

MEET ERIN GRUETZMAN: A Love for her Family Farm

Erin Gruetzman of Beilke Family Farm had two options: to become a registered nurse or join the family farm. After carefully considering her love of the outdoors, Erin returned to the farm.

The granddaughter of Philip Beilke, and daughter of Terry and Debbie Beilke, Erin has been working at the third-generation farm since 2004. Ever since she was a young girl, Erin and her brother worked on the farm during the summertime.

Erin studied health in college, yet, in the back of her mind, she always kept the possibility of returning to work on the family farm.

“I always enjoyed [working at the farm]. After I got my health education degree from Western Oregon, I worked in a basement with one window and that was too much inside time for me,” said Erin. “Plus I enjoy my family and have learned so much from my Grandpa, Dad and Mom and enjoyed being back working with them.”

Since she loved the outdoors so much, she ultimately decided to work full-time at the farm rather than pursue a nursing career.

Bought in 1950, Beilke Family Farm in Brooks, Ore. has 275 acres of farmland filled with apple orchards, blueberries, tomatoes, cherries, vegetable seed, grass seed and now, hazelnuts.

Ten of those acres are dedicated to growing 18 different varieties of apples—the crop they are most known for. Historically, blueberries were planted on the farm in 1995, and the farm originally grew peppermint.

“We raised peppermint for a 28 years. We saw that we wouldn’t be able to sustain our farm with what the price of peppermint was in the 90’s, so we started planting grass seed in those acres. We are a small farm so we have to do several things to make sure that we can have income every year,” said Erin.

With farming, you never know what challenges you might face with that particular season. According to Erin, it’s tough to make long-term decisions, work long hours and keep crops that are profitable.

The most satisfying part of farming for Erin is the u-pick that the farm offers for their apples and blueberries.

“I love how you work all year for something and people come and enjoy harvesting the fruit.”

For the blueberries that are sold on the wholesale market, the Beilke's raise it, take it to a processor who packages the blueberries, then sends it to California or the east coast and there is no consumer interaction.

"With the retail u-pick, we get a lot of contact with people in the field and they are excited that you raised something that is nice and can be taken home," said Erin.

U-pick apples, tomatoes and pumpkins are available now.

Beilke Family Farm is a founding member of Marion Farm Loop, and directions to many farms, including Beilke Family Farm, and a calendar of events may be found on marionfarmloop.com.