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Kelowna Capital News

# Orchardist family adapts to apple harvest evolution



Dorenberg Orchards in Lake Country is this year's winner of the Gold Apple Award. Celebrating the award are (from left) Raymond Fisher (orchard manager), Madeleine Van Roechoudt (office manager) and Marc Van Roechoudt (owner).

Sean Connor/Capital News

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The orchard industry's annual Golden Apple Award goes this year to a Lake Country family who operate Dorenberg Orchards—60 acres

where they've specialized in growing just three varieties: Sunrise, Royal Gala and Ambrosia.

Marc Van Roechoudt has seen a lot of changes in the industry in the 60 years he's been on that property, but he's followed in his father's footsteps in more than one way.

His father was presented with the Compact Orchard Award in 1967 by the B.C. Fruit Growers' Association as well.

Louis Van Roechoudt bought the property in 1949 and suffered the loss of the soft fruits in 1950 when temperatures plunged in January.

He was a pioneer in planting dwarf varieties of apples, and his son describes him as the "horticulturist."

At the time the family didn't even have a tractor and used a Jeep instead—which they also used to go to town, recalls Marc.

Today, the entire acreage is planted in high density and orchard manager Raymond Fisher's life is made easier with a tractor in place of the old Jeep.

As well, Roechoudt's daughter Madeleine has now returned to the orchard to take over.

In addition to the advantages of location—they have a west-facing slope toward Okanagan Lake with good air drainage—he figures their success is because of the pruning, thinning and soil improvements.

"We use all the tools we can find," he said. "We pay attention to details and we don't cut corners."

They've had their ups and downs, beginning with that first serious frost.

After Marc returned to the Okanagan and began to take over from his father, they gambled with new varieties such as Discovery, Summerred,

Jonagold, Empire and Braeburn. They found they didn't return the cost of production, so all were grafted over to Ambrosia.

At the industry's 40th annual Horticultural Forum in Penticton today, Dave and Deb Powell, of Summerland, were presented with the Compact Orchard Award, while Doug Johnson, of Summerland, received the Soft Fruit Award.

Honourable mention recognition was extended to Balshinder and Gurmeet Brar, of Cawston.

The BCFGGA represents 850 commercial orchards in B.C., an industry that generates more than \$130 million in fresh fruit sales annually at wholesale.

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