

Who's Your Farmer Profile: English Fruit Farm, Willcox, AZ



When it comes to longevity, the English Family Orchard takes the cake! Dwight English laughs and says “we were one of the 13 original colonies.” That is, Dwight and English Fruit Farm has been at Tucson Farmers Market at St. Philip’s Plaza since its inception eleven years ago and has been attending local farmers markets in Arizona for over 14 years. Dwight grew up on an apple orchard in Farmington, NM. In 1980 Dwight and Karla moved the family to Willcox in 1980, starting English Fruit Farm on 10 acres of orchard planted in 1965. In two years, Dwight and Karla had planted an additional 10 acres of orchard. Help arrived with the birth of children Renae, Paul, Adam, and Denise who were all raised and contribute to the farm’s various tasks even today. Paul, who graduated from the University of Arizona in 2001 with a degree in Agribusiness Management, is working fulltime on the farm lending his business management expertise. Adam and his family moved to Willcox and help out at the farm and with the cider plant. In 2008, at the age of 2, Nathan Leroy English became the 5th generation orchardist in the English Family. His Great, Great Grandfather, Paul B. English owned/operated an orchard in Farmington, NM in the 1940s.

1984, the English Family Orchard box label with the family picking apples was developed and delivered statewide. Organic practices were initiated by 1985 on 25 acres of fruit trees becoming Certified in 1988 by OCIA (currently by QAI). In 1995 additional 10 acres of apples, peaches and cherries were planted and again in 2004. English Fruit Farm expanded into cider production with the purchase of a cider plant in 2006. Over 7,000 gallons of cider was made in the fall of 2007 under the name of English Brothers Cider. Because farming in the desert involves careful stewardship of water resources, English Fruit Farm installed water conserving drip irrigation in 2009 that saves tens of thousands of gallons per year with plans to convert total acreage.

English Family Orchard produces some of the earliest apples in the State of Arizona, and in the United States, some ripening as early as July in warmer summers. There are currently 35 acres of apples in varieties Gala, Jonalicious, EarlyTart Gold, GingerGold, Granny Smith, Pink Lady, my favorite, and Fuji. English also produces 5 acres of delicious White and Yellow Peaches and Cherries. Dwight personally claims no loyalty or favoritism to any particular variety over another. He enjoys the full spectrum of real sour to real sweet apples. In fact, varieties are developed on an

ongoing experimental basis grafting varieties with desirable qualities with others. All of this depends on the spring frost cycle which has hit hard the last couple of years explaining the lack of cherries this spring. Look for GingerGolds at the market this year. The farm also depends on consistent labor force which is increasingly difficult to find. When asked about the future Paul simply says that “English Family Orchard plans on selling our excellent fruit at the market as long as possible.”