

Gunkel Orchards

Maryhill, Washington

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Introduction

- Gunkel Orchards is an orchard and vineyard business, growing sweet cherries, apricots, nectarines, peaches, and a variety of wine grapes in south-central Washington State.
- The business, in its third generation, is owned and operated by brothers Ron and Dan Gunkel, producing fruit on approximately 300 acres in total.
- Gunkel Orchards sells produce locally in their own fruit stand, as well as to companies and businesses all across the Pacific Northwest, but usually to those in the Seattle and Portland areas. Some of the fruit grown in Maryhill may eventually make it as far as British Columbia, Canada or even across the Pacific ocean to some Asian countries.
- Despite being a rather profitable business, Gunkel Orchards does not deliver bulk deliveries to its customers, but rather they send semi trucks to pick up the order at the fruit stand.
- With the installment of a new cherry sorting machine and packing line a couple of years ago, Gunkel Orchards has been able to increase sorting and packing efficiency as well as cut manual labor costs. Speculations say that the machine will be able to "pay for itself" within five to seven years.

Documentation

Responsibilities performed: irrigation installation, construction equipment operator, spraying, mowing, irrigation control, weighing cherries, storing fruit in cooler, hauling fruit from field to fruit stand, weeding, pruning, vertebrate pest control, machine maintenance and fueling, and move ladders. Basically, anything that needed to be done, I was second in command, being in charge of and responsible for myself and the work that was done.



Left: Digging the ditch for the mainline.
Middle: Covered mainline with risers sticking up through soil
Right: Completed installation



Fixed busted mainline with new coupler



From left to right: Mowing, Weed spraying, Foliar spraying



Found one of the WSU AgWeatherNet stations at one of the distant orchard sites. The faulty filter station on the right is at the same sight



I was sent to a training seminar for the new cherry sorting/packing line and this was the speaker. He is from Poland.



My work truck for the internship



This Yale forklift was my main vehicle of choice when I need to load or unload a flatbed truck in front of the fruit stand. The GMC truck is the one truck that is almost explicitly used to haul fruit in from the field.
Left: A shipment of cardboard boxes that I was unloading
Right: Bins full of cherries with wet foam pads to keep them cool



Before and After sharpening the mower blades with a grinder



1973 Ford I would use to haul in bins of cherries when the crew was picking nears the fruit stand



Left: Scale used to weigh bins of picked cherries
Middle: Stack of fresh cherries after being weighed and watered down
Right: Unloading peach bins at distant site in prep for the next day



When the picking crew would slow down, I would often be sent to weed goat-heads (puncture vine), fix faulty sprinklers and prune trees.



Left: Loading dock with cooler and cherry sorting line warehouse
Middle: Cherry sorting machine (forklift for scale)
Right: Peach/Nectarine sorting line in separate building



The Gunkel Orchards fruit stand before and during business hours



From left to right is the upper and lower half of a distant orchard site, called "Sugarloaf", and an aerial view of the farthest orchard site, called Avery.



This is the small community of Maryhill. Nested into the Washington side of the Gorge, the majority of the available land is utilized for production. Currently, there are only two fruit companies that own orchard property in this area. Gunkel Orchards does own a substantial amount of the land, but the competing company owns the majority, but they lack orchard sites elsewhere.

Summary

- ▶ This experience was able to cultivate my professional growth by allowing me the opportunity to experience work in an established and profitable orchard/vineyard business. I learned how to obtain a rhythm between orchard work and domestic life, from getting enough sleep to putting in the maximum amount of hours possible. I learned how to complete several new tasks without need of supervision. More importantly, I learned that it is most often critical that I became proficient in a given assignment, or else it was likely that I would not be trusted with another assignment for an extended amount of time. Luckily, I'm a fast learner most of the time and excelled at performing my duties in the orchard, whether it be irrigating an entire orchard site or simply weed spraying the tree rows. From such wide variety of work orders assigned to me, this experience taught me just how busy an orchard manager is and will always be, unless he/she is able to trust others with vitally important assignments. This was made evidently clear to me at this business as there were only about three assistant managers, including myself, and my mentor who was doing the work of two or three people even though he owned half of the company.