

Estancia Valley Corn and Pinto Beans



Ideal Growing Conditions Assist Family Commitment to Quality

One big draw to the East Mountains that is often not noticed by the general public is its agriculture, especially when crops of its renowned sweet corn and pinto beans are harvested.

The reputation of the area's sweet corn is championed by the Schwebach farming family, who continue to find new ways to market its crops.

Dean Schwebach said his father, Don, was the one who focused on the quality sweet corn as a primary crop for the family farms — one in Moriarty, the other just outside of town along the road to Estancia. Originally, Schwebach said it was just called "Moriarty corn," but when others sold corn as "Moriarty corn" that didn't have the same quality, the emphasis was put on that it was "Schwebach corn." The Schwebach Farm also has a modern website, developed by his wife, Ivelise, and a storefront, Schwebach Farm Market, located at 807 Martinez Road in Moriarty.

Those efforts have resulted in the Schwebachs, making the family name synonymous with quality for all of its produce. Dean Schwebach said he works to maintain that reputation, employing organic practices in the growing — something that today's consumers care about. He said he is working to keep the farms sustainable by installing solar arrays for energy needs and is looking into installing a drip irri-

gation system to conserve water. The market will be enhanced by offering cooked dishes from a food truck using fresh produce from the farm.

Dean and Ivelise Schwebach have six children who are all involved in the farming operations. They said they hope at least one of their children will carry on the family tradition that goes back at least six generations. It was Dean Schwebach's grandfather, Eugene, who first bought a farm in the Estancia Valley before his father struck out on his own with the second farm. Although he grew up on the family farms, Dean Schwebach said he hadn't intended to follow in his father's footsteps, but didn't find working in a business office to be what he enjoyed.

"I grew up working in the outdoors," he said. "When I was working in the city, I was always behind a desk."

When his father was ready to retire, Dean Schwebach stepped into his shoes and found they fit him nicely.

Fresh produce desired by consumers

Also helping family farms is the growing consumer desire for locally grown food that is fresh, said Steve Ness of Ness Farms, who still works at the family farm outside of Estancia. Freshness is guaranteed with Ness pinto beans, he said.

"When someone buys a bag of pinto beans on a shelf at a major store, who

knows how long it's been sitting there," Ness said. "When you buy a bag of our beans, they've only been bagged since September or October."

Although each year's crop of pinto beans sells out by the end of July, any leftover beans are tossed out by summer, he said. Ness credits the freshness, cleanliness of the beans and the altitude for giving their beans their flavor.

"People also like how fast they cook and that's because of the freshness," he said.

Like the Schwebachs, Ness said he is investing in ensuring the crop's quality, spending \$300,000 last year on new cleaning equipment.

All these efforts add up to people coming out to the Estancia Valley to buy produce, he said.

"The farm-to-table interest is really huge," he said.

Ness Farms is a family-owned business started more than 35 years ago by Eugene and Sandy Ness. The farm was first used for growing pinto beans, silage and alfalfa. Over the last 25 years, Ness Farms also began growing pumpkins for the wholesale market. Due to popular demand for the public to pick their own pumpkins direct from the field, Ness Farms opened "The Happy Lil' Pumpkin Stand" located south of Estancia on state Highway 41, where it continued for nearly 20 years.

To learn more about Ness Farms, visit nessfarms.net online.