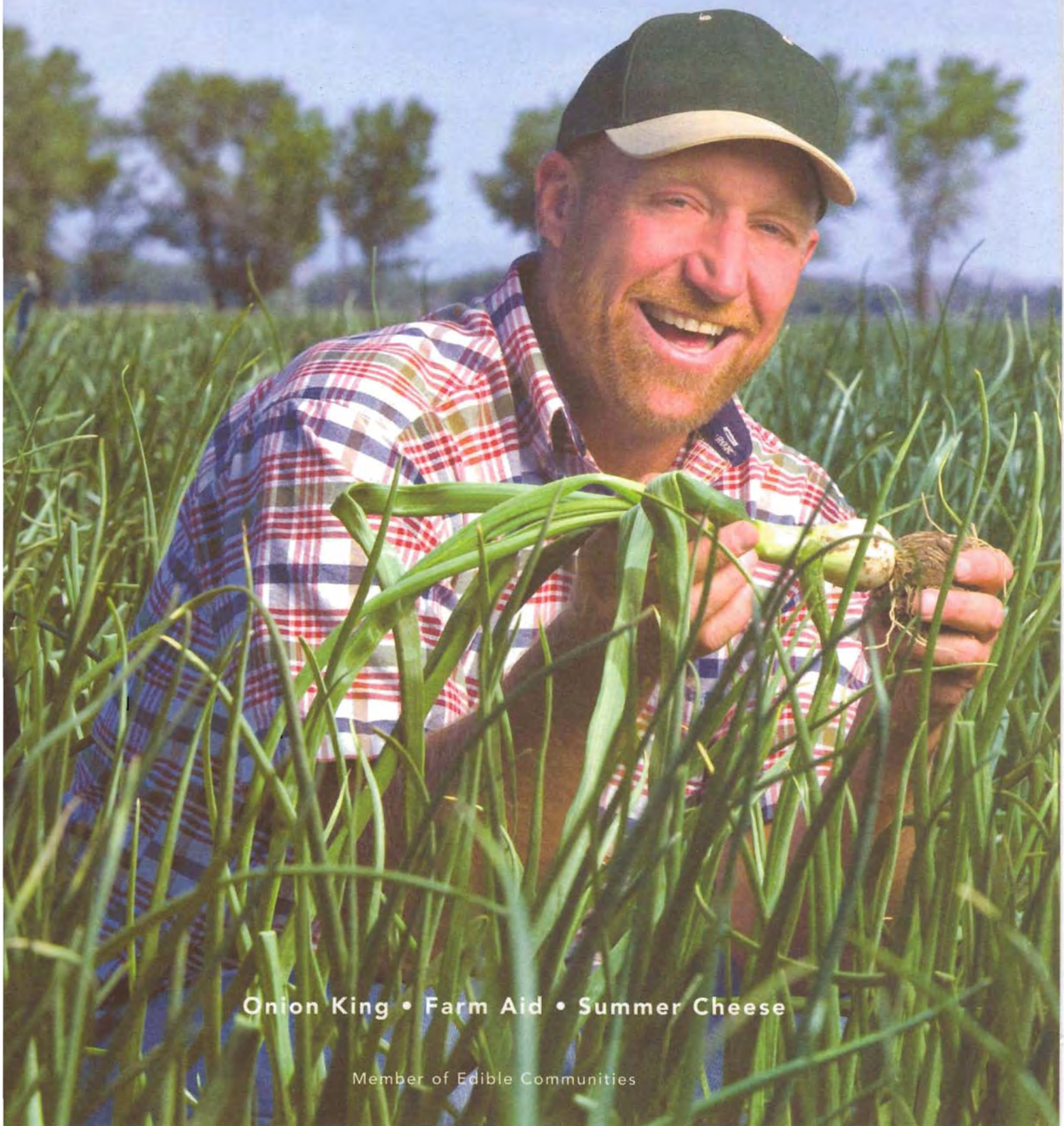


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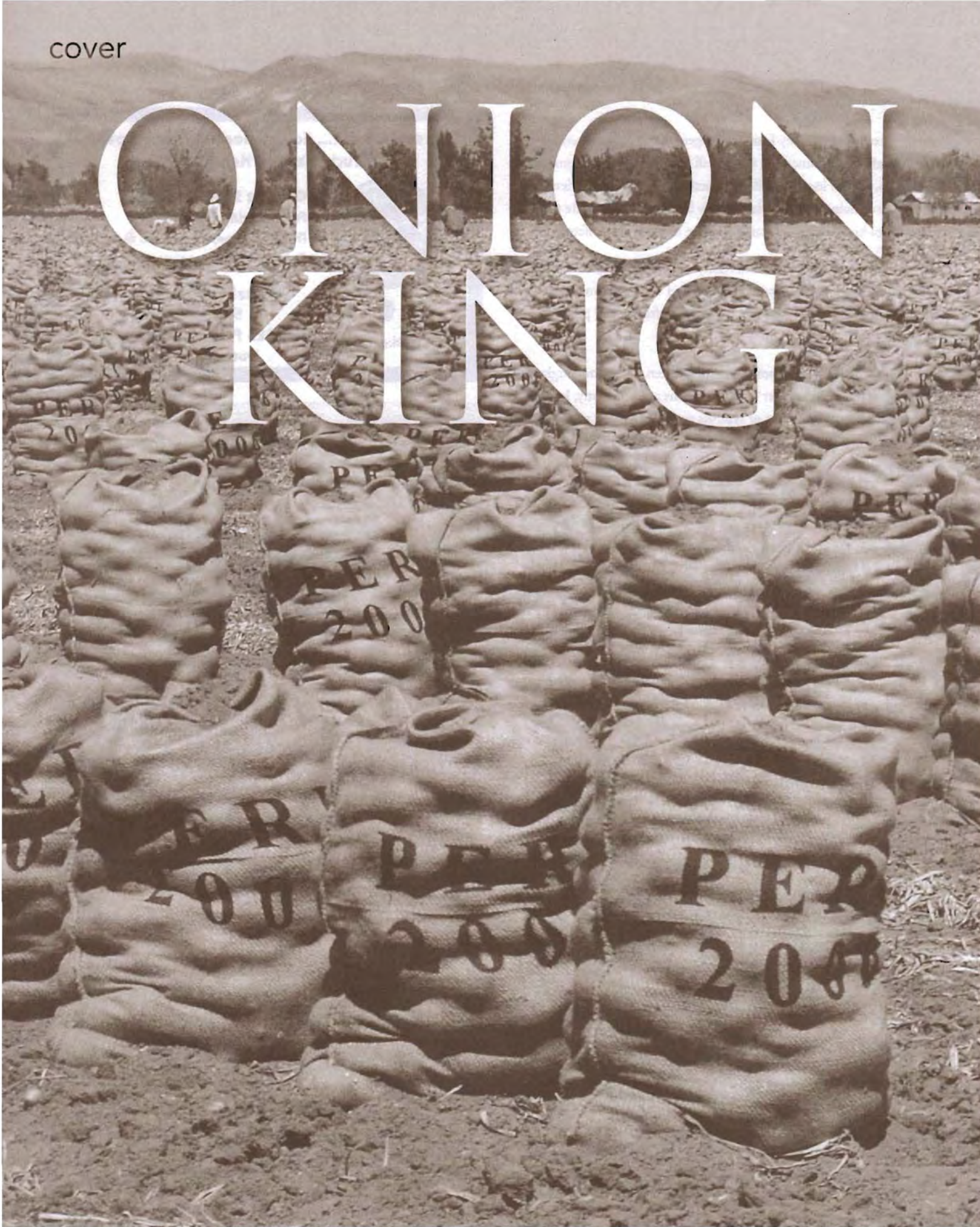


Onion King • Farm Aid • Summer Cheese

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cover

ONION KING



The Peri family has farmed alliums in Northern Nevada for more than 100 years.

WRITTEN BY ANN LINDEMANN • PHOTOS COURTESY OF PERI FAMILY



Julia Child once said, “It’s hard to imagine civilization without onions.” While the Peri family probably never crossed paths with this culinary icon, they surely would agree with her sentiment regarding one of the world’s most indispensable ingredients, which just so happens to be their livelihood.

The Yerington, Nev.-based Peri & Sons Farms, Inc. is one of the largest seed-to-store onion companies in the world, employing 200 full-time employees and 1,500 seasonal workers who come onboard for the demanding eight-week harvest. Peel away the layers from this vi-

sionary multi-million dollar operation and you will find an inspirational family-farming legacy that dates back to 1902 when Constantino Peri and his two brothers immigrated to the United States from their native Italy.

BORN TO FARM

According to Constantino’s great-grandson and third-generation farmer David Peri, his elders had an unwavering vision — fueled by hard work and intent — that would play out in the fields of Lockwood, Nev., and, ultimately, Yerington. Out of six offspring, David was the only kid who truly had farming in his blood.

“There was never any question that I would go into farming,” he says. “I remember when I was 12 years old, I begged my parents to let me quit school so I could move to Smith Valley and farm because my uncle was selling the ranch. I pleaded with them to let me go there and farm, and I cried every day when they said no.”

Upon graduating from high school, David was ripe for bringing his farming fantasy to fruition. With support from his father and uncle, he laid the groundwork for Peri & Sons Farms, Inc. in Yerington where there was plenty of room for expansion. He opted for

onions — not because the desert soil was pre-ordained to produce stellar onions — but rather because of their inherent long shelf life and versatility. He started with 500 acres and now lays claim to a remarkable 7,500 acres of onions located in Yerington and California.

VARIETY AND CARE

The company grows yellow, red, and sweet onions. But it's the lovely whites, with their elegant satiny skins, that are its signature product. Peri & Sons onions can be found locally at Raley's, Save Mart, Safeway, and Whole Foods Market.

"There's no perfect growing area; we just work harder at it," David says. "We hand-harvest everything; they don't do that anywhere else. So we are spending more money to make a better product."

He says hand-harvesting renders the onion "much shinier and prettier than a machine-harvested onion."

NATURAL SPIRIT

Long before Peri & Sons Farms, Inc. launched its organic division eight years ago, there was an overarching company ethos that endeavored to farm "the right way."

David's wife, Pamela, serves as the company's executive vice-president and the administrative brains behind David's visionary spirit. Daughter Jessica Peri Cummings is the retail sales manager, and son DJ is still in high school.

Pamela says the company has always been way ahead of the curve when it comes to progressive food safety, pesticide-free methods, and sustainability practices.

"Long before it was vogue, it was just David's basic practice," Pamela explains. "We all try to take this positive perspective and I really think it's the soul of the business."

GOING ORGANIC

Currently, Peri & Sons farms 500 acres of organic onions. David says, five years ago, the company saw a demand for organic baby greens. They jumped at the opportunity, which evolved into a successful crop rotation with the organic onions.

David marvels at the changes that have occurred during the last three decades.

"It's mind boggling," he muses. "When we started no one was conscious of pesticides; what they were doing to the environment, what they were doing to people, what they were doing to animals, what they were doing to anything."

Still, vision can take an enterprise just so far. The seed that was planted generations ago would never have sprouted if it weren't for the hard work ethic that runs deep in the Peri family.

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