

Farming is farming, but it's not just corn & beans



Wes Carithers

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Wes Carithers of Astoria is a farm operator. He has land in corn and beans and makes the big decisions. But he hires a local farmer to plant, harvest and everything else

in between.

Wes grows, tends and harvests other crops – vegetables, fruits and berries – and is the owner of Orchard Hill Farm outside of Lewistown.

In many ways his farming mirrors what the corn and beans guys are doing.

And, in many ways, it is different.

None of it is really “seasonal”

Wes has gardened his whole life and has a small orchard at home with an assortment of apple, pear, and peach trees, as well as an array of blackberries, strawberries and raspberries/more.

Like many farmers there was some off-the-farm experience before he took the plunge.

“In the past, I have done market gardening, worked in a garden center which specialized in trees, perennials and fruits, and worked for a fertilizer and chemical company, then decided to make the jump here” he said.

“Lots of people think it is a seasonal business. Technically it is. But you are here all the time,” he said.

The Orchard is open from July to Halloween, but Wes devotes at least two days a week during the so-called off-season mowing, pruning, spraying and general upkeep, as well as expansions.

“Once the season hits we are here seven days a week, sometimes until midnight. Or you never know – the day might start at 3 a.m.,” he said.



■ It takes the better part of a month for Wes Carithers to prune all of the apple and peach trees at Orchard Hill Farm outside of Lewistown. Pruning keeps the trees rejuvenated and limits problems with things like fungus by promoting good air flow. The trimmings are used or sold for smoking. At one successful event last year they served applewood-smoked pulled pork sliders.

Planting is planting

With a crop more perennial in nature than corn and beans Wes doesn't face the same annual planting schedule as others, but he has been planting new trees every year for the last few years to expand the orchard.

“Last year we planted over 600 new apple and peach trees, and another 150 this year.

Then we will probably call it good for a while,” he said.

It will take five years before they see a decent harvest, he added, but the trees should produce well until they are 35 years of age, or so.

“Then they start slowing down. We have a handful of trees that are 50 years old. We

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