

Sondra Andrews admits that walking into the Duris Cucumber Farm stand in Puyallup is like stepping into the past, and she wants to keep it that way. There are wood chips on the ground. A sign in the front says "Kindness Spoken Here." They play music by Perry Como and Doris Day. They even have flowers next to the Sani-Can around back.

"I've resisted looking like a supermarket," Andrews says. "I want to keep this farm-stand atmosphere and not get too high-tech or too modern. And people like that. People like to go to a place that makes them feel good."

The stand sells all kinds of produce from the Duris farm—strawberries, zucchini, yellow squash, fresh dill, slicing cucumbers ("slicers," the smooth variety primarily used for salads), and green beans—as well as other local vegetables and fruits from Puyallup and Eastern Washington. But their staple is pickling cucumbers—the smaller, bumpy variety that retain their crispness during the brining process.

"Our major thrust here is cucumbers," Andrews says. "That's how it all started."

Andrews was in the second grade when her mom, Hazel Duris, came home with a quart of cucumbers from a neighbor's roadside stand, shocked at how much they were charging. She asked Sondra's dad, Al Duris, then a part-time farmer, to plant a third of an acre of cucumbers for her to sell the next summer. When cucumber season came around the following July, she put a sign in the front yard and set up shop in one of the farm's outbuildings. She made enough money that summer to cover the seed and planting costs—and to buy school clothes and a Singer sewing machine.

More than 50 years later, the Duris Cucumber Farm stand is still in that same outbuilding, though it's been expanded. In the early 1980s, Hazel Duris was dying of cancer and asked her daughter if she would take her place managing the stand.

"I was a nurse. I had my own family," Andrews said. "I remembered working on the farm, and it was so hard, and I didn't want to work that hard. But how could I tell her no?"

Andrews now calls the stand her second home. Memories of hard work haven't dissuaded the other Duris kids from carrying on the heritage of their family's farm, either; now that both of their parents have passed away, the five siblings run the farm business together. Tom, the second oldest, manages the 250 acres of farmland and wholesale operations. Bill, the "computer wiz," helps out on the accounting side. Becky and Mark take the farm's produce to local farmers markets during the summer.

Asked if they have regular family meetings, Andrews laughs.

"Not really," she says. "We talk to one another, obviously. We're partners. But after all these years we just know how things run."

In the Puget Sound region, you can get small quantities of pickling cucumbers from urban farmers markets or special-order them from farms, but they're rarely part of grocery stores' regular produce section. At the Duris Cucumber Farm stand, you just walk in, go to the bins where the cucumbers are separated by size (six different grades), and get almost any quantity. Andrews has one customer who picks up 5,000 cucumbers every year for an annual family pickling party: "They call in advance."

Because the farm does several plantings, they always have a field to pick from, providing an abundant supply of cucumbers throughout the season. Cucumbers are picked and graded every day; they don't get overripe, and the stand always has fresh cucumbers on hand. (An automatic grader is one modern convenience that the Duris family

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brought on shortly after Andrews went to college. In the old days, Andrews and her siblings sat around on overturned buckets and graded by hand.)

Customers can also find all the other ingredients they need for pickling—vinegar, pickling salt, spices, dill, peppers—as well as jars of different sizes, canning supplies and copies of Linda Ziedrich's *The Joy of Pickling*.

And while many Duris customers are from families who've been going there for generations, the joy of pickling has been rediscovered recently.

"We've seen a lot of new people," says Susan Norman, who has worked at the stand every summer for the past 18 years. "And they're not just coming down there for vegetables. Pickling's coming back." Norman described a shift in clientele over the last few years, with younger visitors—and more of them—coming from Seattle and Tacoma specifically to learn about canning and to get their cucumbers for annual pickling. "People are tired of eating all the kinds of foods they have out there now," says Norman. "They want to know what's in their food."

Andrews also attributes the influx of new urban picklers to the cold-pack process. It is easier than hot-pack pickling, which involves canning and, generally, larger batches. With cold-pack pickles, you can make a batch or you can make one jar, and the pickles are very crisp. Duris sells kits with all the spices (pre-measured into baggies), vinegar, and dill needed to make signature Duris Cold-Pack Refrigerator Dills. Starting in early August, pickling demonstrations go from 9:30 to 11:30 on Saturday mornings.