



#FridaysOnTheFarm: Strength of Character and Mind

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Each Friday, meet farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This week, we travel to Chowchilla, California, where Jim Chew grows pistachios with his wife and son on their operation – Forever Grateful Ranch.

Jim Chew has a predictable morning routine. He gets up, gets dressed, eats breakfast, greets the dogs, and then goes for a stroll amongst his pistachio trees. It is a labor of love that has been his life for much of the past 15 years. Now, he includes the added step of attaching his prosthetic leg.

Resiliency

The last couple of years have brought about a lot of change, some heartache, and an awe-inspiring amount of strength and perseverance to Jim's life. He was the victim of a hit-and-run accident that took a lot from him, but he's emerged with a newfound passion for life and farming. This is reflected in all that Jim does, down to the name of his ranch itself.

"I've been farming from the age of seven," said Jim. His family returned to farming after his father got out of the military. "We lived in the little town of Stevinson, California, and my father hauled hay to local dairy farmers. I was part of Future Farmers of America and farming became my passion."

After majoring in Plant and Animal Sciences at Modesto Junior College, Jim joined the Peace Corps and set off on a multi-year adventure teaching agriculture in Botswana and other nations. He learned a lot about other cultures and countries while traveling by foot and found a deeper meaning for his own life.

Upon returning to the United States, Jim completed his bachelor's degree at Fresno State University and later earned a master's degree in engineering. He did a brief stint at the Campbell Soup factory in Modesto and then worked for 15 years for the City of Richmond, California.



During that timeframe in Richmond, Jim channeled his energy and compassion into becoming a foster parent. He saw a need for mentorship and leadership in the local community and went on to foster 10 children, who still consider him to be their guardian and friend.

Conservation

That journey still serves Jim in Chowchilla, where he continues contributing to his community as a farmer. Jim has owned and operated Forever Grateful Ranch since 2003. He grows the Kerman variety of pistachios on 30 acres with his wife, Maryam, and son, Sonny. Water is a limited natural resource in Chowchilla and the larger San Joaquin Valley. Because of this, Jim has been dedicated to improving water efficiencies across his operation from day one.

To help with his conservation goals, Jim reached out to the NRCS Madera Service Center, where he met NRCS Soil Conservationists Sheryl Feit and Priscilla Baker. Sheryl worked with Jim to develop a conservation plan and an [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) contract for the farm that incorporates multiple water, nutrient management, and soil health practices over a span of several years.

Using EQIP, Jim has installed a chemigation check valve to protect groundwater quality and a flow meter to help him manage his irrigations. He's also installed a soil moisture monitoring station to track his soil water status at multiple depths. These tools help Jim decide when and how much water to apply to his trees.

Inspiration

Jim has a commitment to improving the health of his soil, with specific goals of preventing compaction and building organic matter while increasing the amount of water his soil can hold. Jim now mows his orchard middles instead of disking and he planted a re-seeding grass cover crop in fall of 2017 to further improve [soil health](#). He also utilizes fall compost applications.

"It has been inspirational working with Jim as he recuperates from his injury," said Baker. "All the while, he has been working not just to maintain, but to better, his orchard."

Jim's advice to would-be farmers is to get up in the morning and get going; work for it; expect long hard hours of work; read up on the latest farming technologies and ways the government can help you, and you can help the country.

In the end, the hard work pays off. In Jim's words, "A good day is when harvest trucks leave with loads of my pistachios."



More Information

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers build resiliency and weather ups and downs in the market. Visit farmers.gov to learn more.

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