

# MEET *the* LAPIERRES.

If Mark and Marnita LaPierre could hold their breath for 70 days, they would. That's how long it takes their sweet cherries to mature from delicate blossoms to ready-to-pick fruit. It's an agonizing 10 weeks, when hail, frost, mildew and insects can ruin a crop. Married 10 years, the LaPierres work as a team on their 120-acre orchard near Granger: Mark farms and Marnita coordinates pickers and fruit packing, while cell phones connect them throughout the day. In addition to conventional and organic cherries, the LaPierres also raise apples and pears. Washington is the nation's leading grower of fresh sweet cherries, producing over 67,000 tons that are shipped to markets around the world. Cherries are a happy food and for many people their arrival signals the beginning of summer. For Mark and Marnita, a successful cherry crop means the end of 70 days of babysitting. So when you bite into a sweet, juicy Bing, Rainier or Chelan cherry, think of the LaPierres walking down an orchard row, smiling as they pick their precious cherries ... they're a part of the Heart of Washington.

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