



However, the DeBenedettos saw it differently. A fresh fig crop was the difference from moving from a commodity business to a produce style business. The DeBenedetto's had their eye on moving into the fresh fig business 11 years ago. But it took the hand of all the DeBenedetto's to make it happen.

Although figs had been growing in the valley since the California missionaries had planted them back in the 1700's, Mauro DeBenedetto, as a 9 year old, immigrated with his mother and three siblings from Bari, Italy, through Ellis Island to Fresno in 1915. The whole Fresno area was dried fig crops back then, flourishing in the dry, arid climate. By the time Mauro was 15 years old, and had lived with the

They laugh now about the fact that people used to think they were insane. They continuously experimented with equipment that was intended for different uses. They had converted walnut picking equipment to fig picking.

They continuously experimented to reduce labor. However the pruning is the real proprietorial information. The whole family has been experimenting with pruning since the 70's, looking for different methods to enhance the quality of their fruit. The real turning point took place when the youngest of the three sons, Mark DeBenedetto, after graduating from college, went to work for a fruit packing company in Los Osos. That is when he met the Todds, owners of a 400 acre fig farm in Kern County, and started talking to them. In 1991, the rarest of opportunities came along. Mark's ideas of picking, packing and selling fresh figs, and an older couple's wish to sell their fig property along with their equipment, sales contracts and private label, was the DeBenedetto's opportunity to step into the future with fresh figs being their primary business. They started changing the orchard around and replanted to harvest for fresh. It is a different style, you grow dried for tonnage, and you grow fresh for hand picking. Over the last 8 or 9 years, they have reversed the ratio of fresh to dried, fresh now representing 80% of the crop, and dried representing 20%.

This has put the destiny . and the cash flow . back in the hands of the DeBenedetto's . Now a produce style business, they no longer sell exclusively to packers and wait all year for their money. By broadening the usage of the crops they had, they were capitalizing on experiences the whole family already had . and has worked continuously to improve the product that they grow, and the method used to grow it.

The DeBenedetto farm now represents the premium fresh figs in the industry.

Munier family for 3 years, and was making his living working odd jobs for them. The Munier family was the largest fig grower in the valley of this time, Mauro also worked for a pump company for a while, and then again as a tractor mechanic. Both of these odd jobs would prove to be prophetic, as the knowledge that Mauro gained during those working years would end up being instrumental in some of the innovative techniques in fig farming that earned the DeBenedettos their reputation .



Scraping together enough money to buy their first 150 acres, the DeBenedettos started out with dried fig crops, just like the other fig farmers of the Fresno area. Dried fig crops are watered by the flooding method. You flood the crops during the winter, and just let the water seep down. They get no water during the spring and summer, and it is not until the rains come in the fall that they get water again. But since he had worked for a pump company, he knew how to drill wells, so he dug two of the existing wells on the property that are still being used today.



Mauro continued farming until

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Maury DeBenedetto Sr., and his three sons

Nutrients Provided in Serving Sizes of Common Fruits

FRUIT CALORIES DIETARY FIBER POTASSIUM CALCIUM

Apples

(154 gr)1 med. 91 3.0 177 11

Bananas

(126 gr)1 med. 75 1.7 324 4.9

Dates

(40gr)\_ c. 113 3.8 240 10

Figs

(40gr)\_ c. 113 4.9 244 53

Grapes

(138gr)1.5 c 98 .8 255 15

Oranges

(154gr)1 med. 72 2.9 279 62

Prunes

(40gr)\_ c 109 2.4 290 7.2

Raisins

(40gr)\_ c 126 2.3 306 16

Strawberries

(147gr) 8med. 147 2.2 244 20.6

All Fig Facts were supplied by the California Fig Advisory Board . History and Fig Facts.



his oldest son Maury Sr. joined

him in 1959 after graduating from Fresno State. Maury Sr. farmed with his father continuously until Mauro's retirement. Their land acquisitions grew to 850 acres, and by this time Maury Sr. had a wife and three sons and two daughters of his own. As children, they fished, played and hunted on that ground, and learned to own it themselves at a very young age. From the time they were old enough to pitch in, they were working the land on weekends and summers.

Mauro had been known as an innovator in his time, but it would be Maury Sr. who would take it two steps further. As Maury Sr. was able to delegate more and more responsibilities to his sons, he used that time to improve the techniques he used on the farm.

He first made news with both surface and sub surface irrigation, a form of underground irrigation in the early 70's. Innovative at the time, drip irrigation is now the standard for fig farmers, which allows for a more dense planting and higher yields for fig growers. The cultural changes that were being made for fig production, ultimately ended up being used in the future for fresh fig operations as well.

Non cultivation side benefits

were reducing the amount of dust created in the orchards, increasing the amount of beneficial insects, and ultimately helped in the soil being able to retain moisture.

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