

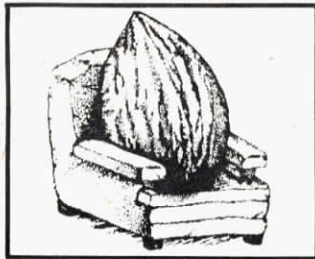
## California Nut Ranch Seeks 'Armchair Farmers'

Ken and Melanie Murray are looking for a few good "nuts" to share the risks of farming.

The young California couple, who recently married and settled down on an established almond orchard, knew they had to find a better way to market their crop after receiving just \$1.20 a lb. for their nuts after their first harvest. Their "nutty" solution was to rent trees to "armchair farmers" in other parts of the country, promising the entire yield of an almond tree to the renter. It's an idea they say could work with other crops.

"We think this is a good crop to start with since many people pay outrageous prices — often as high as \$5.50 a lb. or more — for shelled almonds. We're able to offer fresh nuts, shipped direct after harvest, and an opportunity to become involved in an actual farming operation. It's a good deal all around," says Melanie.

The Murrays, advertising in national magazines like *Country Journal* and *Mother Earth News*, offer to rent almond trees for \$25 per year. The average yield per tree is 7 to 8 lbs. of shelled nuts but can vary to as low as 2 to 3 lbs. in a bad year up to 10 lbs. or more in a good year. The agreement with renters guarantees them a



5 lb. minimum. After harvest, nuts are shipped to renters postpaid.

"We make it clear to customers that it's impossible for us to harvest each tree individually. We simply harvest the total crop from our 22 acres and obtain an average yield per tree. This year we have a great crop and expect trees to yield 9 to 10 lb. apiece. People will get a great deal," explains Melanie, noting that it's still not too late to get in on this year's harvest.

The Murrays got their idea from an article they read about maple sugar harvesters who made a similar arrangement with city dwellers for the sap in their trees.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Heather Creek Farm, P.O. Box 92, Guinda, Calif. 95637 (ph 916 796-3649).

## GIVES BIRTH TO "BLUE MOON", THE FIRST-EVER VERIFIED MULE COLT

### Nebraska Mule Makes History

They said it couldn't be done but "Krause" did it! The young mule owned by the Arthur (Bill) Sylvester family, of Champion, Neb., foaled a healthy mule last July 6.

The Sylvesters were as surprised as anyone.

Because "everyone" knows that mules do not reproduce, you can imagine what Bill thought when he looked out in the pasture of mules to find what appeared to be a newborn colt. He told his son Kim they'd better head out to investigate.

Sure enough, there was Krause — a two year old mule they had raised from birth — with a perfectly normal mule colt. The colorings and markings were almost identical to her mother.

Because of the extreme "once in a Blue Moon" odds under which such a phenomenon occurs, the Sylvesters named the new arrival "Blue Moon".

The birth of a mule results from the breeding of a mare horse with a male donkey (jack).

Krause (Blue Moon's mother) was produced on the Sylvester farm. Her mother is a Welsh mare pony named

Annie, and her father a jack named Chester. Chester is a prolific jack who also is the father of the newborn mule Blue Moon. The Sylvesters permitted Chester to run with the mules because the females were thought to be infertile.

When Blue Moon was born, the Sylvesters contacted Dr. Dave Johnsen, a local veterinarian, to have him vouch for the unusual birth. Within a short time, Dr. Kurt Benirschke, director of the Center for the Reproduction of Endangered Species at the San Diego Zoo, in California, was called to arrange for scientific testing and verification. Dr. Johnsen was commissioned to take blood samples from Krause, the mother; Blue Moon, the foal; the grandmother, a Welsh pony mare (horse); and the father and grandfather, a jackass (male donkey).

A horse is supposed to have 64 chromosomes, a donkey 62, and a mule 63.

Blood samples and other "technical testing" have verified that Blue Moon is indeed the first scientifically verified mule colt foaled from a mule

**FARM  
SHOW**



**Editor's Note:** Most of what goes into *Ag World* stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of *FARM SHOW* touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching — everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit.

If you've read or heard a good *Ag World* type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: *FARM SHOW*, Box 704, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.



Photo by The Imperial Republican

**"Blue Moon" is believed to be the world's first scientifically verified mule colt foaled by a molly mule.**

molly. In mid-August, the Sylvesters received word from Dr. Benirschke with the big news: Krause is a true molly mule with 63 chromosomes and her new son Blue Moon is also a mule with 63 chromosomes. The father and grandfather is a verified jackass with 62 chromosomes, and the grandmother a true female horse with 64 chromosomes.

So what do you call the foal of a mule?

The cross of a male horse and a jenny (female donkey) is called a hinny. Therefore, the cross of a jack

and mule could logically be called a jule. This would make Blue Moon a real "jule".

Scientists will be studying Blue Moon carefully to test his capacity to reproduce as he matures. And Krause will be observed closely for the remainder of her life. Will she continue to beat the odds by producing more foals, or was her amazing fete truly "once in a Blue Moon?"

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