

- ▣ home
- ▣ music & nightlife
- ▣ movies
- ▣ the arts
- ▣ restaurants
- ▣ classifieds
- ▣ columns
- ▣ news & features
 - SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
 - SILICON VALLEY
 - SONOMA / NAPA / MARIN
- ▣ the papers
- ▣ advertise
- ▣ about us
- ▣ contact

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11.05.08

[home](#) | [metro santa cruz index](#) | [features](#) | [santa cruz](#) | [feature story](#)

Core Values

Prevedelli Farms grows delicious reminders of sweet days gone by

By Christina Waters

Apple-cheeked Nick Prevedelli is a man in exactly the perfect spot. Perfect in terms of his life's work tending apple orchards, and perfect in terms of where he does it. On a generous and undulating spread of land bordered by berry fields and overlooking the ocean, he and his extended family harvest 24 varieties of organic apples fit to tempt Eve and delight home bakers all over the Bay Area.



Photograph by Carlie Statsky

The Ripe Stuff: Sam Lathrope (left) and Nick Prevedelli tend the family orchard.

"The farmers markets have really been great for us," says Prevedelli, whose eyes, incidentally, are the exact shade of a ripe pippin. The Bay Area's celebrated and vigorously patronized farmers markets are the logical niche for the Watsonville-based Prevedellis, who as a result are able to manage every phase of their output, from harvesting and packing to delivering and selling.

Prevedelli leads me into the clean cool interior of the orchard's warehouse. "It's been good for our family. We all work the markets in the South Bay, including the Cabrillo market, for over 26 years," he grins.

The family includes Nick, his dad Frank, mother Sylvia and his sister, brother-in-law and nephew. Nick's Italian grandfather settled first in Soquel. The orchard has been operating since 1945.

Inside the warehouse, the incredible aroma hits me. I am stunned by the gorgeous perfume of thousands of apples. The room smells like old roses and grappa. I am swept away to my grandfather's back porch in Boulder Creek, scented by rows of pears picked from his trees every winter.

"Apples keep for a long time at temperatures just above freezing," Prevedelli explains as we walk to another barn and an even larger cold storage room. The bins have been filled starting from the beginning of the summer. "Gravensteins are first," he says. Each bin holds about 1,100 pounds of fruit, fruit that will be packed into trucks each Friday. "We leave at 5am on Saturday, do the markets, then reload and do it again the next day," he says, handing me a pear that he swears will be sweeter than any I've ever tasted.

"Go ahead," he says, his green eyes gleaming. "Take a bite."

I don't hesitate. Grainy and floral, it is as he says, utterly sweet. And yet it's still got great crunch.

Nick's brother-in-law Sam Lathrop helps manage the farm, and he joins us walking through acres of fruit trees. This is what a lot of America must have looked like a century ago, I realize as my eyes take in the curving rows of trees, some newly picked, many heavy with large, perfect fruit. Nick Prevedelli doesn't like to mention a figure, but he admits there are at least 100 acres in cultivation. Apples and pears take up most acreage. But in addition, there are now berries ("most of our neighbors who used to have apples now have berries," he says; "they can get more money for the harvest"), and the farm also harvests butternut squash and green beans. The berries are turned into amazing jam, as I discover back in the warehouse. After sampling everything from a Very Berry blend to a sensuous pear butter, I decide that the pure blackberry preserve is my favorite.

What's the customers' favorite apple? Prevedelli and Lathrop both shake their heads and smile. "Fuji!" Prevedelli doesn't entirely approve. "People just like them," he says. "But the Mutsu is so much better than a Fuji--they stay crisp, they taste tart and sweet--people just don't realize." In Prevedelli's opinion, the Fuji is "the Red Delicious of the future." Luckily, Lathrop notes, "People like all kinds." The Prevedellis' orchards grow apples with names like Empire, Winter Banana, Jonagold, Fuji, Mutsu, Sundowner, Pink Lady and of course Granny Smith.

Most of the trees are semidwarf 10-footers. "We replanted the taller ones because it's too hard to pick them on the ladder," Prevedelli explains. Everything here is done by hand. And happy schoolkids regularly visit to pick apples right off the trees.

Saving the best for last, Prevedelli presents me with a shiny crimson Mutsu. Becoming Snow White, I take a bite. Complex, firmly textured, almost effervescent with sweet/tart, flavor, it captures me. I have just tasted the best apple on the planet. Nick Prevedelli beams. He knows exactly how good it is.

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*PREVEDELLI FARM is at the Aptos
Farmers Market, Cabrillo College,
6500 Soquel Dr., Aptos, every Saturday from 8am to noon.*

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