

The Richards Family

The monthly ag column is highlighting local ag families every other month in addition to its agricultural education articles. It is important to not only know where your food comes from, but also to be able to put a picture and story to the face of those who produce it. This month the Richards Family from Madras will be featured.

Marty and Nancy Richards both attended high school in Sandy, Oregon and were married in 1976. They purchased their first farm, which was 20 acres in 1979 and formed Fox Hollow Ranch. The Richards provided grass hay for the local feed stores and raised a few calves. Also during this time, Marty worked as a union carpenter in Portland and Nancy worked as a licensed tax consultant.

In 1989 they purchased 350 acres in Madras, Oregon and moved the family over the mountain to begin farming full time. Their kids, Gary age 11, Katie age 9, and Kevin age 6 were active helpers on the farm, picking rocks and changing irrigation water. All three kids participated in school sports and were very active in 4-H, each earning a trip to National 4-H Congress. Gary and Kevin were active in FFA and went on to serve as state FFA officers following graduation.

Gary attended OSU for several years and took time off to work as an Agriculture Trainee in Australia before starting his electrician's apprenticeship. Gary and his wife Shannon currently own and operate Top Notch Electric. He recently moved his family and three girls to a home on the family farm so his children get to experience farm life. Katie attended college at Florida Institute of Technology and worked on the space shuttles while interning at Kennedy Space Center. She finished her schooling at OSU graduating with degrees in Computer Engineering and Computer Science. She currently lives in Hillsboro with her husband, Brent, and works for Intel. Kevin also attended OSU graduating with degrees in Economics and Math. He moved to Washington DC to earn his graduate degrees in Economics and Public Policy at Georgetown. He worked as Director of Regulatory Relations with the American Farm Bureau before he, his wife Natalie and their son recently purchased the farm next door to their parents and moved home to the farm.

The Richards hosted 9 agriculture trainees from Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, England, France, and Norway from 1994 through 2002. They provided room and board and a small wage during the trainees' nine month stay with them.

Currently they are growing carrot seed, grass seed, mint oil, wheat and hay on 620 irrigated acres. They utilize technology such as drip irrigation and SIS (Scientific Irrigation Scheduling) to reduce water use. Recently they installed a VFD (Variable Frequency Drive) on their largest pump to reduce energy costs. Also, they installed GPS systems on two tractors to be more efficient which has enabled them to reduce fuel consumption and increase accuracy of herbicide applications. The addition of Roundup Ready Alfalfa to their crop rotation has resulted in a significant reduction in the use of pesticides. They also use no-till and minimum till in their crop rotation as much as possible.

Marty and Nancy have been active volunteers in both the 4-H and FFA programs and were awarded the Oregon State Fair Farm Family of the Year award in 1994. They also helped Mt. Jefferson Livestock 4-H Club produce and distribute a youth farm safety video in 1996. Currently Nancy represents Jefferson County on ECAN (Extension Citizen Advisory Network). They are also members of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

On the farm and at home the Richards place a high value on family activities. They started an annual tradition when the kids were in high school which is referred to as “family bonding,” where they and extended family schedule a fun weekend somewhere which has included Christmas in Australia, and running a marathon together in Sacramento.