



History

Sand Hill Berries is a family farm located in the foothills of the beautiful Laurel Highlands in southwestern Pennsylvania. The farm has a long history dating back to 1779 (the date on one of the cornerstones). Originally 400 acres, one of the present borders of the farm is one of General Braddock's routes to Fort Duquesne (Fort Pitt) during the French and Indian War. Previously, the land's agriculture use was as a dairy farm. After the passing of the owners, the farm was leased for almost ten years to corn and grains and mowed for hay. Parts of it lay dormant for those years and were overrun by wild rose and blackberry. Beginning in 1981, the farm was slowly but surely brought back into production with re-seeding, lime, potassium, and phosphorus. Goats and sheep were instrumental in the revival of pastureland. The farm is now home to meat goats, pygmy goats, sheep, horses, a few cows, a llama, an adopted dog, and numerous barn cats.

In 1986, Sand Hill Berries began with five acres of red raspberries and two acres of black raspberries. Thirteen years later, the last of the original planting was removed in the fall and replanted with a newer variety. The mainstay crop remains raspberries, but blackberries, red currants, gooseberries, black currants, heirloom apples, strawberries, and a few stone fruits, seedless grapes have been added. In 1998, six acres of black currants were planted for processing. Future plans consist of a kiwi berry crop, blueberries, and more grapes.

Since preserving and baking is a family tradition, in 1991 Sand Hill Berries began processing pantry products and baked goods. The Farm Store opened as a retail outlet to sell these products and baked goods. Just prior to opening the store, there needed to be a use for fruit that did not qualify for lengthy shelf life. The excess crop provided the key ingredient for Raspberry Shrub, which was renamed Raspberry Claret. Raspberry Claret was sold to Williams-Sonoma retail stores.

The next year Country Fruit, a seedless, lower in sugar jam was produced for a local basket company.

Also, in the early 1990's, desserts and toppings were created from the farm's own fresh fruit in the kitchens of Sand Hill Berries. The desserts were sold at Southwestern Pennsylvania festivals to a public hungry for home baked fruit pies. Many people first heard of Sand Hill Berries at these events.

Soon, jam and jellies were introduced at the Farm Store. Since the beginning, they have been cooked in small batches that produce 5-8 jars per batch. The rare taste of the products is a fresh, intense fruit taste.

Today, pies and cookies are baked daily in the Sand Hill Berries kitchens and sold at the Farm Store.

In 1999, an outdoor café was opened. Today, the Café Persimmon sells dessert. The Cabin Café offers salads and sandwiches.

Because raspberries demand it, Sand Hill Berries grows their fruit with a lot of expense and care. Sand Hill Berries is not organic, but use an Integrated Pest Management controls, a system of fungus and insect control that uses as few insecticides as possible. All the fields are irrigated so that during drought years there will always be a crop. Grass strips between rows prevent erosion. The use of trellising makes for easier picking and clean berries. Patience is cultivated since raspberries do not reach normal production until their third year. The emphasis on planting is now to find varieties that will extend the raspberry season in both directions - early and late - so that everyone will be able to enjoy this favorite fruit almost all summer.

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