

KEYS TO QUALITY #1: ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

A great amount of work goes into producing quality almonds. Two keys to growing a quality product are organic certification and regular testing. Organic certification ensures (by a third party certifier/inspector responsible to the USDA) that our farm adheres to the principles and practices of the National Organic Program (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic>). Some farms will claim they are organic, but it is likely they are bending the rules. For farms that are certified USDA organic, you know that the farm is regularly inspected to ensure the farmer is farming according to the strict standards of the NOP. We are not huge fans of big government, but in the case of the NOP, it is not too overbearing and in some cases rather impressive. Our certifier is rather unique too—Yolo Certified Organic Agriculture. They are a department of our local county government. YCOA is a USDA-accredited certification agency and was created to provide organic certification at a local level. They provide excellent service at a competitive price and are very helpful with organic, sustainable solutions to any issues.



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In this issue:

Key #1: Organic Certification

Key #2: Regular Testing

Meet the Farmer

Meet the Farmer's ... Animals



KEYS TO QUALITY #2: REGULAR TESTING

Another key to a quality product is to monitor the micronutrient levels in our trees and soil. Testing is a quantitative way to achieve the goal of making sure our trees are not deficient nor too abundant in any nutrient. We test our almond leaves every month from April through July, run soil tests twice per year, and run an irrigation water test once per year. Additionally we study the nutrient analysis of every product added to the orchard, such as organic foliar sprays and the compost spread each fall. We do not assume we know everything there is to know about reading the test results. We reach out to advisors who are far more qualified in plant science than we are (and a big plus is that they are free). If test results show a deficiency, we have a few methods to mitigate that deficiency. A foliar spray of the micronutrient is the most efficient, immediate way. We also spend much time and effort propagating excellent soil conditions to promote longer-term microbial growth. We actually spend time and money feeding soil microbes! It is well worth it. We get roughly \$700 nutrient value per 1% of organic material in the soil. Soil microbes are algae, bacteria, actinomycetes, bacteriophages, protozoa, nematodes, and fungi, not to mention beneficial earthworms and arthropods. There are more microbes in a teaspoon of soil than there are people on the earth! They are critical in converting nutrients that are “trapped” in the soil and digesting them into a form available to the tree roots. We spend as much time caring for the soil as for the trees. Testing tells us quantitatively how our trees are doing health-wise. At any time we may have researchers here taking soil, leaf, or blossom observations and tests. We also often host educational workshops. Recently the UC Davis Department of Agricultural Sustainability Institute sponsored an agricultural workshop at Capay Hills Orchard. Attendees even included researchers from Nigeria and Holland! We find it very important to support agricultural research and education and are always happy to provide our farm as a research site.

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Top to bottom: The Fritz leaves change to slightly pink and rust-colored as fall progresses; a poor picture perhaps, but the only one we had of all four dogs; the newest mother hen with one of her newborn chicks, which we nicknamed Egghead.

MEET THE FARMER: BRIAN PADDOCK

Meet the man who started it all. If it were not for the resourcefulness, diligence, and the dream of Brian, the Paddock family would still be living in the middle of an ancient and dying almond orchard. Brian is the kind of guy who does not know how to stop working, so moving into an abandoned 15-acre almond orchard was a project right up his alley. Yet the new almond orchard (and the remnants of the old one) is not all that occupies his time. Though the farm demands full-time work, Brian (who graduated from UC Davis with a degree in engineering) also works full-time as a commercial airline pilot for American Airlines, flying both domestically and internationally for several days at a time. He has worked there for more than 25 years. As if two full-time jobs were not enough, Brian was, up until three years ago, also an officer in the Air Force. He retired from this job after 28 years of diligent service (also several years after he was supposed to retire, but the USAF kept finding him things to do).

In addition to these jobs, Brian keeps himself busy talking to almond customers, researching organic farming methods, spending time with his family, volunteering at the local Catholic church, and coaching soccer. He is also the regional commissioner of our local soccer organization. He never stops looking for things to do, items to fix (when you have six kids and a farm, there is a never-ending list of these), or new business opportunities to explore. When he has the time, a favorite hobby of his (and the family's) is skiing in California's Sierra Nevada mountain range. If he follows in his dad's footsteps, he'll be skiing well into his 80s.



MEET THE FARMER'S ... ANIMALS

Some people have pets instead of children. Farmers generally have a different relation with their animals. On a farm you learn not to name the animals you may one day eat (though we determined that naming your pig Bacon was fine). There are always some farm animals, though, which are neither your children nor your food. Here, we introduce ours to you.

Travis, a McNab cattle dog and border collie mix, is our oldest farm dog and, like Brian, was born to work—though now his 14.5 years make it seem he was born to sleep. Roxy came around when Travis was about six, so they became great friends. She is a short-haired border collie whom we adopted from a neighbor, who found her and her siblings dumped at a store. She is the queen of the pack, now that Travis is retired. Noel is two years old and is definitely the runt of the pack, being a smaller beagle-terrier mix. Her best friend is Caesar, a one-year-old giant of a puppy. Caesar is a German Shepherd and a big baby who cries if he doesn't get enough attention and loves to give kisses. All are great watchdogs except for Travis because he is deaf now and Caesar, who is too sweet to be a menace but at least looks the part.

We currently have seven cats, though as cats are very independent the number fluctuates. The oldest is Hunter, a teenage tabby, and the baby is three-year-old Twitch. The others are Lola, Nathaniel, Bianca, Shasta, and Little Rosie. We keep them for their hunting capabilities.

Lastly we have roughly 70 layer chickens (and a duck), 26 of which are chicks hatched by our hens. They live in a coop with a fenced area with seasonal access to the orchard (in keeping with food safety requirements). In past years we have also had countless other animals and we seasonally have neighbors' sheep and geese. Sound like a zoo to you?