

Our farm's beginning dates back to the arrival of my great-great grandparents, Robert and Anne Dunn. They sold their farm in Missouri in 1876, crossed the wide country in a covered wagon with five daughters under the age of ten. This was the summer Custer met his end, and the Native Americans were not pleased about the increasing numbers of whites headed west. There were weeks when the wagon train would set camp for the night, and then pull out again after dark to make camp several miles down the trail where they couldn't be found. When they successfully arrived in WA Territory, there was little time to prepare for winter. They filed for a homestead claim and there have been Dunns and McDonalds raising crops on these farms since.

In the early years, cattle was king here in the west. Robert Dunn brought a herd of Short Horns across the plains with him and continued to develop them here. It didn't take long to find out that the virgin fertile soil here in the Yakima Valley could grow a wide range of crops successfully. Robert Dunn was a trained civil engineer, and he knew if he could provide irrigation water from the river to the land, the desert would bloom. His original survey was the beginning of an irrigation project that now provides water for thousands of acres of crops. He was an early hops farmer, even hand delivering one season's hop crop by hiring a ship to sail his crop down around the Horn to a buyer in Scotland. Our family continued to grow hops for the next 108 years. Prohibition years were tough, with only the export markets providing some sales and income. The world glut of hops drove the price so low in the 1980's that in 1985 we grew our last hop crop and pulled out the hop yards and replaced them with more fruit orchards. The Yakima Valley still has the claim of growing more than 75% of the nation's hops crop.

My great-grandfather Dan McDonald married the eldest Dunn daughter, Ella. Dan followed the building of the Union Pacific Railroad across the plains in the early 1880's. He contracted with them to provide hay for their teams. He would harvest prairie grass and have it stockpiled ahead as they needed it. Once they got as far as the Yakima Valley, he knew this was the place he wanted to stay. The McDonalds, as were the Dunns, were cattlemen and hop farmers. My dad and grandpa got out of the cattle business in the late 1960's. I was old enough though to remember the annual branding/dehorning and the smell that came with it!

Fruit came to the valley in a big way once the railroads came through the valley. The railroad enabled the fruit to get to the big markets back east. Fruit has had a growing importance in the life of our farm, and now that's all we do. We are long-time members of the Snokist Growers Fruit cooperative. They have a cannery for which we grow Bartlett pears, Italian prunes and apples. Snokist sells its processed products directly to grocery store chains, as well as to the military, schools, and other large food service customers. This is where the lion's share of my fruit goes. Snokist also packs fresh apples and pears that I grow.

We have been offering apple gift packs for Christmas for about 19 years now, using only the best fruit that we grow.

Paul McDonald