

# A Growing Art



*The Hansens' booth at the Auburn Farmers' Market.*

**E**ric and Yarda Hansen are the third generation of the Hansen family to tend Pine Hill Orchard's one hundred acres in Loomis. In the 1870s, Eric Hansen's great-grandparents emigrated from Denmark to Benicia. They worked at the John Deere plow factory until they had saved enough money to buy their first piece of property. In 1878, they moved to Loomis and planted plums, pears, peaches, and strawberries.

In 1901, Eric's grandfather, Hans Hansen, bought the neighboring property. The first 20 acres were cleared by a team of horses and Hercules 40 (dynamite from the Hercules powder plant) and planted with plums and pears in the early 1900s. Hans lived in a little shed on the property while he built the barn that is still used today. Designed as a combination horse stable and fruit packing barn, with hay storage above, the barn has evolved along with the crops produced on the farm.

After WWII Eric's father, Bob Hansen, used his veteran's benefits to purchase the family's first tractor and immediately sold the horse. This freed up the pasture and hay field to plant in more plums and pears, and the stable for equipment storage.

In the early 1960s, the family planted Faye Elberta peaches, which were popular for canned peaches. By the time the Hansens' Faye Elbertas came into production, the canneries no longer wanted them, so they began ranch marketing (selling on the ranch, peddling to friends and neighbors and other buyers).

When the Certified Farmers Market system was created in California in 1977, the Hansens embraced a new form of distribution. Their first market was in Grass Valley on the

## **Yarda's Ditchwater Iris Garden**

*where Yarda Hansen grows more than 750 varieties of tall bearded irises. Most of the varieties are reblooming hybrids; many are fragrant. Potted irises are available at the Auburn Farmers' Market when the garden is closed for the season. The Iris Garden is open on weekends April through mid-May. Potted irises will be available, or you can order your blooming favorite and pick up the rhizomes in August.*

*For details, call (916) 652-7555.*



## Responsible methods and farming artistry yield splendid fruits and flowers

by Karen Killebrew

third market day of that year, and they have been selling at Farmers' Markets ever since. Additional varieties of peaches, nectarines, plums and other fruit have been planted specifically to sell at Farmers' Markets and other local outlets.

Eric graduated from Chico State with a degree in Pomology and returned to the ranch full time in 1982. In 1987, the family planted mandarins, and now have about three acres in citrus. For the first time in 1988 one of their fields became organic. They are very proud to hold "SG-O1," the first organic certification in the Sierra Gold region. Today nearly all their fields are organic. Eric's brother, Randy, a specialist in Integrated Pest Management and a consultant in crop management and organic practices, contributes his expertise to the farm's practices.

And what does a fruit grower do for fun? As a member of the California Rare Fruit Growers Society, Eric has acquired many antique and heritage fruit varieties. He has 12 varieties of figs and 30 varieties of plums. He plans to hold tastings of these rare and unusual varieties for the Placer Gold Slow Food Convivium in the coming years.

Yarda Hansen has expanded the farm's products with one of her favorites, too. In the spring of 2000, she began planting tall bearded iris and created Yarda's Ditchwater Iris Garden. Now she grows more than 750 different varieties of re-blooming hybrids, many of them fragrant. The Iris Garden is open weekends in April through mid-May.

Pine Hill Orchard continues as a family farm today. Eric and Yarda, assisted by Eric's father and his brother, use their combined education, backgrounds, and interests to continue changing what and how they farm, striving to be more responsible growers and to keep providing high-quality produce to the people of Placer County. ■



### The Barn

The shed (located behind the larger barn) was built by Eric's grandfather, Hans Hansen, in 1903. The larger fruit packing and hay barn was built during WWI using hand-hewn digger pine beams from the property and heart redwood siding. Very little interior framing was used, with the structure getting its stability from the redwood planks. The lower portion of the barn was used for packing fruit, with the wagon loading area clearly seen on the left. A smaller area where the horses were stabled is to the left of the loading area. The upper story was for hay storage, and the pulley system for storing the hay can still be seen. Originally the packing boxes were made on site, and the fruit shipped from the farm. In addition to the two barns, there is an old chicken shed and several other outbuildings used for equipment storage.



### Pine Hill Orchard

#### What they're picking in March & April:

Apricots, Asian pears, bedding plants, blackberries, figs, grapefruit, kumquats, lemons, mandarins, nectarines, olives, oranges, peaches, pears, persimmons, plums, pomegranates, pomelos, preserves, prunes, strawberries

Pine Hill Orchard's products are available at the **Auburn, Roseville and Tahoe City Farmer's Markets**, and at **Newcastle produce, Blue Goose Produce, Tahoe House Bakery in Tahoe City, Sierra Valley Farms in Beckworth, the Reno Market**, and various Bay Area stores.