

# Honoring a Family Farming Tradition



Otow Orchard packing shed.  
(photo by Karen Killebrew.)

**A**long with other immigrants from Japan and Asia, Kichitaro Kawano came to the United States in the late 1800s. He eventually found his way to Loomis, where he worked on various farms. In 1911, he and his wife Momi purchased 20 acres of land in the Rosedale Colony Tract of Loomis and named it Rosedale Farm. This land later became Roseville and is now part of Granite Bay.

## Granite Bay Farmers Market

Another place to buy farm-fresh produce in Granite Bay is the Foothill Farmers Market. The market operates 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursdays from May 18 to December 21 at Granite Bay Village. The market features 15–20 vendors each week, with products changing throughout the season. Eden Ranch and Blossom Hill Farm are just two of the Placer County farms who offer their delectable fruits and vegetables alongside growers from other parts of California, such as Rodriguez Ranch from Watsonville and Fiddymont Farms. Other local products include Ophir Wines, Good Stuff Biscotti, plants from Ron's Nursery, and many other treats. In July & August vendors are selling peaches, melons, strawberries, tomatoes, peppers, and many other great-tasting items to help cooks make quick summer meals. Come meet the farmers who lovingly tend their fields in order to bring residents great locally-grown produce. For locations of other area farmers markets visit [www.foothillfarmersmarket.com](http://www.foothillfarmersmarket.com).

Kichitaro cleared the land of rocks, boulders, and scrub oak and began propagating trees for his future orchard. Most of Kichitaro's orchard was planted in grapes and persimmons, along with some pears and a few peaches. When grape prices plummeted in the 1920s, the grapes were replaced with plums. After Kichitaro's death in 1939, his widow and youngest daughter, Helen, ran the farm. During WW II, Helen and her new husband, Seiichi Otow, were interned at Tule Lake Relocation Center and later worked in Chicago. After the war they returned to the farm to find that it was not in condition to provide them an income, so Seiichi opened a radio repair shop in Sacramento while working to revive the orchard.

Eventually, Seiichi and Helen returned to farming fulltime. Rosedale Farm shipped plums to Eastern markets via the fruit sheds in Loomis, and fresh persimmons were sold to markets in Oakland, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Dried persimmons were sold locally as well as in Los Angeles, the Bay Area, and eventually Hawaii. Peaches were sold at the Sacramento Market. The Otow family, including Seiichi, Helen, June, Christine, and Wesley not only



Helen Otow surveys a wall of hoshigaki, Japanese-style dried persimmons, one of the Otow family's specialties.

## Otow Orchard Farm's history goes back a hundred years

by Karen Killebrew

cared for and harvested the orchard, but also packed all the fruit on the farm until the 1970s.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the operations at the local fruit sheds began to decrease, and the children had grown up and moved to the city. These factors and Seiichi's health concerns contributed to the downsizing of production. The creation of PlacerGROWN and new agricultural marketing efforts in Placer County encouraged the family to open a direct marketing fruit stand. Today Helen Otow, Chris Otow Kuratomi, and her husband Tosh Kuratomi respond to their customers' preferences with a diverse variety of fruits and vegetables. They continue to specialize in the ancient art of dried persimmons known as hoshigaki. Surrounded by development, they strive to honor their family's farming tradition. Today Otow Orchard's biggest challenge is water. The family is no longer able to buy the ditch water they depended on for irrigation. Because the San Juan Water District recently changed from flat rate water bills to meters, their water costs have increased fourfold. In other areas of the county and state, farms receive favorable rates, and the



Tosh Kuratomi takes a break during the 2005 Placer Farm & Barn Tour.

Kuratomis hope that public opinion will help to change San Juan's policies. Farms provide open space, habitat for wildlife, a green belt, and most importantly, high-quality fresh food for area residents. Helen, Tosh, and Chris invite you to stop in, shop, and enjoy the different personalities of the orchard through the seasons.



### **What they are picking in July & August:**

Asian pears, blackberries, chilies, peaches, plums, pears, nectarines, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers and peppers.

Throughout the year: Apples, apricots, Asian pears, blackberries, cantaloupes, cherries, chilies, cucumber, daikon, dried fruits, eggplant, figs, fresh herbs, gourds, grapefruits, grapes, hot peppers, kiwis, lemons, mandarins, melons, nectarines, olives, onions, oranges, peaches, pears, persimmons, plums, pomegranate, pumpkins, radish, raspberries, strawberries, summer squash, sweet corn, tomatillos, tomatoes, walnuts, watermelons, winter squash, and zucchini. ■

Otow Orchard, 6232 Eureka Road, Granite Bay, CA 95746 (916) 791-1656

Open Tuesday - Sunday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

### **How to get there:**

From I-80 in Roseville take the Eureka Road exit. Turn east onto Eureka and drive four miles to the first stop sign where Eureka makes a hard left. Drive two more miles to Barton Road. Otow Orchard is at the second mailbox on the right past Barton. Look for the sign out front. From Auburn-Folsom Road, travel half a mile south of Douglas Boulevard. Turn west onto Eureka. Otows' is approximately a mile in on the left.

*The whole Otow-Kuratomi family strives to honor the family's farming tradition. The family's biggest challenge today is the suddenly higher cost of water.*