold storage for a few days to kill any possible microscopic organisms. This does nothing to harm the integrity of the raw almond and is simply an added safety precaution we choose to implement.

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Top to bottom: pink-tinted Fritz almonds about 3-4 weeks away from harvest; pile ready to be loaded onto the truck-trailer and hauled to the huller-and-sheller; and finally loading up the truck-trailer!

NEARING THE END ...

After all this we have reached the final step in this lengthy process: getting the nuts to you! After sorting, we officially process orders, package the nuts, and mail them out! Throughout this entire process, beginning several weeks before the first harvest, we are taking orders via phone and email, responding to phone calls and emails for the orchard, researching the best transportation method, applying fertilizer and compost to the orchard and paying attention to its needs, planting and disking in the cover crop, planning the next variety's harvest, and so much more. Plus, Brian still works full-time as a commercial airline pilot, Gretchen homeschools the younger kids and acts as a college and life advisor, and the whole family is involved in soccer, the local Catholic church, and the local community in various ways. So as you can see, for the entire late summer and into autumn things are quite crazy in the Paddock household at Capay Hills Orchard!



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FARMER: DAY 2

Here are some notes from (dare I say it?) a rather typical few days for Brian, my dad, in the weeks following harvest in the beginning of October. It just might give you an idea of literally how insane it can be at our house this time of year!

On Wednesday (Oct. 4) at 5pm Nicholas (second-oldest son) and I drove 1000 lb. of almonds to our longer-term cold storage site at Tahoe on short notice. At 5:30 I texted the hulling-and-shelling facility in Chico, CA (different facility than previous few years), and they said our other almonds were ready for pick-up. I then called several people to set up a sorting time for the weekend. Providentially, I had left the borrowed flatbed trailer in Chico, so after spending the night at Tahoe and after stacking firewood the next morning, we left for Chico around 4 pm. We loaded the almonds in Chico and headed for home, arriving at 7:30. After a quick dinner we started prepping for transportation of the next varieties of almonds, which would happen in the morning, and prep for Friday's sorting. This prep involved parking the trailer; offloading the bins of shelled almonds; setting up the conveyor belt for sorting; and setting up the chairs, boxes, scale, and other items for sorting. On Thursday we loaded the Fritz and Monterey nuts into the trucks to transport to the huller-and-sheller. Friday began at 7am with prep for the sorting. The crew came at 7:30. My crew included two of my sons (Nicholas and Joshua) and six friends from church and the local area who needed some extra money. After a briefing on the sanitary and food safety rules, we got started. Throughout the day I switch gears constantly: I sort nuts and manage the process, work on emails, communicate with Kyle to get the website updated and ready for orders, answer customer phone calls, and package orders. While all this is happening I also have to deal with any mechanical problems that come up. For example, on day one of sorting, the conveyor motor started popping the circuit breaker, so I had to determine that problem's cause and fix it, and later the tractor had to be fixed in order to move our bins of almonds! The sorting crew (but not me) takes a break every two hours. My lunch was a handful of almonds and a peach, eaten while I was communicating with my crop advisor about spreading gypsum and chicken manure in the orchard before the rains set in. No rest for the weary! By 6 pm the first shift is done. Another group of folks came at 6 and worked till 9pm. My close friend from the Air Force and former missionary in Chile, Jason, came and helped, too. After the sorters left, he and I moved 30 50-lb. boxes into cold storage. By 10:30, we were ready for dinner and a beer. In bed by 11:30pm, then back at it again Saturday and again Sunday (starting after church). This is just an example of harvest time, one of the busier times of the year!