

FARMING IS LIKE A ROLLER COASTER

Farming, like a roller coaster, has its ups and downs. Even though you know those sudden twists, turns, drops, and climbs exist, you always seem to be caught off guard when they actually hit. Take this past year's harvest, for example. When our harvest was complete, we were pleased with the yield our crop had given us. It certainly was not the best yield, but it was not the most disappointing either. Unfortunately, one of those unforeseen drops hit us when we learned that our huller-and-sheller facility was severely behind schedule. In fact, we were not able to take our Fritz and Monterey varieties to be hulled and shelled until late November—7-8 weeks behind schedule! During our wait, we stored the almonds here at the farm (in order to take better care of them). We painstakingly covered the almonds up each time it rained (thankfully it never rained very heavily) and every night, to keep off the morning dew. Every morning, we drew the tarps off the almonds to air them out. Due to this terrible delay and other unexplainable issues (probably combinations of the drought, bloom issues, and ants), our net product of the Fritz and Monterey was much diminished. This is a perfect example of how, as a small farmer, you have lower priority in the minds of others, especially when it comes to having your nuts hulled and shelled!

Yet even though these issues with our crop were certainly disappointing and aggravating, we have high hopes for our next harvest. Beginning primarily in December, we have been receiving rain like I have never seen before (at least, not that I can remember, and I am 20 years old)! The past two rainfall years to date have recorded 7.75 (2014-15) and 11.5(2015-16) inches.

Right now, we are at 21.375 inches! With an average rainfall of 18-22 inches for this area, this is incredible! In one major storm, we received 8.5 inches in 5 days! In one period of 24 hours, we received 3.5 inches! This storm was considered the biggest one in more than a decade. While some of you may not think these amounts are so noteworthy, for water-starved California farmers they truly are! The flooded and closed roads couldn't even dampen our spirits!



The Little Lamb Valley Slough in the back of our property became very swollen during one rainstorm and even overflowed in parts!

NOVEMBER - JANUARY

In this issue:

Farming Is Like a Roller Coaster

Frugal Farming: Buying in Bulk

Winter Work

No Wasting Here!



FRUGAL FARMING: BUYING IN BULK

Continuing our series on frugal farming, here we discuss how buying in bulk helps us keep our expenses (and consequently our prices as well) as low as possible. When purchasing labels, jars, bags, boxes, and such, we try to buy in the greatest quantity we can while still being able to store them properly. In addition, we tend to buy the same size bag for our 15-20 lb. orders so that it simplifies our operations and saves on storage and cost. It also allows us to buy more easily in greater quantities. We do the same for our liners on our 20 lb. and 50 lb. storage boxes. And, yes, we use coupons too!

CAPAY HILLS ORCHARD

24155 County Road 22
Esparto, CA
chorganicalmonds.com

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



Nicholas (top) and Brian (bottom) pruning the trees.

WINTER WORK

While the hectic rush of harvest has died down, another busy season has arrived. During the winter, we began work by knocking mummies (nuts that did not shake off during harvest). Next we spread gypsum, which helps with irrigation movement in the soil, adds calcium and sulfate for nutrition, and helps the soil seek a neutral soil pH (7.0). We also spread chicken manure for fertilizer, then mowed the property in preparation for our cover crop. We sowed 2000 lbs. of cover crop seed (vetch, yellow mustard, radish, and clover) and then tilled it through a very light surface till (a depth of about 1-2 inches). The cover crop inoculates the soil with nitrogen and provides biomass, among other benefits. The mycorrhizal bacteria were inoculated into the orchard in the fall of 2015, so we did not need to inoculate the cover crop again. In the beginning of January we began our annual winter pruning. Careful pruning is crucial for the health of an organic almond tree since we need to keep proper airflow through the canopy to help prevent disease. Using the wood chipper we purchased with the grant money from the Farmer Veteran Coalition, we will chip the trimmings and return them to decompose in the orchard. And yet in addition to all this work, we still managed to find time to sort the delayed Fritz and Monterey almonds, fill orders, and make hundreds of jars of almond butter (thank you, Alicia!).



NO WASTING HERE!

As you know, we take conservation and proper stewardship very seriously. This even extends to our hulling-and-shelling process. When we have our almonds hulled and shelled, the product we are left with is our almonds, free of the hull and shell. Perhaps you are wondering what happens to the hull and shell during this removal process? Even in this part of our operation, you will find no waste. The almond hulls, high in protein and sugar, are sold for animal feed, typically dairy feed. Almond shells are sometimes used as fuel for electricity plants, but may also be used as bedding for garden planters and as landscape material similar to wood chips or bark. Additionally, they serve use as fire place logs, glue filler for laminate board, raw material for medium-density fiberboard and particle board production, mineral mix carriers for livestock, and charcoal briquettes. They can also be used as a bedding product for dairy and poultry. However, even though the shells can be used for so many purposes, they have little value on the market. A third product of the hulling-and-shelling process is the almond hash. Almond hash is the material that is discarded by the machine during the hulling and shelling process. It includes insect and machine-damaged nuts and nuts which did not get their entire shell removed. The hash is sold as higher-end animal feed added to grain feed. As a farm we do not sell our hulls, shells or hash; the huller-and-sheller keeps them and sells them, which keeps our fees as low as possible. Therefore, the consumer may only be eating part of the entire tree product, but nothing really goes to waste. In fact, the almond industry in California is currently offsetting about 50% of its carbon emissions.[1] We hope you appreciate our stewardship!

[1] Kendall, A., et. al. (2015), Life Cycle-based Assessment of Energy Use and Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Almond Production, Part I: Analytical Framework and Baseline Results. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 19: 1008–1018.