



SONOMA COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Affiliated with California Farm Bureau Federation and American Farm Bureau Federation

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Walker Family Is Honored As Sonoma County's Farm Family of the Year

Santa Rosa, CA - Lee Walker, 86, is a sixth generation apple farmer in Graton whose 50 acre apple farm epitomizes the term family business.

Walker manages the farm alongside his son Lee Walker III, but around the property you will always find a handful of family members putting in their best effort on top of their day jobs to help the family business succeed.

The family's history and passion for Sonoma County agriculture has led them to be named as Sonoma County Farm Bureau's Farm Family of the Year. The family will be honored July 13th at Love of the Land alongside Farm Bureau's two other award recipients. Jackson Family Wines will be receiving the Luther Burbank Conservation Award for their sustainability efforts in Sonoma County and beyond while Earl and Dot Holtz will be inducted into the Farm Bureau Hall of Fame for their commitment to the local dairy industry.

Walker's family originally settled in Sonoma County in 1856, and the family owned land from Sebastopol to Santa Rosa which they paid 50 cents an acre for. Arthur Upp purchased the family's 30 acres on Upp Road in Graton in 1910. This orchard has been passed down through generations and the house that Upp built is still where Walker lives.

Walker describes his family as being heavily involved in the business even though the rest of the family has their own jobs during the day. His son John recently weed-eated the orchards, his daughter Sue takes care of the shipping and Lee III's wife Barbara does the bookkeeping. The grandkids, great-grand kids and other family members can be found helping in the packing shed during harvest, and it's all hands on deck for the annual Gravenstein Apple Fair weekend.

Although the family is often working long hours and two jobs, their passion for what they do is evident.

Walker said his wife Shirley was a main cog in the family business and kept it together before she passed away six years ago. He credits much of their success over the years to her. Some of their customers have been visiting the orchard for upwards of 35 years.



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Today, the family grows nearly 600 tons of apples a year, all of which are dry farmed. They cultivate more than 25 varieties of apples, although nearly half are Gravensteins. In addition to selling apples directly to customers on their Upp Road farm, apples can be found locally at Andy's Produce, G&G Supermarket, Inwalle Gardens or the Santa Rosa Farmers' Market.

Love of the Land, honoring stewards of the land, will be held at Richard's Grove and Saralee's Vineyard in Windsor. The event begins at 4 p.m. with a reception of local wine, food and cheese. A dinner featuring Sonoma County products is at 6:30 p.m., followed by the presentation of awards and a live auction. The event is open to the public and anyone who wants to join in honoring stewards of Sonoma County agriculture.

Individual tickets are \$65. Corporate sponsor tables for eight people are \$1,250. General seating tables of eight are \$700. To make reservations visit www.sonomafb.org/loveoftheland or call 707-544-5575. Sonoma County Farm Bureau, a non-profit grassroots organization, was founded in 1917 and has been representing the interests of farmers and land owners in Sonoma County for 100 years. Sonoma County Farm Bureau is a membership driven organization dedicated to protecting and progressing agriculture in Sonoma County.