

## **Olson Farms Holly History**

Stuart Olson Farms is a fourth generation family farm located outside Salem, Oregon in the rich, fertile soils of the Willamette Valley.

W.M. "Bill" Olson, Stuart's father, began farming with his Uncles in the West Salem hills in the 1930's. Bill then expanded his farm across the valley to Southeast Salem, where it just so happened the new farm was next to a holly orchard. Bill, and wife, Barbara, continued to farm cherries, peaches, pears, and prunes, while raising three sons and occasionally helping with the neighbors holly orchard, that was still in it's early stages.

The youngest son, Stuart, wanted to be a farmer since he was old enough to walk and soon began farming full time with his father. While Bill and Stuart farmed together, the holly orchard next door continued to grow into a fully mature, producing orchard.

The opportunity came along and Stuart bought the holly orchard in the mid-70's. Stuart was now a fruit and holly grower. Stuart's background in the fruit tree business and help from his late wife, Shelly, helped him learn to care and nurture his holly orchard to produce some of the finest holly available in the industry.

Stuart and Shelly had two sons, Darin and Chris, where after college, both have returned to work on the family farm. Darin and Chris really enjoy the opportunity of working alongside their father and learning the business of farming. While farming consists of many long days in the field, the three still manage time together to fish the waters of the Northwest for the legendary Chinook salmon.

Today, the farm consists of approx. 200 acres, where holly is a very integral part of the operation, but the fruit crops are still the mainstay of the family farm with crops of cherries, peaches, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, apples, and nectarines. The majority of the fruit crops are marketed through the family's roadside stand, which was established in 1983. Most recently Stuart has begun offering various flowering branches for the early springtime flower industry with great success.

English Holly is a unique crop that is well acclimated to the Pacific Northwest. There are two main strains of English holly that Stuart Olson Farms grows, green and variegated. The Willamette Valley's temperate weather and fertile soil allow the holly to achieve its full beauty, where leaves are allowed to become a deep green and, if the variegated strain, a vibrant, yellow halo circumferences the leaf. On both strains the berries become blood red, contrasting the leaf with a jubilation of nature's colors. With the correct horticultural practices holly trees have the ability to live 100 years and plus.

Each year holly harvest begins around the 1<sup>st</sup> week of November and continues to after the 1<sup>st</sup> week of December, where cutting occurs in all weather conditions. In Oregon it can be sunny one hour and snowing the next.

Within recent years, Stuart Olson Farms, Inc. has expanded from only holly to also include a mini-swag, which the family calls the “Oregon Classic”. The Oregon Classic consists of heavily berried holly stems, noble fir, juniper, and incense cedar, which are bundled together to make a decorative holiday arrangement. The noble fir grows high in the Cascade Mountains, at elevations above 4,000 ft, which gives it a beautiful blue hue. The juniper is collected East of the Cascades, in Oregon’s high desert region. Finally the incense cedar, with its yellow berries decorating the tips of the bough, many times growing to great heights and found from residential and urban areas alike.

The Pacific Northwest, and particularly the Willamette Valley, has given Stuart Olson Farms an exceptional medium to raise their crops and offer their customers the best product possible. Holly is truly a unique crop that Stuart and his sons take great delight in sharing its mystic beauty with the entire nation during the holiday season.