

Ted Sheely
 Lemoore, Calif
 AzCal Management Company
 Products: Pistachios, tomatoes, wine grapes, onions, cotton
 Size of Operation: 10,000 acres
 In Business Since: 1987
 Farm Credit Partner: Fresno Madera Farm Credit
 Working with Farm Credit Since: 2008



With a record drought pummeling California, and indeed much of the nation, forethought and planning has helped at least one farmer weather the weather. Ted Sheely made the move a few years ago to invest significant resources into wells and pipelines on the 8,000 acres he owns, delaying yet again any kind of “draw,” or payments, to himself or his family members.

“My family wasn’t happy about it at the time,” Ted says. “But I started thinking about what would happen if the water district couldn’t deliver any of the water we were allocated.” That unprecedented situation happened this year, and while Ted decided to leave his 2,000 acres of leased land fallow along with eight percent of his own land, yields on the rest of his land are close to normal because of his decision to invest in irrigation. “It’s a tough year, but I’m still going to farm here in California for the rest of my life,” he says.

Water isn’t the only long-term decision Ted’s made – he’s also increased his pistachio orchards, a high-value crop but one that takes ten years to return the investment and start showing a profit. “We always say that you plant pistachios for your children,” Ted says. Six years ago, Ted doubled his pistachio acreage to 2,200, and has also become part-owner and current president of Horizon Nut Company, a pistachio processing facility to which he sells his entire crop. “It’s just good business to do business with yourself,” he says.

In addition to pistachios, Ted raises 320 acres of wine grapes contracted to Gallo, 1,400 acres of tomatoes sold to processing companies that turn it into products like salsa and pasta sauce, and 1,200 acres of fresh market onions sold through grocery stores across the country. His remaining acreage is planted with premium Pima cotton sold overseas to cotton mills, along with some grain.

Like many farmers, Ted didn’t jump into farming with 10,000 acres. Instead, he first worked for another family for 13 years after college. He then started his own 3,000 acre operation with land purchased from his former employers, and began managing his own operation with his wife, who had worked for the same family farming operation. He’s grown his operation slowly over time, purchasing specific plots of land appropriate to grow the crops he targets, consistently planting higher and higher value crops, from cotton to pistachios to grapes.



For the past six years, these land purchases have been financed with Fresno Madera Farm Credit. “They are truly a financial partner,” he says. “I like the conversations I have with them and they treat me very well. It’s the kind of relationship with a lender that I wanted to have all along.”