Gunkel Orchards
Maryhill, Washington
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Introduction

- Gunkel Orchards is an orchard and vineyard business, growing sweet cherries, apricots, nectarines, peaches, and a variety of wine grapes in south-central Washington State.
- The business, in its third generation, is owned and operated by brothers Ron and Dan Gunkel, producing fruit on approximately 300 acres in total.
- Gunkel Orchards sells produce locally in their own fruit stand, as well as to companies and businesses all across the Pacific Northwest, but usually to those in the Seattle and Portland areas. Some of the fruit grown in Maryhill may eventually make it as far as British Columbia, Canada or even across the Pacific ocean to some Asian countries.
- Despite being a rather profitable business, Gunkel Orchards does not deliver bulk deliveries to its customers, but rather they send semi trucks to pick up the order at the fruit stand.
- With the installment of a new cherry sorting machine and packing line a couple of years ago, Gunkel Orchards has been able to increase sorting and packing efficiency as well as cut manual labor costs. Speculations say that the machine will be able to “pay for itself” within five to seven years.

Documentation

Responsibilities performed: irrigation installation, construction equipment operator, spraying, mowing, irrigation control, weighing cherries, storing fruit in cooler, hauling fruit from field to fruit stand, weedding, pruning, vertebrate pest control, machine maintenance and fueling, and move ladders. Basically, anything that needed to be done, I was second in command, being in charge of and responsible for myself and the work that was done.

Summary

This experience was able to cultivate my professional growth by allowing me the opportunity to experience work in an established and profitable orchard/vineyard business. I learned how to obtain a rhythm between orchard work and domestic life, from getting enough sleep to putting in the maximum amount of hours possible. I learned how to complete several new tasks without need of supervision. More importantly, I learned that it is most often critical that I became proficient in a given assignment, or else it was likely that I would not be trusted with another assignment for an extended amount of time. Luckily, I’m a fast learner most of the time and excelled at performing my duties in the orchard, whether it be irrigating an entire orchard site or simply weed spraying the tree rows. From such wide variety of work orders assigned to me, this experience taught me just how busy an orchard manager is and will always be, unless he/she is able to trust others with vitally important assignments. This was made evidently clear to me at this business as there were only about three assistant managers, including myself, and my mentor who was doing the work of two or three people even though he owned half of the company.