

“We didn’t intend to be farmers; we just planted a garden and had too much, so we started selling.”

Somewhere in

Work hard, make do, and have fun—old-fashioned down-home values that Douglas and Evelyn Corron practice every day on their nearly forty-acre farm near the village of Dragoon. They’ve added a yuppie-consumer touch with two acres of elephant garlic, forty hives of pampered honeybees, and an organic vegetable garden. Underfoot is an uncounted number of friendly cats.

A vivacious, non-stop talker who is on the go in high gear twenty hours a day, Evelyn sells produce directly to a varied clientele who’ve found her sale stand. It’s well-hidden off Dragoon Road somewhere in Cochise County, next to the Corrons’ hand-built, tiny adobe home. She also sells directly to Tucson and Phoenix supermarkets.

It all started in 1975. Douglas was a twenty-year veteran engineer with Hughes Aircraft Company in Tucson; their ten children were grown. Deciding they wanted a place in the country

where they could retire, they bought the old Homestead Ranch east of Dragoon. Douglas went to work as a dispatcher at the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Co-op in Benson, and Evelyn started building a house.

She made fifty adobe bricks a day from June until January; Douglas built all the cabinets. The resulting home—an enclosed back stoop, one all-purpose room, and a small bathroom—was going to be their guest house after they built a big, new home right next door.

“Then,” Evelyn says, “I figured out that if we built this big, nice house, all our kids would be home to visit. We’d just gotten them all moved out on their own, so we decided to stay put in our little home. We have Thanksgiving and Christmas from November to January, one family at a time,” she says, chuckling. Celebrating with ten children and twenty-six grandchildren takes a little time!

They didn’t start out with the idea of a

money-making farm, but the Corrons are vegetarians who’d begun by gardening in Tucson. Despite poor soil at their retirement home, Douglas started turning over the dirt and Evelyn began planting. “We didn’t intend to be farmers; we just planted a garden and had too much, so we started selling.”

An apple orchard was one of their first major efforts—a hundred red and golden delicious trees. “The porcupines ate seventeen trees; just peeled off the bark,” Evelyn says in disgust. They replanted with persimmons, but their remaining apple trees produce plenty of fruit for the juice press, and they can always get cull apples from neighbor Barry Long’s orchard.

Until three years ago, they used a century-old hand press to squeeze out the apple cider; they hand-filled the bottles, even when they had an order from the University of Arizona Student Union for two hundred gallons. They replaced the hand-operated antique with a motorized press that could turn



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out thirty gallons a day, but this year, Doug says proudly, they spent four thousand dollars for an up-to-date model.

Their garlic operation started in the orchard, too. Evelyn planted a handful of elephant garlic between the tree rows. "The deer didn't eat them, the bugs didn't get them, and even the porcupines left them alone. So I said, let's plant twelve garlic cloves, and now we have two acres," Evelyn recounts. Just last fall they switched to small-scale machinery to replace planting and harvesting by hand.

They sell the garlic directly to their drive-in customers and they make garlic strings. Floor-to-ceiling drying racks in a nearby shed announce a bountiful garlic crop, but they'll sell it all.

"Some people buy twenty-five or thirty pounds for cooking, and some stores in Tucson feature our garlic regularly. You can freeze garlic, make marinades with wine, put it in olive oil—it's just a real treat."

Across the farm road from the garlic field, forty large beehives stand. "I could have been the honey king of Arizona, but I said enough is enough," Evelyn brags, laughing. She planted a row of vitex trees and put in hyssop (European mint) just for the bees, but they also can gather nectar from row after row of vegetables, flowers, cats-claw—if bees like it, the Corrons probably grow it.

Honey is a popular sale item, and sometimes a messy one. Evelyn remembers spilling a gallon of honey on her rug. Her solution to a sticky mess? She brought the bees in and let them clean up the spilled honey. "I had a solid mass of bees on the carpet, but they sure did a good job of getting rid of the honey. When they were done, I just opened all the windows and doors and back they went to their hives," Evelyn said.

About the only crop not for sale is the multitude of kittens that keeps appearing. All the Corrons' cats are friendly;

they rub and twine around visitors' ankles. Occasionally there can be too much of even a good thing like kittens, Evelyn admits. "We had twenty-six cats on the place a year or so ago, so Doug said anyone who bought ten pounds of elephant garlic could have a cat free—if they wanted a cat, of course. Three weeks later, we only had two cats left. Of course, they were pregnant."

All of Evelyn's crops grow luxuriantly as if planted in the best of soils—now. "When we moved here, the ground was just plain hard-pan desert like everywhere else," she says. If the soil has become especially fertile, it's because Evelyn and Doug have made it that way—but not with commercial fertilizers. Evelyn uses needles from their Mondale pines to acidify the soil. "We used to sell Christmas trees and pick up the pine cones to add to the soil, but now we just use the needles and don't sell the trees," Evelyn says.

Two large troughs contain earthworm beds where uncounted millions of