

My name is Donna Rainboth

My husband, Jim McIver, and I purchased our cherry orchard in Cove, Oregon in 2007, not because we wanted to be cherry farmers, but because it came up for sale and it was virtually in our backyard. We wanted to make sure it was preserved and no longer treated with malathion.

We started a “rent-a-tree” program to handle the harvest of 130 cherry trees. People signed up for a tree and picked the cherries, and we handled the rest. This worked well for the first 8 years, but then we started to have water issues. Even with our water rights on a local irrigation ditch, there just wasn’t enough water during the critical 3–4 weeks around harvest time. We were seeing more and more damage to our trees as they became more stressed and less able to cope with disease. We slowly began to take out the damaged trees. Three years ago, the new Ditch Walker was able to get us enough water to be able to irrigate our trees both before and after harvest. We were elated. We hoped for the same the following year but when I called him he said “I am giving the ditch everything we’ve got. There just isn’t enough water.” Finally, last year we made the painful decision to cut down most of our remaining trees. We now have 17 trees left.

The orchard was never a money-making endeavor. It was about community—families coming together, people spending time outdoors, children growing up visiting year after year. One boy, when asked what he wanted to do on his 15th birthday, chose to spend it at the orchard because, quote, “it is what I always do on my birthday.” He had been coming to the orchard with his family since he was three years old. During cherry harvest people brought picnics, kids played in the riparian area, and wildlife thrived—birds, bats, deer, even foxes. The trees provided a thick overhead canopy and the orchard stayed cool and green in the summer. Today, we mostly have a dry, open field with a few trees on the edges. The land is now more prone to wildfire. The loss of water has had a huge impact on us and our community.

That’s why I support the Climate Resilience Superfund bill. Fossil fuel corporations have contributed to these droughts and other climate damages. They should pay their fair share so communities like ours can adapt, plan how to handle the lack of water, and protect the places that bring people together.