

THE HISTORY OF COVERT FARMS



1959 George Covert, part owner of Hayman & Covert Tomato Packing Company in Tracy, California first heard of the Okanagan while talking to his broker in Calgary, who mentioned a tuck load of apricots from Oliver, BC. Tired of the rat race in California, and intrigued by a climate suitable to grow soft fruit and vegetables in Canada, George came to the Okanagan Valley to see for himself. On a weekend trip in the dead of winter he discovered and purchased the undeveloped mesa North of Oliver, that was to become Covert Farms. (Photo caption: George and Winifred Covert)



1961 Having sold his partnership in the packing company, George brought his wife Winnifred, and their 2 sons Calvin and Michael to Oliver to start their new Canadian life and Covert Farms. Calvin managed their cattle ranch on Richter Pass in Osoyoos (now owned by Ace Elkink), while Mike helped George in the vegetable business. Winnifred, kept the books and sold produce out of the window of the old office. (Photo caption: George and son Mike 1969)



The farm in those days was not much different then it is now. Growing large acreages of tomatoes, onion,

potatoes, corn and grapes, while struggling to find enough labour and equipment, and being dependant on the whims of the weather.
An article **Profits and**

Problems from a **1969**

Farming Today reminds us how times really haven't changed in the years since the Coverts came to Canada. In fact, if you look closely you'll still see some of the same old tractors, trucks, forklifts and people that were here when the farm began over 45 years ago!

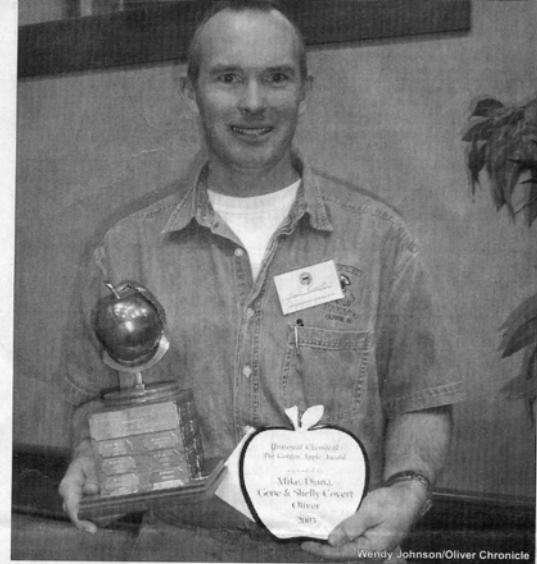


(Photo caption: The Covert Farm Yard 1964)

From the 1970's until **1989**, the year of the grape pull-out, Covert Farms was one of the larger vineyards in the Okanagan Valley (180 acres). The grapes were French Hybrids, Okanagan Reisling and Labruscas, such as "White Diamond", which, truth be told, made consistently unremarkable "Chateau Okanagan River Channel" wines.

In the early **80's**, George, always a horse lover, decided that it was time to get back to the good ol' days, and draft horses were reintroduced to farming in the Okanagan valley. Soon the yard was filled with the wholesome sound of plodding hooves and clanking wagons as the teams of Belgians and Percherons hauled loads of cucumbers and onions and tomatoes through the yard. The horses were a beautiful sight and reminded us of times gone by, but every now and then, they would get tired of standing in the hot sun for hours at a time and take off, galloping through the yard with boxes of tomatoes and cucumbers flying off the wagon behind them. Tractors on the other hand can be put away for the night, and you don't have to worry about them going anywhere! (Photo Caption: Horses Working at Covert Farms)





Golden Apple - getting down to the crunch

Hard work and innovative ideas continue to pay off for Mike, Diana, Gene and Shelly Covert. The four family members who run the 300-acre vegetable, fruit and berry operation were the recipients of this year's Golden Apple Award at the Horticultural Forum in Penticton. The award is given to the grower who best exemplifies the aims of growers in general. A panel of judges visits nominated orchards, looks at yields, packouts and the general operations of the grower. Gene Covert who accepted the award on behalf of his family said the honour "comes as a big surprise." He noted they enjoyed taking what they had grown and finding value-added solutions, such as developing a premier label for their Ambrosia apple. "We are marketing them under our Pancho brand."

1985 with the imminent grape pull-out, Mike realized a need for change and we planted our first high density block of Gala apples, the new sensation from New Zealand. The roaring apple business brought 80 acres of high-production blocks of Galas and Ambrosias, numbering 680 to 3200 trees to the acre making Covert Farms one of the leading apple growers in the Okanagan. (Photo Caption: Gene Covert Accepting the Golden Apple Award)

1996 At the age of 86, George Covert passed away leaving his son Michael and daughter in-law Diana to run the show. Mike's son, Gene, was also becoming involved with the farm at that time also and a new father-son duo was evolving. (Photo caption: George Covert)



2002 Thanks to Gene's creative wife Shelly "Pancho's Country Market," was born out of the old draft-horse barn and is now the Farm's dedicated retail outlet. There we offer the same great produce as well as fresh baked pies and muffins, light breakfast and lunch, gourmet coffees and a charming

and relaxing setting to enjoy a summer afternoon, a morning coffee before work, or a refreshing smoothie after a beautiful hike up McIntyre Bluff. (Photo Caption: Pancho's Patio)



Inspired by good food, fun and maybe a little too much sun, Diana and Shelly Covert introduced the first "Festival of the Tomato" as a way of promoting agriculture in the Okanagan Valley and enjoying the finer things in life. Why not play with your food?



2004 At the age of 60, Michael Covert passed away suddenly, leaving the farm in the hands of his wife Diana, son and daughter in-law Gene and Shelly, mother Winifred and daughter Ashley.
(caption: Mike and Diana Covert with their Airplane.)



2005 With the wine industry booming and land being in high demand Gene & Shelly Covert collaborated with Kirby & Crystal Froese to start a small winery. Dunham & Froese Estate Winery is up and running with its first vintage from 2005 on the shelves. With falling apple prices and high demand for quality grape growing land, we are now converting some of the apple acreage in to wine grapes which will be leased to other vineyards. (Photo: Gene Covert)



2006 Like the forward-thinking Coverts before him, Gene has moved ahead into organic production of some of our crops. Starting in 2006 our U-Pik Market Garden is [Certified Organic](#), bringing a

healthier, more environmentally friendly alternative to our customers and their families. (Photo Caption: A Family In the U-Pik Patch)



TODAY Covert Farms is still one of the leaders in quality fruit and vegetable production in the Okanagan. We are a major shipper of fresh field tomatoes, sweet onions, sweet corn, muskmelons and table grapes. We still supply fruit stands, truckers and major wholesalers in western Canada as well as continuing our tradition of offering the freshest produce to the retail public. Our goal is to continue providing the highest quality of fruits and vegetables to the public and to promote and support a healthy community and agro-tourism in the South Okanagan.

(Photo Caption: The Covert Family – Gene, Kaeland, Ashley, Diana, Shelly, Faolan, and Winifred)

