


KEYS TO CONTENTMENT



Skydiving and Nelson Hardie Super 80 sprayers keep a walnut grower and his orchards happy and healthy



Walnut farmer and skydiver Paul Gilbert (right) enjoys a 55-second free-fall at 193 kph (120 mph) with Mike Estes, owner of Nelson Manufacturing (bottom). Once the parachute deploys, speed decreases and it's time to enjoy the peace and fantastic views of the San Joaquin Valley.
Credit: Kurt Vert, Skydance Skydiving-Davis

Walnut grower Paul Gilbert is a bit nuts about skydiving. When the 49-year-old farmer isn't tending to his groves of trees, he's jumping out of airplanes and relishing California's rich tapestry of orchards, vineyards, and farm fields from 4,115 meters (13,500 ft) in the air.

Contrary to common perception, Gilbert finds skydiving "soothing" — a much-needed break from his daily orchard chores. "Farming can be stressful; you're always on the go, and you're battling the elements of Mother Nature, her insects, drought, and flooding. You never know what you're going to get. There are always new diseases popping up, and it can seem defeating at times. Skydiving is calming. It feels like you're floating. It's a joy."

Back at ground level, Gilbert works hard to safeguard the high-value walnut crop from disease and pests. Two Nelson Hardie Super 80 sprayers, one at each orchard location, sit on standby, ready to be deployed for battle should a threat occur. Walnut blight, codling moths, and walnut husk flies are common offenders.

"This was one of the wettest seasons on record," says Gilbert of Wheatland, California.

"We were constantly battling blight. Nearly every time it rained, we had to spray."

There's a lot at stake. The orchards have been in the family for three generations, with trees planted by his grandfather. Collectively, there are more than 200 hectares (500 ac) of trees producing English walnuts that are exported to Japan.

The two orchards consist of a mix of traditional tall walnut trees and new hedge-row-style walnut orchards. The Nelson Hardie Super 80 sprayers cover the foliage of both types of orchards equally well.

"It's just a great machine," says Gilbert, a decade-long customer of the Nelson Hardie. "Whether we're spraying large trees or small, the sprayers do a really good job with coverage."

Nelson Hardie Super 80 sprayers are manufactured by Nelson Manufacturing in Yuba City, California. The company builds five models of stainless-steel sprayers. When company owner Mike Estes purchased the business in 2005, he began selling globally through dealers, including John Deere dealers. Since that time, sales have grown fivefold.

"I attribute our growth to the dealer network and the service we provide customers," Estes says. "Our dealers are trained service technicians, and they're often working on weekends and after hours."

Estes also attributes the company's success to building a very high-quality sprayer, which includes heavy-duty Myers pumps and John Deere engines. "The more we sell, word gets out that it's a good quality product. We believe the John Deere engines give us a competitive advantage over manufacturers that use other engine brands."

Nelson Manufacturing began powering sprayers with John Deere engines in 1990. In recent years, Western Power Products helped Nelson Manufacturing navigate the rising emissions regulations — most recently, Final Tier 4/Stage IV. "Western Power Products really spends a lot of time going over parameters and expectations before we start fabricating parts," says Estes. "Every time we come up with a new model, they always do an application review and approve our build before the sprayer goes into the field. There are no surprises."

Estes says he continues to improve his sprayers, drawing on the expertise of growers who operate the machines. "It all comes down to getting growers' input. We think of our growers as engineers. We listen to them and make changes to improve our product."

Paul Gilbert is among them. "Paul is an owner and operator and spends time running the machine," says Estes. "That's where you learn about your sprayer."

Estes is learning about skydiving, too. Gilbert, who has logged more than 440 jumps, is drawn to the energy and enthusiasm within the skydiving world and enjoys introducing the sport to others. In fact, he introduced Estes to the sport in July, when Estes braved his first tandem jump. "Skydivers have a passion," Gilbert says, "and we want to share that passion."

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www.westernpowerproducts.net



Jumping for John Deere: Skydiver and walnut grower Paul Gilbert displays his aerial allegiance to John Deere with a branded flag. Credit: Alvaro Rondinelli



Nelson Manufacturing manufactures five models of stainless-steel sprayers, including this Nelson Hardie Super 80.



A PowerTech™ PVX 6.8L Interim Tier 4/Stage III B engine is assembled for installation into a dual-fan Super 80 sprayer.