

## It's a bountiful harvest for the Sitorius family

Written by Deb Egenberger  
Friday, 11 September 2009 13:59 -

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**Sitorius family turns garden space into thriving produce business.**

The corrals and outbuildings on the Sitorius acreage south of Brady sat barren for quite some time. The hogs were long gone and the weeds had pretty much taken over the canyon.

Jobs, children and grandchildren monopolized the lives of Lyle and Charlotte Sitorius.

Last March, that all changed.

“We had an acreage sitting here with no income,” Lyle said.

Oldest son Raymond and his wife Mary, who live at Wray, CO, had a brilliant idea.

“They said, ‘Why not clean this place up and grow some vegetables?’”

By the end of April last year, Charlotte said they were planting onions and from there a family business bloomed.

On seven acres nestled in the hills, the Sitorius family grows nearly every vegetable imaginable for their business Hometown Produce.

There are 900 tomato plants, 900 pepper plants, 4,000 onions, 2,000 leeks, three 110-foot rows

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of cucumbers, plus some of the burpless variety.

They have planted a half-acre to pumpkins with a whole magnitude of other veggies including squash, broccoli, cauliflower, corn, asparagus, potatoes, okra and egg plant, just to name a few.

But that's not all. Lyle and Charlotte decided to try their hand at fruit too so they planted some raspberries, plums, choke cherries, strawberries and other wild berries.

"It's a lot of work," the couple admits. "An awful lot of work."

Last year's produce began from seedling plants the couple purchased. This crop all started from seeds planted in their greenhouse back in January.

"I kept reading that seed sales were up this year," Charlotte said. "I got a little worried how the market would go."



It turns out there was little to fret over. The garden has been spared Mother Nature's wrath this season and plants are producing plenty. Charlotte said sales at farmers markets have been more than any of them anticipated.

"A lot of people start a garden," she said. "Not so many finish it."

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Because the work involved in weeding, watering and harvesting can be overwhelming, many gardeners give up long before frost hits.

Not the Sitoriuses, though. They just pull more family members into the process.

“Everybody gets involved,” Charlotte said, “right down to the great-grandkids picking up potatoes.”

It also takes everyone when it comes time to sell the produce at farmers markets.

Raymond and Mary come from Colorado every weekend to help out at the Saturday market in North Platte. Daughter Rebecca Stearns, who has worked all summer, hauls goods into Brady on Wednesdays and they take turns at the Gothenburg market on Thursday afternoons.

The couple couldn't manage the operation by themselves. Lyle said it is a full-time four- or five-person business.

“We're limited by the number of hours in a day.”

Hometown Produce has not only expanded the varieties of fruits and vegetables offered from last year.

The Sitoriuses have added other goods as well.

With the certification of a kitchen licensed by the state, the business can sell jellies, jams, pickles, salsa and other canned goodies.

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“Rebecca has been making jams and jellies all summer,” Charlotte said. “It’s an added value and people love things that are homemade.”

The salsa, made with all fresh ingredients grown on the plot, is a recipe of Mary’s perfected with each canning.

“We’ve been selling a lot of that,” Charlotte said.

With a walk-in cooler and freezer, the Sitoriuses can keep what doesn’t sell for canning over the winter.

And while the hours are long and the work is sometimes difficult, the rewards are many.

“When people walk away with a smile and I hear them say, ‘That was the best or most delicious,’ that’s what’s satisfying to me,” Lyle said.

Most customers, Charlotte said, seem to appreciate the effort involved.

“It’s a business,” she said, “but there’s a beauty about it. It’s amazing to watch how nature takes care of itself. You get where you kind of feel in harmony with the plants.”



The Sitoriuses have already started planning next year’s garden.

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“We’re always up for trying something new.”