

Jenny Crist Kohn
 Walden, N.Y.
 Crist Bros. Orchards
 Products: Apples
 Size of Operation: 600 acres
 In Business Since: 1893
 Farm Credit Partner: Farm Credit East
 Working with Farm Credit Since: 1974



The old adage that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree is no truer than for Jenny Crist Kohn, a fifth generation farmer who returned to join her parents in managing her family's apple orchard three years ago after spending three years working off-farm. Today, she does everything from coordinating packing house operations to managing payroll and budgeting.

"My parents encouraged me to look around first to decide if farming was something I really wanted to do," Jenny said. After college, she went to work as a loan officer for Farm Credit East, which also finances much of Crist Bros. Orchards' operations. "I really enjoyed it there – every day was interesting. But my parents needed some help managing an expansion, and so it was the right time to go back and give it a try."

That expansion included a state-of-the-art packing line that includes an external defect sorter that takes 72 photos of each apple to then sort by weight, color and external blemishes. This sorting determines which end market each apple reaches: the first and second sort go to brokers that sell the product to large retailers, such as WalMart, and those of lower quality go to cider producers.

Crist Brothers produces around 500,000 bushels of apples a year, depending on both macro- and micro-weather conditions. "Our orchards are located in six locations, and that diversity helps spread our risk," says Jenny. Although the orchards are, at most, 25 miles apart, differences in altitude can make a big difference in temperatures and hail storm exposure, one of the significant challenges the family faces. The Crists raise 19 different varieties of apples, the most predominant being Red Delicious and Empire, although Gala apples are quickly gaining popularity. "Galas are being planted like they're going out of style, because people are eating them that way," says Jenny. Jenny's parents planted a significant number of Gala trees years ago that are now at full production, meeting this growing consumer demand.

The family plans to pass their operation down to the next generation, a prospect Jenny says is daunting for a number of reasons: deciding which new varieties to plant to meet customer expectations, keeping up with reporting requirements and government regulations, finding qualified employees, and continuing to grow the operation. "My parents are very good business people, and are always thinking three steps ahead about what's coming next and the best way to handle it," Jenny says. "I hope I'll be able to carry that forward."