



**Sierra Gold Nurseries**

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER

GROWING QUALITY FRUIT & NUT TREES  
*Since 1951*

70<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

## Celebrating 70 Years!

1951 TO 2021...AND STILL GROWING STRONG!

It was seventy years ago this fall that our founder, Walter Berg, together with his father-in-law and established orchardist, C.E. Sullivan, planted the seeds and cuttings that would become Sierra Gold Nurseries' first crop of fruit and nut trees.

Seventy years later – while our production practices have evolved and many new technologies have been adopted – our commitment to quality and superior service remains true. Thank you to all our customers and employees for keeping us growing for 70 seasons!

The early vision and commitment for the nursery was simple – quality fruit and nut trees for agriculture together with superior service. These things would always be in demand for orchardists.



Above, Sierra Gold Nurseries founder, Walter Berg, poses near the original monument sign. Right, the first Sierra Gold Nurseries business office.

## From Bamboo to Fiberglass

NEW PLANT STAKES INCREASE TREE HEALTH

This coming season, customers receiving our containerized trees will notice one new feature that will be a little bit different from trees we have delivered in the past. The bamboo stake used to support and train up the trees has now

been replaced by a fiberglass stake. Similar stakes have already been in use with our containerized pistachio rootstock, but now these stakes will be used throughout our containerized tree program.

*"Fiberglass" Continued on page 3*



# Owners' Message

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

70 years in the nursery business has given us some unique perspectives as we deal with the challenges of the day. An unprecedented drought here in the west has reset the thinking on which crops can be farmed based on each farmer's unique location and water availability. Some can keep planting new orchards, or rejuvenating old orchards, while others make the tough decision to remove orchards without replanting. Most farmers we talk with are focused on using their limited water supply to maintain their permanent orchard crops, instead of farming annual crops. That is a tough position to be in for our growers who have generations of experience farming their land.

And, where did all the workers go? Well, we all know the ongoing pandemic has had an impact on the

workforce, and agriculture has not been immune to the changing supply of workers. We had "NOW HIRING" banners flying here at the nursery for the first time in memory. Credit to our management team here who have embraced new technologies and lean-flow manufacturing practices to keep our smaller crews more productive. A huge thank you to our loyal and dedicated employees who kept working through all the COVID-19 restrictions.

Challenges will always be with us – the key is to keep seeking solutions and be flexible to fit the times. We are committed to keep doing everything possible to earn your business and be the best fruit and nut tree nursery possible.



Thank you for your business – we are grateful for the trust you have placed in Sierra Gold Nurseries to be your tree supplier for 70 years. As our founder Walter Berg was fond of saying – the best is yet to come! Keep the faith folks.

Sincerely,  
**Brian Berg**  
 Chief Executive Officer  
**Jack Poukish**  
 President

Left, the original Sierra Gold Nurseries fleet, circa 1951.

Below, a small portion of today's Sierra Gold Nurseries fleet and facilities.



# In Memoriam, Larry Fuller

1940-2021

Remembering a prominent Colorado Orchardist and long-time Sierra Gold Nurseries Representative. Larry Fuller

was a mentor and coach to many. His guidance and strong support will be greatly missed. He was and always will be "Bulldog Tough".



# USDA Releases "Yorizane"

## NEW SELF-FERTILE ALMOND VARIETY

The Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, has released a new variety of almond designated the 'Yorizane' cultivar. This new self-fertile cultivar was developed from a cross made in 1998 between the self-fertile cultivar Tuono and an unreleased USDA-ARS almond selection.

In 2014, this cross eventually made its way into the UC regional variety trials located in Butte, Stanislaus and Madera counties. These trials were planted in 2014, and after a few years of successful observation at these varied trial sites, the variety was finally released in the fall of 2020.

In all regions of the variety trial, Yorizane has performed well with consistent, strong yields. Yorizane has a similar kernel size to Nonpareil and yields a similar, high crack-out rate. Despite its high crack-out percentage it has a more well sealed shell compared to Nonpareil, while also yielding a considerably lower percentage of doubles. The kernel itself is smooth and attractive with few defects.

We have obtained virus free budwood from Foundation Plant Services in Davis to start a certified mother orchard. Availability is currently limited, but some inventories should be available for planting starting in Fall of 2022. For more information about this new cultivar, please contact your local SGN field representative.



Above, Yorizane has a similar kernel size to Nonpareil.  
 Below, a mature Yorizane orchard in bloom.



# "FIBERGLASS" CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

There are many reasons for this change, but the number one reason is plant health. The fiberglass stakes are roughly half the diameter of the old bamboo stake. This thinner diameter means we are minimizing root disturbance when we place the stake into the Ellepot™. Another plant health benefit to a synthetic stake is the reduction of possible pathogens compared to the bamboo stake, which over time would rot away. This is not an issue with the sterile fiberglass stake and because the fiberglass will not rot away, customers will not have to worry quite as much about a rotted-out bamboo stake snapping in the wind. While the fiberglass stake is not quite as rigid

as the bamboo stake, we have ample evidence from many plantings where the fiberglass stakes have been used that shows they hold up great. Other benefits include increased airflow as the plants grow in place here at the nursery and increased light interception. That means healthier plants and better growth!

Finally, we are happy to report that early feedback appears to be extremely positive. One customer who recently planted an 80 acre block of almond trees with these fiberglass stakes was very happy with what he saw. There were less stakes to replace at planting and the grower noted less breakage



after making spray applications with a hooded sprayer, a common issue with the old bamboo stakes. We hope all our growers will be equally excited about this change!

# New Walnut Varieties Getting Traction

## THE BUZZ ON DURHAM AND UC WOLFSKILL

While most customers are still planting Chandler and Howard, there have been a few new additions to our walnut product line getting some attention.

The first is Durham (formerly known as UC93-028-20) which was released in 2017 by UC Davis and should be harvesting 2-3 weeks ahead of Chandler. There are already significant numbers of trees planted of this variety and so we've had a decent first look at it.

Overall, the reports are great! It's a very high-quality nut, with 55% edible yields, and good consistent light color, which seems to hold up well. Overall it seems to be a vigorous tree with good architecture; the only knock on it seems to be that it may come into production with less yield than Chandler in the early years. Only time will tell!



Above, 'Durham' offers a plump, light-colored kernel and smooth, attractive shell.

Right, 'Durham' leaves a few days before Chandler and has had very little blight.

Photo by Chuck Leslie, UC Davis Walnut Improvement Program Director.



Left, unpruned, unheaded, 5th-leaf, 'UC-Wolfskill' tree.

Below, 'UC Wolfskill' kernels are slightly larger than Chandler nuts of the same age, with excellent, Chandler-like colorshell.

Photo by Janine Hasey.

Another variety generating quite a bit of buzz is UC Wolfskill, also by UC Davis, which was released in 2020. While there is less acreage planted, quite a few growers are really excited about the upside potential. It looks as though UC Wolfskill will have really nice color, almost up to Chandler standard, and better edible yields again hovering in the 55% range. It also seems to have few of the early yield issues of Durham, and may come in 3-4 days earlier than Durham, and well ahead of Chandler. We still have a lot to learn, but this could be one of the most promising walnut varieties yet!

Oh yeah, and, in case you were wondering, we did plant some of these in our orchards too! We have 27 acres of third leaf Durhams coming into production, and we planted 25 acres of UC Wolfskill this spring. We are excited to learn more about these new varieties along with the rest of the industry.



# Nursery Gets Lean

## IMPLEMENTATION OF LEAN FLOW PRODUCTION PRACTICES

We're all aware it has been getting more and more difficult to find high quality employees and control costs. As a nursery, we are especially vulnerable because so many of our small, sensitive plants must be touched by human hands! When you add ever-increasing regulatory burden, a pandemic, and an historic increase in raw materials, it is hard to imagine how we can continue to provide an affordable product, especially when so many of our customers are also feeling the effects of increased expenses.



So we had to think outside the box a little. We contracted with an outside company called Flowvision who specializes in Lean Manufacturing consulting for horticultural companies. This is not the first time the nursery has brought in some outside help to design a packing line or analyze a process, but this was the first time we had applied it at full scale. We realized since a significant percentage of our nursery trees are now containerized, we could really push the envelope when it came to moving trees to specially designed sorting, grading, sticking, shipping and budding lines.

It has made a huge difference. As some of you with experience with Lean or other advanced manufacturing technology can probably attest, we started seeing all the things we



Sierra Gold's Lakhwinder Cheema tracks sorting data for the new flow system.

needed to make happen. Our costs started going down, our quality started going up, and we were able to shrink the lead times on orders across the nursery. And, our employees really seemed to get excited about being part of the process of building and tracking new systems. So far our experiences seems to show that if you work smarter, not harder, it can be a win-win for your organization and for your customers.

# Lori Van den Heuvel

## LONG-TIME NURSERY SALES COORDINATOR RETIRES

After a stellar 42-year career in our sales office, Lori decided to retire at the end of June this year. Lori started at the Nursery when she was just 19 years old as a secretary in the sales office – back when everything was hand-typed and before any computers!

Lori performed a multitude of roles over the years in our main office – everything from Sales Secretary, Assistant Sales Coordinator, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Inventory Management, Sales Coordinator and Customer Experience Manager. Over her long career Lori worked with countless customers and over 90 different sales people who represented Sierra Gold to the orchard marketplace all over the United States. Lori has been an excellent and loyal Sierra Gold employee even when faced with many challenges

over the years. She says sometimes the counts would be off and having to deal with tree shortages was never fun. Predicting what to grow and learning all the varieties and rootstocks kept her on her toes. Some of her favorite things about working at Sierra Gold were working for a family-owned business, the customers and fellow employees who became friends, working to support all the sales folks, taking pride in helping customers with their tree needs and giving great service.

Lori witnessed the growth and transformation of Sierra Gold – from a traditional field-grown bareroot nursery to a modern containerized nursery utilizing micro-propagation and greenhouses. Everything keeps changing – Lori would often say.



Lori and her husband Mark have two daughters and five grandchildren – who now keep Lori on her toes! We salute Lori and congratulate her for her long tenure, her many contributions and for being one of the many fine loyal Sierra Gold employees who have enabled us to continue to grow over the years.

Enjoy a well-deserved and long retirement Lori!

# New Customer Plantings

OFF TO A GOOD START!

1. New Walnut Planting | Sutter County
2. New Prune Planting | Sutter County
3. New Pistachio Planting | Sutter County
4. New Apple Planting | Washington State
5. New Cherry Planting | Washington State
6. New Chandler/RX-1 Walnut Planting | Sutter County
7. New Almond Planting | Glenn County
8. New Almond Planting | Tulare County



Dr. Micah E. Stevens  
Research Laboratory Manager

## New Faces in the Lab

Sierra Gold Nurseries is always looking for the best and brightest team members so we can continue being a world-class technical nursery operation. Well, we think we got lucky with two of our latest hires. You won't see them around much since they perform mainly behind the scenes work, but we thought we should take some time to introduce them, so you know who is behind your plants!

Dr. Micah E. Stevens is our new Research Laboratory Manager, and has quite the pedigree. He received his M.S. and Ph.D in hardwood tree micropropagation and genetics from the University of Purdue, in 2016. From there he was hired by a commercial California nursery, Pro Tree, supervising their tissue culture lab producing millions of apples and cherry rootstock.

*Continued across fold...*

Dr. Stevens joined the Sierra Gold Nurseries team in early 2020, and we're sure his experience will be helpful! At Sierra Gold Micah is tasked with improving protocols for efficiency in the tissue culture lab, as well as doing lots of new product development (avocados..... pecans..... stay tuned)! He has also taken over our genetic work and is providing a whole lot of help as we transition our breeding program to using more genetic tools.

Bailey Von Bockern is our new Quality

Control Lab Manager. She comes to us from UC Davis, where she ran the production of the Plant Transformation facility. There she oversaw micropropagation and transformation of all sorts of different crops like roses, strawberries and avocados.

At Sierra Gold Nurseries, she is focusing on production and making sure all our processes are streamlined and free from inefficiencies and defects. Keep those plants coming Bailey!



Bailey Von Bockern  
Quality Control Lab Manager



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