

## *The Graham Family*



Jim and Ruth Graham are the owners and operators of Cochise Groves and Golden Rule Vineyards in Cochise, AZ. They inherited Cochise Groves from Ruth's parents, Victor and Hazel Nilson, who planted their first pistachio orchard in 1981. While the Graham's are 2<sup>nd</sup> generation farmers, their son has already taken an interest in Golden Rule Vineyards and will carry on the family legacy as the third generation.



The Graham's are not new to farming. Before he and Ruth took over the family Arizona pistachio orchard in 1998, Jim Graham farmed in Iowa for 25 years. Ruth's parents, Victor and Hazel Nilson, also grew up on farms in Colorado and South Dakota respectively.

Today, Cochise Groves consists of four separate orchards, with 21,000 pistachio trees on 150 acres of land. Their other business, Golden Rule Vineyards, also consists of 21,000 grapevines

for wine making on 26 acres of land. Each vine produces approximately 10 lbs. of grapes and about 3.5 bottles of wine. The Graham's currently produce nine varieties of grapes, with a tenth one on the way! New varieties are produced by grafting, or moving, them onto existing vines. The ten varieties produced at Golden Rule vineyards are Sangiovese, Syrah, Zinfandel, Cabernet, Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and soon Aglianico.



While the Graham's greatly enjoy their lives on the farm, they get very few breaks. Although pistachios and grapes are permanent crops, meaning they only need to be planted once, they need to be taken care of year-round so there's plenty of work to be done. During the winter months, both crops need to be pruned by hand. In spring and summer, irrigation needs to take place regularly to ensure the plants get enough water in the hot, dry, and windy Arizona climate. In the late summer/early fall, grape harvest begins and continues until late October. This process requires a lot of work! 8-12 workers pick the grapes by hand. Similarly, the pistachio harvest typically begins in late August and continues through September.



Pistachios have not always grown like they do today. They originated in the Middle East and Asia Minor and naturally grew on a bush close to the ground. Over time, those bushes were trained into growing like trees, and those trees grow perfectly in the desert. They have low water needs and live a long time, which makes them grow great in Arizona! So much in fact that pistachios are Arizona's second largest nut crop, right behind pecans! Even more interesting when you consider pistachios, although widely considered to be a nut, are drupes. A drupe is a fleshy fruit with a thin skin and a central stone which contains the seed.



Another interesting thing about growing pistachios is that there are both male and female pistachio trees and both need to be present on an orchard for the trees to produce fruit. When they are ripe, the pistachio shells split open to reveal the kernel inside.