



## Farmer White's • Williamsburg, Michigan

A few miles south of the harbor town of Elk Rapids, MI, Mary Cooper's family has tended cherry orchards for three generations—four, counting her grandparents' orchards at another location.

During cherry season, Cooper looks forward to the annual migration of summer people who stop by her roadside stand, regulars who might remember how the fresh-fruit enterprise began—from the back of the family's 1968 GMC pickup.

"We still have it," Cooper laughs, adding that she still uses the same three-tiered shelf from that era to display the day's picks. Today Farmer White's stand is a fully enclosed 20-by-30-foot building that features more than 40 varieties of jams and jellies, many from old family recipes tweaked by Cooper, who earned her bachelor's in food and nutrition and a master's in business administration from Michigan State University.

When Cooper went off to school, she never dreamed she'd be back, running the farm. She was married and working in the business world

when her parents, Versil and Jane White, feared they would lose the family farm to tenacious developers. "We stepped up to the plate. We knew we had to take it over or the farm would be sold," Cooper explains. Now their eldest son, Vincent, runs the family farm stand plus booths at the Petoskey, Harbor Springs, Charlevoix and Elk Rapids farmers markets, which run on different days during the season. His brothers Nick and Timothy, both college students, help during crop time.

Farmer White's 10 acres of sweet cherries are hand picked. Another 50 acres of tarts are harvested with mechanical pickers that shake the fruits into tarps below. The tart season is short—14 to 20 days—and nerve-wracking, says Cooper. "If they get overripe, they won't go through the pitters; they fall apart. That's why we get so stressed out. You gamble with Mother Nature every day. You could be frozen out in March, in June, or you could pull through and a windstorm could come—or a hailstorm. That's why my husband has a daytime job."

Yet Cooper wouldn't have it any other way. Despite the 14-hour, seven-days-a-week hustle that ramps up when the stand officially opens Memorial Day and closes for the season just before Christmas, it's the personal contact that makes it all worthwhile. "You watch people grow up, then they bring their kids, then their kids. It's like family."

*Farmer White's is at 11373 U.S. Highway 31 South Williamsburg, MI 49690  
231-632-1500, [www.farmerwhites.com](http://www.farmerwhites.com)*

**"We stepped up to the plate. We knew we had to take it over or the farm would be sold."**

—Mary Cooper

