

OUR *Family Farmers*



We want to highlight just two of our family farmers that we are delighted to partner with! **Bertagna Orchards in Chico, CA** and **Homestead Pistachio Growers in Artois, CA**. Maisie Jane has a long legacy of family farming in her background, and as a company we are proud to do what we can to ensure that family farms endure long into the future.

Bertagna Orchard:

An Almond Farmer With a Passion



If you are ever in the north state and you care about family farms, you just have to meet Ben Bertagna! Not just because he's Maisie Jane's father, but because of his knowledge and true passion for farming. When asked, 'how long have you been farming?' he laughs and says, "ever since my dad put wood blocks on the tractor pedals so I could reach and drive". Being born in 1948 one can put a confident 57 years behind Ben's worn leather work belt for experience.

He grew up being the oldest son of three in Chico, CA helping his father start is almond farming operation. With having farming in his blood, he continues to farm in Chico and the rural areas, now working with one of his sons, Jason. They farm over five hundred acres and lease and custom farm hundreds more acres beyond that. The majority of the acreage they farm is almonds but they are certainly diversified by adding walnuts, beans, vegetables, sunflowers, and other crops grown for seed to the mix.

Ben Bertagna definitely displayed his love for farming to his four children: Berton, Maisie Jane, Jason, and Mary Carmen; as all of them have chosen farming for their life careers in the Chico, CA

area. Maisie Jane's California Sunshine Products is proud to purchase her siblings almond crops. It's rewarding to take her family's almond crop, further process them, and sell them straight to the consumer.

Another big aspect to their farming operation is they own and operate an almond Huller and Sheller plant. This is a processing plant that receives almonds from their orchards and many other neighboring farmers, (which at this stage includes the dirt, rocks, sticks, and all other foreign material that comes in from harvesting the orchards). At the end



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of the processing you get the cleaned almond 'meats' packed in 2,000lb. bins. On average, they process 6,000 tons of hulled and shelled 'meat' pounds of almonds at harvest.

You can tell by Ben's positive attitude, light-heartedness, and spring in his step that he is a farmer with a passion. He says, "I love the farming way of life. It's rewarding starting from nothing, watching it grow, and then see it mature to harvest. The whole process is a miracle." Ben's favorite time of year in farming is spring. He says, "I love starting fresh, the beginning of another cycle with the blooms."

Experiencing so many cycles in farming through the years a general philosophy that's proven successful to Ben is to, "Be in tune with Mother Nature as much as possible". When asking Ben what his biggest challenge is farming is, his reply is, "Mother nature and how unpredictable she is". Though, to Ben, Mother Nature also presents his biggest reward in farming. He says, "Dealing with Mother Nature and how unpredictable she is makes life very interesting. I love waking up NOT knowing what the day will bring." He also says that his "farming lifestyle" is one of his biggest rewards. He loves his life time relationships with his fellow neighboring farmers and the tight agriculture community in Chico. He's also grateful for the opportunity he's had to share his farming life with his four children and offering them jobs on the almond farm during their childhood. Because of this and by his example, he has instilled in his children, his passion for agriculture and good hard work ethics. He's contributed to successfully passing on the farming heritage to the next generation, which is so important these days with the diminishing percent of American farmers succeeding.

Ben says the biggest changes he's seen in farming, besides the modernization, is the wider gap between farmer and consumers. He explains, "It used to be that most everyone had a direct connection with a farmer, whether it was a first blood relative or a friend. Now, there are fewer people with these relationships with farmers. This is why he likes to share with consumers his farming experiences. He says, "If consumers knew the challenges and process, they'd appreciate their food more."





Homestead Pistachio Orchards: Meet John McGinnis!



Out in the middle of the agriculture patchwork quilt in northern California, you'll find a 90 acre pistachio orchard nestled in a small rural town called Artois. As you drive down the long driveway outlining this orchard, you'll notice that pistachio shells are used to keep the dust down.

John McGinnis, his wife Gloria, and son Mike, own and operate their farm they call Artois Nut Company. They are a fully diversified family farm. They grow, hull, process, and market their 90 acres of pistachios.

John is an engineer by trade, originally a city boy. It wasn't until 1974 that John and his wife moved to the country to his wife's family homestead ranch and started farming. He started with farming rice and row crops until 1986. It was at this time that the McGinnis's wanted their home to be surrounded by trees, instead of the low growing, annual, row crops. So, they planted their pistachio orchard, which still stands today.

Ninety-five percent of the orchard is the Kerman variety. The remaining five percent of the orchard is planted in two different pollinator varieties which do not produce any nuts at all. Their sole purpose is to produce the pollen that is dispersed to the Kerman variety trees by wind. In the spring time the two pollinator varieties bloom two weeks apart from each other, thus giving the trees a longer pollination window to help ensure a better yielding crop.

John is a great example of a small independent U.S. family farm. He loves the solitude of his farming lifestyle on the farm. He explains, "My favorite season is the early spring growing season. It's quiet and the orchards are clean and new". Farmers have to treasure these 'quiet' moments, as the majority of the year farming perennial tree crops takes constant monitoring, maintaining, and action to ensure healthy trees and abundant crops. Though sometimes, all that hard work and spending capital doesn't mean profits, as Mother Nature has a mind of her own and won't always provide the necessary weather conditions that favor abundant crops. When John is asked what he'd like to share



with consumers, his reply is, "before pistachios are ready for consumption there are so many steps that have to be taken and none of them can be skipped". He continues on with the long list, "irrigation, weed control, insect and fungus control, mowing, harvesting, hulling, drying, hand picking, color sorting, flavoring and roasting, packaging and labeling, boxing, and finally the marketing".

Artois Nut Company can be commended for their persistence and hard work which has led them to a healthy growth in their business. They are continually experimenting with new flavors and are investing in more innovation roasting and packaging equipment. In 2009 they started generating 95 percent of their own power. John explains, "I look at it as we're just pre-paying our electricity bill for the next eight years."

Maisie Jane's is happy to support this small family farm that has big ideas! Their hard work shows by the top-quality pistachio products they produce.

