

# Pecan south

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# Family does weekend labor to expand orchard

By Cindy Loggins Wise

Mark and Bonnie Friesenhahn earn their living in Houston where Mark's career as an engineer with Exxon Production Research is anchored. But their weekends for the past several years have been devoted to establishing a pecan orchard on land just south of New Braunfels, Texas.

On property adjoining his parents' land where he grew up, Mark, Bonnie and their sons Justin and Jacob were adding another 100 trees on a recent January Saturday to the orchard they started in 1989. Mark indicated that his property was previously owned by members of the Friesenhahn family and that it was especially significant to have it back in the family again.

Although still small by most standards, the Friesenhahns' planting currently consists of about 1,700 'Kiowa' and 'Cheyenne' trees with the latest addition being 'Wichita'. 'Pawnees' will be added in the future, Mark noted. He plans to establish between 2,500 and 3,000 trees on the 75 acres he has suitable for pecan production.

An automated irrigation system has been installed at planting throughout his orchard. The micro-sprinkler system is equipped with bubbler-type emitters for the youngest trees. The bubblers are now being

replaced with sprinkler heads for the larger, five-year-old trees. The irrigation water is pumped from wells.

The automated system which is preset to water at specific intervals has been an invaluable aspect of his orchard's survival and growth, Mark emphasized, since he is usually onsite only on weekends. And it was critically important during the two-and-a-half years he spent in Alaska during the Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster. Mark was Exxon's logistics manager at the site of the spill and cleanup effort.

In his earlier plantings of 'Kiowa' and 'Cheyenne' trees, the Friesenhahns have achieved 99-percent tree live. They expect that to drop to about 95 percent in their current 'Wichita' planting due to the nature of the variety. The trees are planted on a 30-foot diagonal layout. The entire family including Mark's father, Roman Friesenhahn, was recently working together to dig the 14-inch-by-40-inch holes using a post-hole digger mounted on a tractor, position the trees, refill the holes and cut the tree tops off.

They had some production this year from their oldest trees and are looking forward to increasing harvests. "We may not be doing everything just right," Mark declared, "but we're having fun at it."



From left, Mark Friesenhahn along with 14-year-old son Justin, 12-year-old Jacob and Mark's father, Roman Friesenhahn. Their recent tree planting weekend was a three-generation effort. Mark is expanding his orchard near New Braunfels, Texas.