

WILD CHERRY FARM: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A VISION

A sustainable agricultural endeavor in the historic village of Placitas? It was our vision when some friends and I founded Anasazi Fields, Inc. and started construction of the winery in the early 1990's. It was with this vision in the late 1990's that we purchased from Jim and Kathy King the orchard they called Windy Farm. It is with this vision that we go forth with the transformation of Windy Farm into Wild Cherry Farm, an intentional orchard community.

One of our primary goals at Anasazi Fields is to help preserve the Placitas Community Ditch and the rural nature of the historic village of Placitas by continuing the beneficial use of the water to grow fruits, berries and grapes for wine making, an old tradition in the village. By producing a value-added commodity from the fruits, berries and grapes that have been grown in the area for centuries, we can assure that large segments of the village remain under agricultural production. We can also support the local economy by purchasing fruit from our neighbors and by hiring locals to pick our own fruit.

Ten years ago, it came to my attention that Windy Farm, the farm from which we had been getting wild cherries for a couple of years, was being donated to the Boys' Ranch by Jim and Kathy King. The rumor was that the Boys' Ranch was going to sell it to a developer. I called Jim King and he told me that yes he was donating it to the Boys' Ranch, but did not know their plans.

Jim King gave me a contact to whom I sent a letter proposing an arrangement in which the winery would manage the farm for the Boys' Ranch as an educational facility in return for the fruit. They did not respond to me, but sent a letter to Jim King stating that they had no interest in my proposal and were, instead, going to work with a developer to maximize the value of his contribution. The plan was to develop the land intensively and to sell the water rights separately.

Jim and Kathy King then called me. They said that they really hated to see the farm destroyed and that if the winery were indeed interested in keeping it as a working farm, they would be willing to sell it to us and do something else for the Boys' Ranch. They offered to give us a year to come up with financing.

The package I was able to put together involved selling the house and the land around the house and an additional two and a half acres of the property to neighbors. The rest, I financed by taking on new investors in the winery and taking out a loan.

Since then, I have financially drained myself and the winery making the land payments while at the same time trying to grow the winery into a sustainable business. I have also worn out the good will of several partners.

When our attempt to recoup some of our investment by securing a grant for a conservation easement on the farm failed (for reasons I still do not understand), I contemplated throwing in the towel. Over more than a few sleepless nights, I seriously considered the option to stop making wine, sell off our inventory, sell the farm to the highest bidder, sell my little mud shack and move back to Texas.

Out of this darkness came the concept of Wild Cherry Farm. Our current vision is an orchard community of five (at most) small, green-built houses surrounded by a sustainable agricultural showpiece.

Wild Cherry Farm is divided into five lots. No-build zones incorporated into the plat require that any houses be built in a cluster near the north central portion of the property. Approximately half of the area outside of the construction envelope has already been planted with wild cherries, blackberries, plums and apricots. The purchase agreements for the lots at Wild Cherry Farm contain a section providing for the leaseback of the agricultural portion of the lots to Anasazi Fields. Our plans are to continue the planting of these areas with the exception of one area designated as a community garden for the owners.

Our focus at Wild Cherry Farm, as the name suggests, is wild cherries. I have been making an exceptional wine from the berries of this native, drought-tolerant, pest-resistant tree for twenty years. Once Wild Cherry Farm is fully planted and the trees have matured, we expect production to be approximately ten times the current level. One small area that we planted four years ago is already producing more cherries than the grove that was on the property when we purchased it. One of beauties of the wild cherry is that it spreads naturally, creating a dense thicket and supplying a continuous source of new plants. All of the trees that we have planted have come from the original grove. In addition, we have allowed the original grove to more than double in size.

In addition to planting wild cherries in the open areas, we are planning to plant grapes along the entire fence surrounding the property as well as along selected segments of the boundaries between lots. We are currently growing two grapes: syrah and black malvasia. Since 2001, we have produced a big red wine from a blend of these two grapes. We call the wine Synaesthesia.

As part of our continuing commitment to preserving the agricultural nature of the historic village of Placitas, Anasazi Fields is retaining one of the lots at Wild Cherry Farm. Our goal is to maintain that lot as an integral component in our production of wild cherries and Synaesthesia grapes.

While even one house at Wild Cherry Farm was not part of our original vision, it is quite probable that had we not purchased Windy Farm, there would already be ten or twelve house there and the wild cherry trees would be long gone.

In the transfer of the lots at Wild Cherry Farm to the new owners, Anasazi Fields is permanently tying the irrigation water rights to the land such that they cannot be severed later as a commodity. These water rights are to be held, in perpetuity and communally, by the Association

of Owners of Wild Cherry Farm for the expressed purpose of maintaining an agricultural oasis in the heart of the historic village of Placitas.

We invite you to stop by the winery for more information on our vision or to make an appointment to tour Wild Cherry Farm.