



## MEET OUR GROWERS

*Leo Dietrich & Sons*

CONKLIN, MICHIGAN

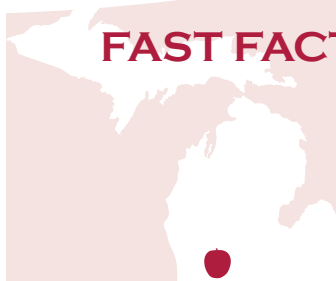
### HISTORY

Since 1853, the Dietrich's apple and cherry orchards have not only been a place to make a living, but also to raise new generations and build families with a passion for what they do.

The Dietrichs are in their sixth generation of ownership in Conklin, Michigan. As they continue to grow, they've divided their business into two distinct operations. Leo Dietrich & Sons is owned and operated by brothers Jim and Mike Dietrich, while their cousins Joe and Al run Ridgeview Orchards just down the road. The two families work closely together and jointly operate their packing and storage facility, Dietrich Orchards.

Riveridge Produce Marketing has partnered with the Dietrichs for over twenty years, selling their fruit under the Riveridge label. That partnership allows the Dietrichs to carve out their own place in the industry more easily. "There's a broad spectrum of growers out there and huge numbers we need to produce," says Mike Dietrich. "Riveridge helps us organize and communicate with other growers in the area to meet the demand."

### FAST FACTS



- Location: *Conklin, Michigan*
- Total Acreage: *500 acres*
- Year Founded: *1853*
- Commodities: *apples and cherries*
- Varieties: *Braeburn, Cortland, Empire, Fuji, Gala, Gingergold, Golden Delicious, Honeycrisp, Ida Red, Jonagold, Jonamac, Jonathan, McIntosh, Paula Red, Red Delicious, and Rome*
- Production Time: *August - May*
- Packing Facility: *Dietrich Orchards*
- Distance from Packing Facility: *1-5 miles*



## GROWTH

In the last few years, the Dietrichs have expanded to meet increasing competition, both locally and globally, by expanding their farm to 500 acres. While increasing in size, they've also improved efficiency by planting trees closer together, and decreasing their height. The apples grown on these trees are greater quality due to additional sunlight reaching them. This also allows better use of the land and minimizes the area sprayed.

Whereas in previous decades the industry would change every few years, growers now have to constantly update techniques and technology to maintain relevance. "It changes all the time, and it's different for every orchard," explains Mike. "You have to write the book yourself, then throw it out and write a new one for next year." The Dietrichs have implemented new computer systems to control sprayers, allowing them to automatically target specific trees and eliminate excess use of chemicals.

## SUSTAINABILITY

While other industries in the past few years have jumped onto the bandwagon and made an effort to "go green," local orchards have always recognized the need for sustainability and environmentally-friendly business practices.

The Dietrichs are always looking for new ways to reduce the effect their growing techniques have on the environment. One example of this is the use of pheromones to drive away pests previously controlled by a variety of chemicals. Pheromones are a natural alternative that allows growers to control the effect of insects on their crops without impacting the environment.

Additionally, Leo Dietrich & Sons are operating their tractors at half-rpms to reduce carbon emissions, a technique that saves money and boosts efficiency.

## FUTURE

As Jim and Mike look forward, they're confident the orchards will remain a family business for a long time. Mike says, "There's a sense of pride to keep it going forward when the business has been in the family for this long. It's a good feeling to step outside your front door and be at work."

The Dietrichs are vital members of the grower community, expanding and refining their operation each year. Their mission is to ensure the growth of "quality fruit that delivers the best eating experience possible." By staying on the leading edge of technology and sharing knowledge with other growers, the Dietrichs consistently elevate the quality of West Michigan apples.



Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc.  
Sparta, MI | 800.968.8833 | [www.riveridgeproduce.com](http://www.riveridgeproduce.com)