



Lewis County

Derald & Audrey Oxley

"I don't want to see it in houses. As long as I'm alive it won't be." Derald Oxley

Derald Oxley was born into a farming family and spent the first 12 years of his life in Kansas. After suffering the loss of three crops during the Depression's infamous dust bowl, Derald's father John Henry, and his wife Bertha, packed up their family and moved west in 1943. They spent two years in California then moved north to settle in Ethel, Washington.

To survive the post Depression, Derald's father worked as a stump rancher. Derald, "He didn't clear cut, he just took the logs they left lying on the ground, receiving \$1,500 that was stumpage price." Over time, Derald's father purchased 188 acres of land, 3 acres in farmland and the rest with 10-year old trees. The property had been logged 12 years earlier. Derald, "Dad bought 28 acres and then another 80. In 1945 he

bought another 80 from the old Chehalis Mill Company."

Derald met Audrey Talbott at a church youth group meeting. In May of 1948, Derald and Audrey married. Derald, "We lived in Salkum for about four years. Then we built the garage on this property and lived in it about seven years while we built the house." The following year Derald joined the Lewis County Farm Forestry Association, "We had timber on the property so I wanted to get involved and see what I could do as a tree farmer."

George England and Charley Burton, both with the Washington Farm Forestry Association, were a major influence on the Oxleys. In 1955, Derald and Audrey bought 188 acres from his parents and began their own harvest plan. Derald, "I try to have my dead trees harvested and do a little bit of thinning. One big project is to get a road all the way on my side of the property line. I started putting a road in about 1980 and keep adding to it all the time. The one problem I've had is root rot. In those areas I've been taking the trees out and planting cedar and alder back in. They seem to do very well."

The Oxleys also leased 37 acres for Christmas trees in Salkum from 1971 to 1993. They brought in a harvest of between three and five thousand trees. In 1991, the Oxleys were one of five tree farmers to be part of an experimental noble fir program with Weyerhaeuser. They planted 440 trees from varying elevations to see which would be heartier for the tree farmers and more desirable for consumers. Derald, "Out of the 440, I had a few die, and I planted them back with Frasier fir. The last two years I've harvested 130 trees, and last year 120. So, I still have a few left."

Over the years, the Oxleys have been very involved with the Washington Farm Forestry Association. Derald was twice president and four years treasurer for the Lewis County Chapter. He takes part in the

Learning Tree Program for children, has been a tour guide on Doug Stinson’s tree farm, and is influential with outreach and education programs for the public held monthly at the Lewis County Courthouse Annex.

“A lot of people ask me why I don’t harvest all my trees and clear cut. And I tell them that my trees are like bank CDs that are still earning interest. Trees grow, and I think they make me better interest if I let them grow than if I cut them,” Derald notes.

FIR ACRES TREE FARM

Derald Oxley, born August, 17 1927

Audrey Talbott Oxley, born February 1, 1928

Fir Acres Tree Farm

188 acres certified by the ATFS, 1957

President Lewis County, 1959

President Lewis County, 1974-1975

Treasurer Lewis County, 1986 – 1990

Lewis County Tree Farmer of the Year, 1998

