



The Pride of Being a Family-Owned Farm in California

by Bonnie Swank

I'll never forget the first time my sister-in-law visited our home ranch. She looked out across the fields she commented, "just think of all the houses you could build." Is that what people think when they see fields of row crops or acres of orchards? Don't they see the ancestry or history of our land? We are generational Californians and our history was made here — on this land, in this soil. We are proud, hard-working people whose ancestors came to California to start a new life for their families. And through hard work and tireless effort, they did. Dick's great-grandfather Bill Maggini came by boat from Switzerland to San Francisco and homesteaded in South San Benito County. Dick's grandmother's family also homesteaded here and that is where his grandparents met.

In 1928, grandpa Bill had saved enough money to purchase, along with his brother, a 90-acre parcel in north county. The partnership didn't work and Grandpa Bill kept 60 acres, the 60 acres we call the "home ranch" today. Growing up I would visit my grandparents on their farm in Escalon. I loved visiting them and spending time on the farm. Unfortunately my grandfather died of a heart attack when I was only ten. I was young and don't remember the particulars but I do know my two uncles picked up where grandpa left off and continued farming.

Note: Bonnie and Dick Swank continue farming and bring the produce they grow to many of the local Farmers Markets. Meet them at one.

When my father came home from WWII, my mother was renting a room from his parents while going to college — romance blossomed. They married, had a baby, and my father decided to follow in his Uncle Elmer's footsteps and become a dairyman. They built a Sears & Roebuck mail order house and a small dairy. This is where things get interesting. Uncle Elmer and his herd of heir shires were rather famous in the dairy world. When my father was 10 years old, he and Uncle Elmer headed down to southern California to show the cows at the fair. The train they were traveling on was stopped in Fresno and my father was taken off, considered a free loader because he was not Elmer's son, just a nephew, and given bus money. My father traveled on his own and got to the fairgrounds before the train,



making his bed in the stall and waiting for Elmer and the cows to arrive.

Dick was born in Calistoga and grew up on a dairy. Little did I know when I met Dick that the story of my father and uncle Elmer was known in the dairy world across California, which tickled my father to no end? When Dick was a senior in high school, his mother and father decided to move the cows to Hollister. They rented property where the corn maze is now and lived on the farm his grandma Maggini owned. In 1986, the cows were sold and Dick started farming. It's been our passion to keep the family farm intact, just as it was when grandpa Maggini bought it in 1928. We work hard every day to keep that dream alive. California is a beautiful state and a wonderful place to live. A place full of history and passion; not just a place to build houses on. 🍷