

ASK THE GATER



Robinson family members pack apples in Wilderville, circa 1907. Photo: Josephine County Historical Society.

What commercial crops have been grown in the Applegate Valley?

BY LISA E BALDWIN

Commercial agriculture in our Applegate Valley communities has changed quite significantly since the first farming began in the 1850s to provide fresh vegetables to miners. It didn't take long, though, for agriculture to become a major industry, the fertile land producing an abundance of a wide variety of crops.

Not surprisingly, hay was one of the first crops grown and sold. It is still in the top five in agricultural sales. Hop flowers were also an early agricultural success. In 1888, more than 70,000 pounds of hops were shipped from Josephine County and, in 1922, the local hop industry netted \$100,000 from 13 railcar loads that were shipped to Europe. With the boom in craft breweries, locally grown hops are making a comeback, albeit on a smaller scale.

Early homesteaders in the Applegate Valley commonly planted fruit and nut orchards. Apples, pears, and walnuts did particularly well in our climate, and the

surplus produce from a family's orchard provided extra income. By 1900, Josephine County was quickly becoming Oregon's major apple producer, but the economic shifts in the run-up to World War I put the brakes on orchardists' prosperity. Railroads' freight rates skyrocketed, and many growers took out their orchards to make room for other crops. By 1917, 90 percent of the apple orchards in our region were gone.

The wine grape industry that our valley is famous for today took off in popularity in 1906 with the arrival in Grants Pass of Tokay grape roots and cuttings, enough for 127,000 vines to be planted locally. Today, wine grapes are second only to hay when ranked by the number of acres in production of the crop (in Josephine County and Jackson County).

As our communities and agriculture grew and developed, there was a great diversification of crops, including watermelons, cane berries, mint, and much more. In 1916, the Utah Beet Sugar Company built a sugar refinery in Grants Pass to process the abundant sugar beets. Also, large fields were planted with gladioli, which were cultivated for the bulbs, but the flowers provided a secondary crop; in 1925 the Jewell Ranch shipped 1,200 cut gladiola flowers daily during blooming season. The local bulb industry stayed strong into the 1950s. There were large shipments of tomatoes and string beans and, with the opening of a cannery in Grants Pass, tomatoes were sent to markets far outside southern Oregon. Old-timers said the whole town smelled like ketchup.

While much has changed, agriculture continues to be an important part of our economy and a defining feature of our Applegate Valley way of life.

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Have a question about the Applegate Valley? Ask the Gater! Send your query to gater@applegater.org.

Workers in the hop yards worked on stilts to tie up the long vines in late spring, and to cut them down in the fall harvest. This photo was taken in the late 1930s in the Eismann hop yard in the Fort Vannoy area. Photo: Josephine County Historical Society.



••• BIZBITS •••

In April, Laura Avants, owner of the Wilderville Store, re-opened the restaurant next door, now named the **Creekside Diner**. Patrons will enjoy a full menu, with breakfast, lunch, and dinner offerings of classic American diner fare. Customer favorites are the Reuben sandwich and the pizzas. The restaurant is open for brunch Sunday. Currently, brunch is ordered from the regular menu, but Laura has plans for a buffet brunch, perhaps a champagne brunch, coming soon. The prices at the Creekside are great, and the atmosphere is comfortable and welcoming, with tables inside and out. The outdoor space is covered and sheltered from the wind, and the long lunch counter that runs the length of the back deck overlooks Slate Creek, just a mile or so above its confluence with the Applegate. It is truly a beautiful setting in the shade of big trees with the sound of the creek running below.



Creekside Diner owner Laura Avants and breakfast cook Grant Gustafson on the deck overlooking Slate Creek. Photo: Lisa Baldwin.

Laura and her husband, John Tracy, bought the property in 2002, after deciding to relocate from Charleston, South Carolina, to be closer to family. John's family was in Nevada, and Laura's mother, local artist Carol Phillipson, was living on Wonder Mountain. Carol told them that the historic store was for sale, and it turned out to be exactly what they were looking for. After John passed in 2012, Laura leased the restaurant a couple of times, but neither of those ventures were long-term successes. Laura is committed to making the Creekside Diner a neighborhood favorite, a gathering spot in the heart of Wilderville. "We need a place like this in our community," she said. "I know we had a bumpy start, with all new staff and the new menu, but we are ready now, running smoothly!" Check out the menu, available online on Facebook, or Google "Creekside Diner" (Laura cautions folks to search Google for Creekside Diner, not Creekside Diner and Deli, which was the name of one of the former iterations of the Wilderville restaurant). Come try it for yourself; you will be glad you did!

Open 8 am to 8 pm Tuesday-Saturday; 9 am - 2 pm Sunday; closed Mondays. 7845 Old Redwood Highway, Wilderville. 541-415-1907



Megan McGinnis, Colin Kress, Margaret Patterson, Tom Patterson in their Cascadia Vineyard, Wilderville. Photo: Lisa Baldwin.

There is a beautiful new winery in the lower Applegate, and it is a family affair. **Cascadia Vineyards and Winery** on Slate Creek, was established in 2019 by Colin Kress and his partner, Megan McGinnis; Colin's mother, Margaret Patterson; and her husband, Tom Patterson. The team of four are hands-on vintners, and it's "all hands on deck" as they work together to produce exceptional wines. Their first vintages were made with grapes sourced from neighboring vineyards—Solero, North Applegate Road; Deer Creek Vineyard, Illinois Valley; Apricity Vineyard, Jerome Prairie Road; and Robas

Vineyard, Helms Road. The Cascadia team spent four seasons rehabbing the 40-year-old vines of the Robas Vineyard, which are now producing the fine fruit only possible from well-aged vines. In 2022, their intention is to use all Josephine County grapes, sourced from Robas, Apricity, and Schmidt vineyards.

Winemaker and vineyard manager Colin Kress brings 16 years' experience to Cascadia. He honed his craft in the AVA (American Viticultural Area) of California's Santa Rita Hills, climbing the ranks from cellar-hand to head winemaker in four years and, in the next seven years, collecting numerous 90-plus-point accolades at Babcock Winery. Megan McGinnis, assistant winemaker and marketing director, began her sommelier studies in 2014 and continued her education with Flying Goat Cellars, learning specialized winemaking techniques. Megan also ran the wine program at the prestigious Ballard Inn & Gathering Table in Ballard, California. Margaret Patterson is the office manager for Cascadia Vineyards and Winery, and Tom Patterson is the bookkeeper. Both assist in the tasting room and vineyard, as well as with bottling the finished wines.

During the summer months, Cascadia hosted an off-site tasting room on the deck at Creekside Diner in Wilderville. They are currently looking for the right space for a permanent tasting room, preferably in downtown Grants Pass. The Wine Club will fully launch in fall 2022. Private tastings are available by appointment Friday-Sunday at the winery at 8489 Old Redwood Highway, Wilderville. Call 805-689-9040 or send an email to info@thecascadiacompany.com to schedule. More information can be found on thecascadiacompany.com. Find them on Facebook as Cascadia Vineyards and Winery.

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