Oregon Family Farmer

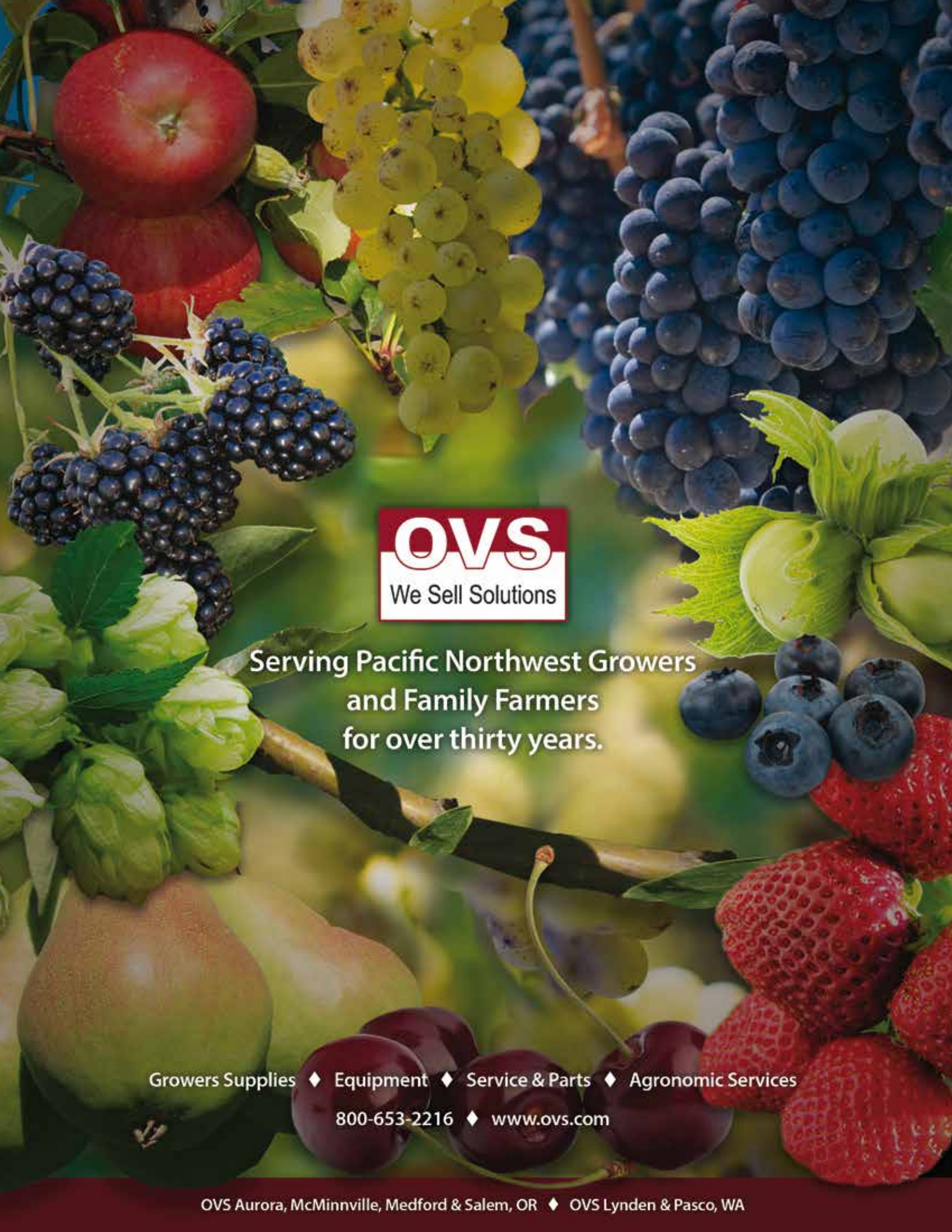
A publication of the Oregon Family Farm Association

Senator, Coach, Firefighter, but most of all a **Farmer**

Meet Chuck Thomsen

Plus

CELEBRATING OREGON'S AGRICULTURE ENTREPRENEURS: JASON & NATALY MATTOX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California Looks to Oregon for Farm Salvation

From the President

Matt Cyrus, President,
Oregon Family Farm Association

Oregon has been the nation's top moving destination state three years in a row. This wave now includes California farmers looking for a better harvest. The last few years, growers in Central Oregon and the Willamette Valley have seen large-scale nut growers scoping out the area. According to a recent article by The Globe and Mail, California farmers looking to Oregon may only increase. That's in large part because Oregon has an abundance of what its neighbor to the south lacks—water.

The Globe and Mail article quotes Oregon State University associate professor emeritus and horticulturist Ross Penhallegon, who notes that Oregon is seeing an "influx" of California farmers actively inquiring about possibilities in Oregon, where the soil is good and rainfall is plenty.

One has to go back at least five years to understand Oregon's appeal. That's the last time California didn't experience below average rainfall. In fact, California has been in a drought-induced state of emergency since the beginning of 2014. The toll on the state's agricultural industry is enormous—billions of dollars in production lost annually and more than a million acres of farmland left unusable and idle. Though California remains by far the largest producer of fruits, vegetables and nuts in the country—supplying roughly half of the United State's total—there is increasing concern that too much of the United State's food supply is dependent there. Calls to "de-Californify" the supply are growing.

What California's agriculture plight means for Oregon's growers remains uncertain. One thing seems pretty clear, however. Expect to see more California farmers looking to Oregon for salvation. ■

Contents

OREGON FAMILY FARM ASSOCIATION
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FFA High School Students Serve Thousands of Oregon Families

BY NAOMI INMAN

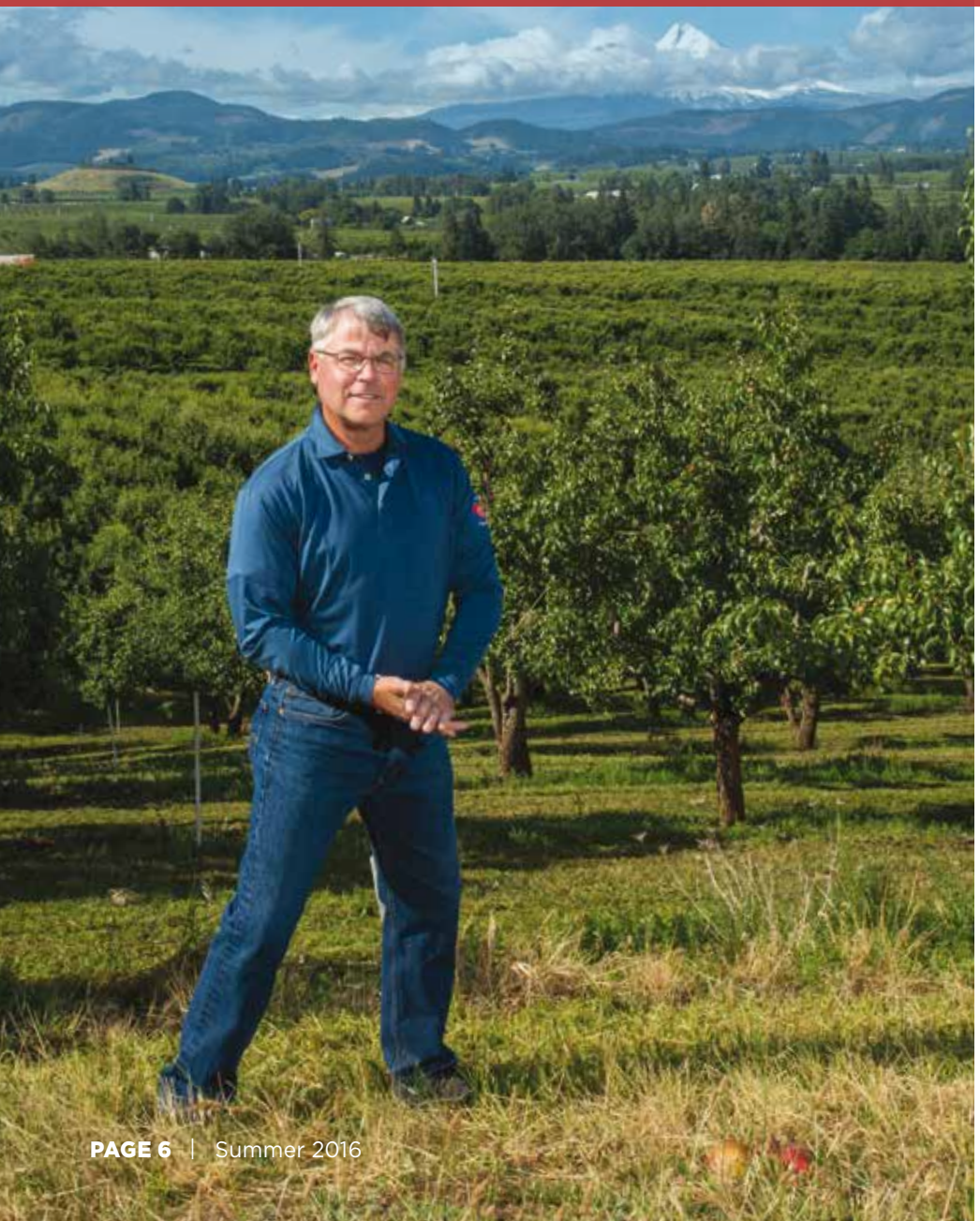
One ag student's class competition is another family's food on the table. That's what happened at Perrydale high school in 1997 when a friendly rivalry between freshmen and sophomores snowballed into Food for All, a huge produce drive coordinated by Oregon's Future Farmers of America (FFA) students to fight hunger and feed families. In the past four years alone, Food for All director Kirk Hutchinson credits students, and about 25 farms and co-ops, for collecting and distributing more than 1.5 million pounds of produce to thousands of food insecure families from the Oregon Coast to Ontario.

Hutchinson, a retired agriculture teacher of 35 years, has been directing the program and steering its exponential growth since he first acted as advisor for the Perrydale freshman class. In the 18 years since, he said, the most meaningful growth has been in the lives of the students themselves. "These kids truly learn to serve; it really changes them. It changes their minds and hearts about serving and giving to others."

Last December, Food for All collected 300,000 pounds of quality, shelf-stable fruits and vegetables, which hundreds of FFA students at six high schools—Amity, Dayton, Perrydale, Sheridan, Willamina, and Yamill-Carlton—repackaged into 40 pound boxes and delivered to more than 5,000 families around the state. At the Oregon State FFA convention in March of this year, students and OSU athletes gathered to pack boxes and deliver another 65,000 pounds of food to local food banks.

As a service and learning project, Food For All volunteers learn the ag industry from start to finish and develop real-world skills. They write letters to farmers and producers. They call, visit, and make presentations asking for donations. Pulling it all together requires students to navigate dozens of partnerships with farmers, agencies, and transportation companies. By December 23rd each year running, thousands of disadvantaged families receive a knock on their door from an FFA student or volunteer with three cheerful words just in time for the holiday season: "Food for All!" ■

Senator, Coach, Firefighter, but Most of All a Farmer



Flanking the eastside of the Hood River Valley, and just to the south of Whiskey Creek Road, a fair stretch of Eastside Road winds along miles of winter pear orchards, dotted with vintage farm homes. A modest but dignified, crisp, white, salt-block home has stood as a Thomsen family residence for the better part of a century.

BY NAOMI INMAN

Ask Senator Chuck Thomsen, third generation pear farmer in the Hood River's fruit valley, why he stayed on the family farm—a farm on which he is still only a tenant—and you'll hear a thing or two about legacy. "It's how you treat people, how you treat your kids, how you treat your workers down through the generations that makes it

work. It's about honesty and a good work ethic." says Chuck. "The decisions we make about our communities...all of it matters."

His is a deep devotion to community. To a broad sense of family. And a rich heritage that stretches from the lumber mill and farm his great grandfather built, to the Pine Grove Schoolhouse that Grandpa Vic Thomsen built, and the pear grove that Grandpa Vic happened into while working at the Diamond Fruit Company.

"That's how this whole family pear farm got started," Chuck explains. "My grandpa Vic grew up in this farming and timber community (on Thomsen Road). He worked for Diamond Fruit, the big pear growing cooperative here. The owner really like my grandpa. And when the owner of this farm retired to California he offered him this farm. That barn used to be a packing house, and they picked fruit back then in little wood boxes."

Grandpa Vic married Daisy, and their only son Robert (Bob) is Chuck's father. So Bob kept on at the farm and made a wise business decision that stands to this day. He hired the best foreman in the valley, Everett Long, who helped him take the farm from 50 acres to 160 as it stands today. "When my dad took off for Wyoming and left me with the farm, I basically went to work for Everett Long," said Chuck.

Farmer Chuck Thomsen talks about the generational farm from the kitchen table—the same tidy blue and white country kitchen where Grandma Daisy raised his dad, Bob, and where he often stomped in as a little boy from the guest house out back that he and his three sisters called home. He sipps a stiff cup of black coffee and leans over to stroke a rather adoring "foster kitten" he's sending to a new home.

Out the back kitchen window he points to the house where he grew up, the old packing house, the barn, and the pear trees he and his sister would climb into and "just bawl."

"One year later, to the day, I was laying on the couch watching sports and my dad came in and said, 'Well, it's been a year. What're you going to do?'"

"When I was younger my dad would make us work. He'd wake us up in the middle of the night to light smudge pots. We drove tractors at ages 10 and 12. Sometimes my older sister and I would go and sit in a tree over there and just bawl. Thinning is hard and tedious work and it felt like no fun working in the orchards when all your friends were out playing."

Chuck doesn't remember resenting farm work too much. He enjoyed his family home, his three sisters, his grandparents, and his farming community. But it had its moments where it caused him to consider a different future.

When Chuck graduated from Hood River High School in 1975 and headed for Willamette University, he had one goal in mind "Get off the farm!" he says, with a quiet intensity. "I originally went to Willamette University saying, 'I'm going to do something else, I'm not going to farm.' And that gave me incentive to do well in school."

He graduated with a B.S. in Economics and Political Science at the height of the Carter years and a low in job prospects. So, he came back to Hood River where there was always work to do, meals to be had, and a close-knit community he cherished.

"When I came back my dad asked me, 'are you going to farm?' And I answered. 'I don't know. I'll give it a year.' I said that just to get him off my back," Chuck laughs. "I was having a good time. There were a lot of friends around here my age. And I thought farming and working at Dad's Chevy dealership was a fun job, even though it could be hard at times."

Wouldn't you know? Chuck's dad very literally marked his son's words. On the calendar.

"One year later, to the day, I was laying on the couch watching sports and my dad came in and said, 'Well, it's been a year. What're you going to do?'"

So he answered glibly, "I'll stay and farm."

Within two years of that date, Chuck was married to Christy, a bright young schoolteacher he met at a basketball game in Goldendale, WA. And his dad? He was the one with a ticket to get off the farm. Bob Thomsen bought a cattle ranch in Wyoming and left Chuck with "pears for his heirs."

That was in the early 80s. Thirty years later, the Thomsen family farm is a hard-working pear orchard with 160 acres of trees producing over 7,800 bins of Anjou, Bartlett, and Bosc pears

Continued on Page 8

Senator, Coach, Firefighter, but Most of All a Farmer

Continued from Page 7

sold on the fresh market. The farm is overseen by now second and third generations of foremen who are incredibly valued for their knowledge and loyalty. His dad still owns the farm. Chuck is still working for his dad. He's still getting up in the middle of the night lighting smudge pots when the icy spring frosts threaten to kill the opening buds.

It seems Chuck developed the same work ethic.

But what Chuck Thomsen has also cultivated in more than three decades is an unrelenting drive to serve his community and to be an encourager. For most of these 30-plus years, Chuck has been a volunteer firefighter with the Pine Grove Fire Department. For 14 years he coached his daughters' school and Little League teams. Those are all just starters. Rotary Club president, numerous volunteer roles, and four years of appointment to the Hood River Planning Commission demonstrate just how intensely committed he is to his family, his community, and to working out policies that impact people where they live.

When a vacancy came up on the ballot for Hood River County Commissioner in 1994, he ran for the office and held that position until 2010. "When I ran for that spot and got elected, I never had an opponent after that, never put out a yard sign, never put an ad in the paper, never raised a dime, never did anything. People just knew me and I was a commissioner for 16 years."

But when Ted Ferrioli approached Chuck to run for the State Senate seat (District 26) in 2009. He was reluctant. Even though he had been County Commissioner for 16 years, he had never actually run a campaign. All he'd ever done is sign-up for the ballot.

"I was however, ready for a new challenge," Chuck remembers. And he's quick to add, "I'm real lucky that I have a lot of good people and a foreman to run the farm when I'm gone. If I didn't have Alfredo, I couldn't do this job."

Chuck the candidate had his work cut out for him in a minus-6 Democratic swing district. He agreed to run on one condition: he told Ferrioli, "I'll run but I'm not going to lose. There's no way my opponent can outwork me: I'm a farmer. I can get up any time of the morning and go to work."

For eight months, and at great personal cost, in his words, "When I ran for state senate, I ran! And I ran and I ran." He knocked on doors six days a week, often literally running between 100 doors a day from March to November. He knocked on 13,000 doors personally, and left thousands of personal handwritten notes on every door that went unanswered. He stayed up 'til 2:00am writing handwritten thank you notes to every contributor. He took Mondays "off" to do the mounting paperwork and pay the bills and payroll. In a swing district, against a seated State Representative, he won 55% of the vote.

Senator Chuck Thomsen describes himself as a moderate thinker who is always looking for healthy compromise. "I'm willing to listen to everyone and try to find something in the middle that works," he quips. He was on the budget committee for schools and effective in getting more funding for K-12.

The policies that threaten family farms, and especially generational family farms, still loom large and are cause for concern. Issues like paid sick leave for seasonal workers, inheritance taxes, minimum wage laws, and a legislature that is dominated by Portland-centric legislators—those issues can be killers for family farmers.

"I've always said that the best way to save agricultural land is to make sure farmers have a viable business. Don't overregulate us. Don't enact policies that hurt farmers. Because farmers work off of supply and demand," he starts to explain.

One of the most striking things about Chuck Thomsen's orchard, is his level of personal investment in his workers and his family.

More than 60 people live on the Thomsen farm where they are provided with housing, electricity and water—rent free. Many of these are long time seasonal workers and their families who work three or four months for the Thomsens, yet are free to work up and down the valley on neighboring farms. As Chuck drives me around to the homes and gardens set aside for his employees, he somewhat humbly avers "We have the best crew in the valley, the best foreman. That's just how we take care of the people that work for us."

"More than 60 people live on the Thomsen farm where they are provided with housing, electricity and water—rent free."

It's no wonder his current foreman, Alfredo, grew up here and now follows in his immigrant father's footsteps (who is now retired and living on the property). Even Everett's widow still lives in a house on the property. "It's just what we do. We take care of them like family."

From every perceivable angle, it's easy to see that Chuck Thomsen is completely in his element. Following his passion for people, for families, for policy that affects people and families. Leading by serving—he's lived it.

Don't get me wrong. Chuck is pretty serious about having fun too. No "dull boy" here. His unimposing office is just off the kitchen, shelves are filled to the ceiling with a farm toy collection. I take notice. "Well, we kinda have a 30-year family hobby too," he mentions. His daughter Meagan chimes in, "You want to see the basement?"

We head down the steep cellar-like stairs where a veritable museum of every year, make, and model of miniature tin tractors, farm equipment, barns, silos, figurines and what-not are carefully arranged. Catalogued

Continued on Page 10

Senator, Coach, Firefighter, but Most of All a Farmer

Continued from Page 9

on shelves from floor to ceiling around the perimeter of the room.

"Most every year we go as a family to the Iowa Toy Farm Show," Meagan fondly interjects. I find it to be just one more layer of intrigue on this increasingly fanciful farmer.

Going back to his early memories of working for his dad, and "just bawling" with his sister in the pear trees, Chuck says he always vowed to raise his own kids, daughters Meagan and Mallory, not only to have a good work ethic, but to like farming. He put them to work four hours a day during the summer. They could choose the 8am or noon shift—but in either case they had to be punctual. "I wanted them to learn a work ethic. To learn what it was to be punctual, get up, and be at work on time."

To this day, Mallory still loves the farming life. Meagan—not so much. She became a nurse. But she still lives on a Measure 37 claim on the family property. Meagan stopped in to see dad, I get to hear her story. She credits their dad for the intentional time he invested in them. Working alongside them in the pear orchards and coaching their ball teams.

"What's your parting wisdom," I ask. "Practical tips for keeping farming in the family."

Suddenly, he's a bit stumped.

"I don't know? Do what you think is best and hope a little bit rubs off?" he questions. "You always hope at least one person in the family wants to take over, eventually. Will my daughters want to do it? Maybe. I don't know. I want them to enjoy it."

His resolve kicks back in. "You know, family farming is the greatest life! It's a great way to raise your kids, to raise up a family and teach them a work ethic. To continue generationally isn't always easy. It's tough to mix business with family. So in family farming—part of it is staying in business, and part of it is staying a family." ■

"Early memories of working for his dad, bawling with his sister in the pear trees, made Chuck vow that he would raise his own kids to like farming."

Oregon-Flavored RECIPES

Gingered Cranberry, Hazelnut, and Fig Conserve

A delicious side to serve with smoked turkey! I'd call it a chutney because of it's spicy nature, but once you've added hazelnuts, it officially becomes a conserve.

Makes about 2-1/2 cups

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 cup yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cups whole fresh cranberries
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- Juice and grated zest of 1 orange (about 1/2 cup juice)
- 1/2 cup brandy
- 1/3 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/3 cup dried cherries
- 1/3 cup dried Mission figs, each one cut into 8 pieces
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger root
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 3/4 cup chopped roasted and skinned hazelnuts

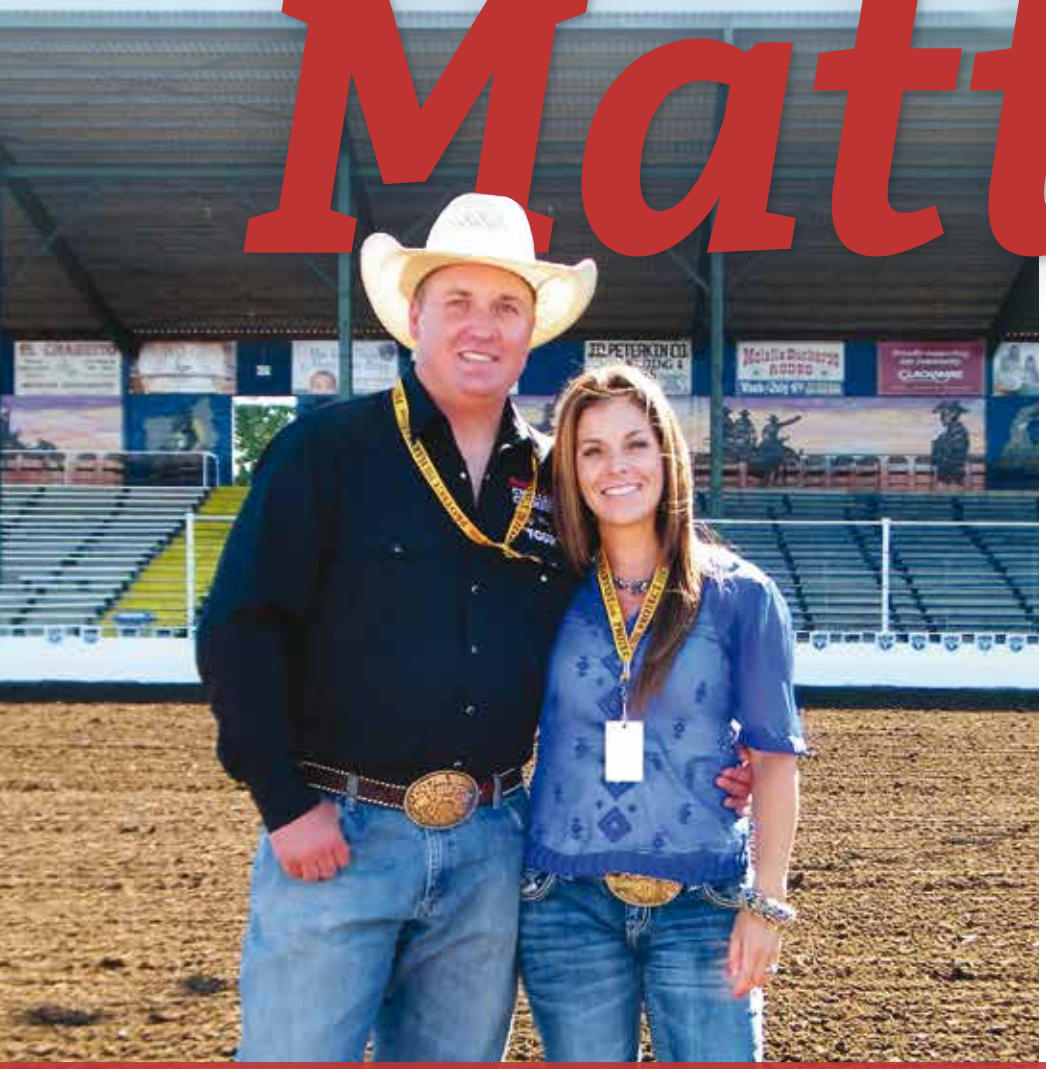
DIRECTIONS:

In a medium, heavy-bottomed pot, over medium-high heat, sauté the onion in the olive oil just until the onion softens, about 2 minutes. Add the cranberries, brown sugar, orange juice and zest, brandy, vinegar, cherries, dried figs, ginger root, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally. The mixture will foam at first, but that will subside and the liquid will thicken and turn glossy.

Remove from heat. Serve warm or chilled. May be prepared up to one month ahead and refrigerated.

CELEBRATING *Oregon's* AGRICULTURE ENTREPRENEURS

Jason & Nataly Mattox



"From three events in its first year of operation, to an 18-event tour each year, the Mattoxes now produce one of the most successful rodeo operations in the Pacific Northwest."

Challenge of Champions Tour

WWW.CCTBULLRIDING.COM

BY KURT HEATH

Respect for others. Commitment to family. Honoring true heroes. Keeping your word. Doing what's right. According to Jason Mattox, these are the hallmarks of the "Western way of life." They're also the values that drive him as a husband and father, a business entrepreneur and the "cowboy" culture he works so hard to preserve through his rodeo, The Challenge of Champions Tour.

Started by Mattox and his wife Nataly in 2009, The Challenge of Champions Tour is a traveling rodeo that draws the best bullriders to the best event venues around. From three events in its first year of operation, to an 18 event tour each year, the Mattoxes now produce one of the most successful rodeo operations in the Pacific Northwest, with professional competitions in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and, if all goes right, Hawaii later this year. With Nataly's support, Jason manages five to six full-time employees and a deep bench of volunteers; works with his team to secure all the riders, bulls, judges, announcers, and sponsorships needed for each rodeo; and produces a multi-event competition that includes bullriding, barrel racing and much more.

Despite the lonely rodeo cowboy mystique depicted in country music, for the Mattoxes, the rodeo is truly a family affair. Their three daughters, Joelle (9), Cassia (7), and Stella (4), have all grown up in a culture where the sense of community among rodeo families is strong and family togetherness is encouraged.

When the girls were younger, Jason admits it was easy to pack up the entire family for the roughly five days required for each event. Now

© TAKE A PEAK PHOTOGRAPHY

© ROPIN' THE MOMENT PHOTOGRAPHY

TOP: Live shot of the Challenge of Champions Tour event, Justin Schmitt aboard Garbers Ghost (2 Bucks Rodeo Co). BOTTOM: Cassia Mattox (7) competing in the Dummy Roping event at the NW Youth Rodeo Association.

that they're in school, it's a bigger challenge. Nataly, who also works as a realtor in Roseburg, is usually able to bring the girls for half of a Tuesday through Sunday event.

"It's never easy to be apart during the tour, but it makes our time together that much more special," explains Mattox. "At home, we're constantly doing things together, working our farm, having fun. We aren't watching TV or going to separate rooms. We love being

Continued on Page 14

Oregon's Agriculture Entrepreneurs: Jason & Nataly Mattox

Continued from Page 13

around each other and make the most of the time we have."

From one standpoint, the Mattox's success running a rodeo and balancing family life isn't too surprising. Jason is a former professional bullrider, introduced to the sport at the age of seven by his friends, and members of a bullriding royal family, Cody and Jim Custer. Jason went on to a successful 11-year rodeo career that included a full scholarship to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, where he competed in the college national finals. Nataly is every bit Jason's match when it comes to rodeo credentials. Her father, Jody Tatone, boasts one of the most successful and storied bullriding careers ever. Her mother is a former Miss Rodeo Oregon and champion barrel racer. When Jason met Nataly her freshman year of college, she was well on her way to becoming the collegiate barrel racing national champion, which she accomplished in 2005.

© ROPIN THE MOMENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Joelle Mattox (9) barrel racing at the NW Youth Rodeo in St Paul, OR.

The Challenge of Champions Tour takes special pride in highlighting youth involvement and opportunities at rodeos. It also enjoys a partnership with the Oregon Junior Bull Riders Association based in Lebanon, Oregon. These youth events provide young Oregonians, aged 7 to 15 years, a chance to put their skills to the test and a unique opportunity to qualify for the national finals held in Texas each December.

It's one thing to be a bullrider or barrel racer. It's another thing to run a successful rodeo business. As Mattox tells it, he's not a natural business man. Instead, he credits much of his success to the people and business skills he picked up over the years in sales jobs and as a collegiate bullrider.

"I learned how to talk to people. Be proactive. Sell something and still be a genuine person," says Mattox about his days as a water softener salesman. Mattox also gained experience selling sponsorships, and organizing and producing rodeos in college. That's because the collegiate rodeo isn't governed by the NCAA, and bullriders plan and execute their competitions.

One thing Mattox won't do is take full credit for his success. Instead, he acknowledges the many great people and partners who help his rodeo draw the best

Cowboys awaiting their introduction into the arena to kickoff the Challenge of Champions Tour Stop in Molalla, OR.

riders, judges, and sponsors. He mentions in particular the importance of five or six quality bull providers. They ensure every rider gets a competitive bull that puts him in a position to win.

"I wanted a rodeo that truly honors the cowboy way of life. That means everything we do has a bigger purpose..."

"Producing a rodeo is a huge undertaking with a lot of moving parts. We're fortunate to have a great team of people that make our tour one of the best in the business. The addition to the tour of Coastal Farm & Ranch, Protect the Harvest, Boot Barn, Pendleton and all our great corporate sponsors has also had a big impact on our events for the better," Mattox says.

After the dust settles and the sun sets on each event, Mattox hopes above all that rodeo-goers leave with an appreciation for Western values. In fact, that desire motivated him to start The Challenge of Champions Tour after he retired from full-time bull riding.

"I wanted a rodeo that truly honors the cowboy way of life. That means everything we do has a bigger purpose than just making money. The day I put on rodeos for money and not for love of the game and to promote the values that make Western culture and the rodeo so special, that's the day I need to retire." ■

2016 CHALLENGE OF CHAMPIONS TOUR SCHEDULE

(Events subject to change)

ROSEBURG, OR
January 23, 2016 @ 7:00pm

PRINEVILLE, OR
March 12, 2016 @ 7:00pm

PASCO, WA
March 19, 2016 @ 7:00pm

HERMISTON, OR
May 14, 2016 @ 7:00pm

ALBANY, OR
May 21, 2016 @ 7:00pm

SANDPOINT, ID
June 18, 2016 @ 7:30pm

MOLALLA, OR
June 25, 2016 @ 7:00pm

LONGVIEW, WA
July 9, 2016 @ 7:00pm

OAKVILLE, WA
Co-Sanctioned by Lazy HK Bar Rodeo Co.
July 16, 2016 @ 4:00pm

CENTRAL POINT, OR
July 20, 2016 @ 7:00pm

SANDPOINT, ID
August 16, 2016 @ 7:30pm

NEWPORT, OR
August 20, 2016 @ 2:00pm

CANBY, OR
August 21, 2016 @ 2:00pm

MORO, OR
Sherman County
August 27, 2016 @ 7:00pm

WAIMANALO, HI
Tentative
October 16, 2016 @ 7:00pm

SALEM, OR
November 12, 2016 @ 7:00pm

CENTRAL POINT, OR
Tour Finale
January 7, 2017 @ 7:00pm

Cattle Replaces Nursery as Oregon's Top Ag Commodity

BY KURT HEATH

The Oregon Department of Agriculture reports that cattle and calves has taken the lead in production value for 2014 in Oregon's top agricultural commodities. This is the first time back in the number one spot since 1994, when greenhouse and nursery overtook cattle and calves. In Oregon, cattle country has seen the most dramatic increase in production value—up 38% from 2013 to 2014.

"That industry hasn't been number one since the early 90s, so I'm sure it's exciting for them to be a leader once again," says Kathryn Walker, special assistant to the director for the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "There have been some very strong cattle prices the last couple of years and that is reflected in the value of production for cattle and calves."

Statistics from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) show Oregon agriculture as a major economic contributor to the state with total production value for recent years at around $5.4 billion. Successful commodities rely on strong production and high sales prices.

Oregon's top 10 in the value of agricultural production are as shown in the chart below—with percentage of increases

Oregon's TOP 10 | Value of Agricultural Production

Percentage of Increases or Losses Compared to 2013

1	Cattle and Calves	$922 Million	▲ +38%
2	Greenhouse and Nursery Products	$830 Million	▲ +11%
3	Hay	$703 Million	▲ +11%
4	Milk	$656 Million	▲ +23%
5	Grass Seed	$449 Million	▲ +9%
6	Wheat	$302 Million	▼ -22%
7	Potatoes	$164 Million	▼ -3%
8	Hazelnuts	$129 Million	▲ +7%
9	Pears	$127 Million	▲ +14%
10	Wine Grapes	$118 Million	▲ +10%

or losses compared to 2013.

Onions, Christmas trees, and blueberries missed the top ten list, yet still surpassed $100 million in production value. Commodities not in the top ten with significant increases include sweet corn (+29%), blackberries (+18%), and blueberries (+8%).

For the first time ever, Oregon had two commodities above the $800 million mark in production value and four valued at more than a half billion dollars. The cattle and calves category is on the brink of reaching the billion-dollar mark, reached only once before by greenhouse and nursery products at $1.039 billion in 2007.

"When compared with Midwest states which rely on two or three commodities, Oregon has 17 which have a value of at least $50 million."

"It was generally a great year for Oregon's farmers and ranchers," says Walker. "When you have so many commodities with a production value above $500 million, that's impressive.

Preliminary statistics for 2014 show 34,600 farms in Oregon with the average size being 474 acres. The numbers include commodities in which Oregon production leads the nation—Christmas trees, hazelnuts, grass seed, blackberries, boysenberries, storage onions, and potted florist azaleas. With 220 commodities, the agricultural diversity in the state serves to protect the overall industry. When compared with Midwest states which rely on two or three commodities, Oregon has 17 which have a value of at least $50 million.

Severe weather conditions impact Oregon's trend especially in light of last year's severe drought. Walker further stated "Our agriculture industry is resilient. They have faced these kinds of challenges before and typically bounce back."

Cattle prices remain strong. Expectations are for the current leader to continue to do well in production value as it comes within reach of the billion-dollar mark. ■

Learning to Do
Doing to Learn

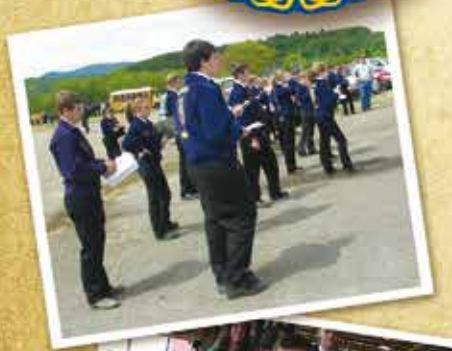
Earning to Live
Living to Serve

OREGON
FFA FOUNDATION

Oregon FFA

Today's agricultural industry is more than planting and harvesting; ***it is a science, a business and an art.***

Since 1928, the FFA has been preparing the hearts and educating the minds of future generations for the challenge of feeding a growing population. Those challenges are met by helping its members develop their unique talents and explore a broad range of career paths.



The Oregon FFA Foundation

The mission of the Oregon FFA Foundation is to coordinate sustainable, long-term funding for agriculture education and the Oregon FFA. The Foundation supports our young people today with over 6,000 students in 103 local FFA chapters as they become farmers, ranchers and agribusiness leaders prepared for tomorrow's agriculture industry.

FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

www.supportmyffa.com

INDUSTRY PROFILE:
Oregon Seed Council Director, Roger Beyer

BY KURT HEATH

Driving between Portland and Eugene, one can't help but notice Oregon's wide-open beauty. On either side of I-5, farmland blankets the Willamette Valley in a quilt of green and gold patches stretching for miles in either direction. Former state senator Roger Beyer knows this land well. As executive director of the Oregon Seed Council, Beyer is tasked with making sure Oregon's grass seed industry, most of which centers in the Willamette Valley, continues to thrive.

A family farmer and former state lawmaker who served in Oregon's House and Senate, Beyer joined the Oregon Seed Council in 2008 to ensure seed famers are well represented in Salem. He successfully guided the council through the Great Recession of 2008, during which Oregon's grass seed industry shrunk nearly 40 percent. Now that economic conditions have improved, roughly 85 percent of the pre-recession market is back. According to Beyer, that's a remarkable recovery and may represent the fullest recovery possible under current market and regulatory conditions. He notes that Oregon grass seed farmers have done a good job of diversifying with blueberries, hazelnuts and other crops to supplement their production.

Though grass seed may never reach pre-recession production levels, it remains far and away the Willamette Valley's number one crop in acreage and one of the top crops in the state. Roughly 1,300 farmers, employing 10,000 workers fuel Oregon's $450 million grass seed industry. Of the 222 crops grown in the Willamette Valley, nearly 50 percent of all surrounding farmland is devoted solely to grass seed production and shipped to domestic and international markets.

"Roughly 1,300 farmers, employing 10,000 workers fuel Oregon's $450 million grass seed industry."

What makes grass seed such a popular crop for Oregon growers?

"The climate in the Willamette Valley is perfect," says Beyer. "Cool, wet winters and dry summers provide the best climate for the crop to flourish. We also have world-class infrastructure. Our seed companies, seed cleaners, and the laws that govern producers are all excellent."

Beyer is quick to point out the many direct and indirect benefits of grass seed production—especially for an environmentally conscious state like Oregon. A 25 square foot patch of grass, for example, provides enough oxygen to sustain one person for a full year. Importantly, Oregon's 400,000 acres of grass seed, 350,000 of which are in the Willamette Valley, prevent soil erosion and harmful nitrates from entering and compromising waterways, as well as counteracts global warming through grass seed's ability to capture and retain carbon.

"Grass is one of the best natural healers of the environment. The crop not only provides economic opportunity for thousands of workers, it protects our cherished environment and preserves the wide open green spaces that Oregonians love." ■

NW Cranberry Growers See Record Growth

Sometimes all it takes is an opportunity. That's what cranberry growers in Oregon and Washington have been given following the 2015 fall harvest season.

BY KURT HEATH

As demand for cranberries and related market competition continue to rise in the United States and around the world, the Northwest's cranberry industry is poised to capitalize on a less than stellar 2015 in Wisconsin, which is the largest cranberry-growing state in the country.

Global figures from early 2015 projecting a record-setting harvest of 12 million barrels of cranberries ended up far lower due in large part to Wisconsin's low yield. Wisconsin, which provides more than half of the world's supply of cranberries, experienced a harsh winter in 2015 that reduced its anticipated output of 5 million barrels by at least 10%. Meanwhile, unusually warm temperatures made 2015 one of the best growing seasons on record for Northwest cranberry growers. As a result, producers in Oregon and Washington have been in an excellent position to fill the void leading up to the 2016 harvest season.

According to one grower, 2015 was "the best crop we've ever had...It's just kind of a remarkable year."

In Oregon, the opportunity for more business as a result of the most recent harvest has been welcome news for cranberry producers and the local economies of the state's southern coast, where economic growth has lagged behind other parts of the state. Cranberries represent an $11 million industry in Oregon, with most of the economic impact focused in Coos and Curry Counties. That's where nearly all of the state's roughly 3,000 acres of cranberries are concentrated.

"As the third largest growing region in the country, Oregon is a vital part of the U.S. cranberry industry," said Michelle Hogan, Executive Director of the Cranberry Marketing Committee. "When compared to five years ago, their production last year increased by 50% to a record 541,840 barrels. We anticipate this year's crop to come in around the same number as last year."

Placed within a larger context, the fact that Northwest cranberry growers are benefitting in the short term from market factors comes during a period of challenges for domestic producers.

In the last two decades, America's cranberry industry has transformed from primarily

a domestic enterprise to one with global impact. Domestic growers now export 35% of the total crop, compared to just 5% 20 years ago. Pacific Northwest growers have been a part of the transformation. Oregon and Washington both rank in the top five as cranberry-producing states.

"Oregon is home to many of our independent grower — handlers who continue to find innovative ways to utilize and sell their own fruit in niche markets such as wine, jellies, jams, and so much more," said Hogan.

As the world's appetite for the little red berry has continued to grow, so too has market competition and global supply. Since 2008, cranberry growers have faced the challenge of declining prices due to oversupply. The good news is that federal and state agriculture leaders, as well as private businesses are stepping up efforts to develop and market innovative uses for cranberries.

The most recent federal farm bill, for example, allocated $1.6 million for the Cranberry Marketing Association to spur demand for cranberries in foreign markets. More locally, the Oregon Department of Agriculture teamed up late last year with the South Coast Economic Development Council to collaborate on financing options to help local growers sustain and expand business, as well as identify opportunities to creatively market the local crop.

Though Northwest cranberry growers have faced tough times in recent years, these positive developments at the federal and state level may signal better days ahead as innovation and creativity take root in the industry. In the meantime, they've been getting a little help from mother nature. ■

Oregon FFA's Future is Bright

Not Enough Teachers to Catch Up

The FFA Motto: Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Eearning to Live, and Living to Serve.

BY NAOMI INMAN

When you think of the Oregon FFA Association (OFFA), three words come to mind: Future Farmers of America. Yet oddly enough, some of us still find our thoughts going back in time—picturing a sandy-haired farmer's daughter in a soils competition, or the broad shouldered son of a rancher entering a livestock contest.

"Today's FFA members rarely come from a farm or ranching background. Our kids are all about the FUTURE part of FFA," says Kevin White, Executive Director of the Oregon FFA Foundation, tasked with raising funds for programming and scholarships for members who want to become ag-science teachers.

"The diversity of membership is huge! And our membership is exploding—we've added 1,000 members in the last few years."

"The growth is amazing!" says Lee Letsch, Executive Secretary of the OFFA, from her office in the historic Ag Strand Hall on the OSU campus. Letsch directs and administrates the statewide programs for nearly 6,000 Oregon

"Our membership is exploding—we've added 1,000 members in the last few years."

FFA members in 105 high-school chapters. "Growth is a good problem to have, but we have a big teacher shortage, and we are eager to add more programming."

OFFA is an intra-curriculum program, meaning chapters can't happen without an ag science teacher in a high school. And ag educators are hard to come by. In June, OSU graduated nine certified ag teachers (Masters in Ag Education), and incidentally, there are nine vacancies in Oregon high schools. That means no new high school chapters at a time when student demand is high and future opportunities are promising for young agriculturalists from all walks of life.

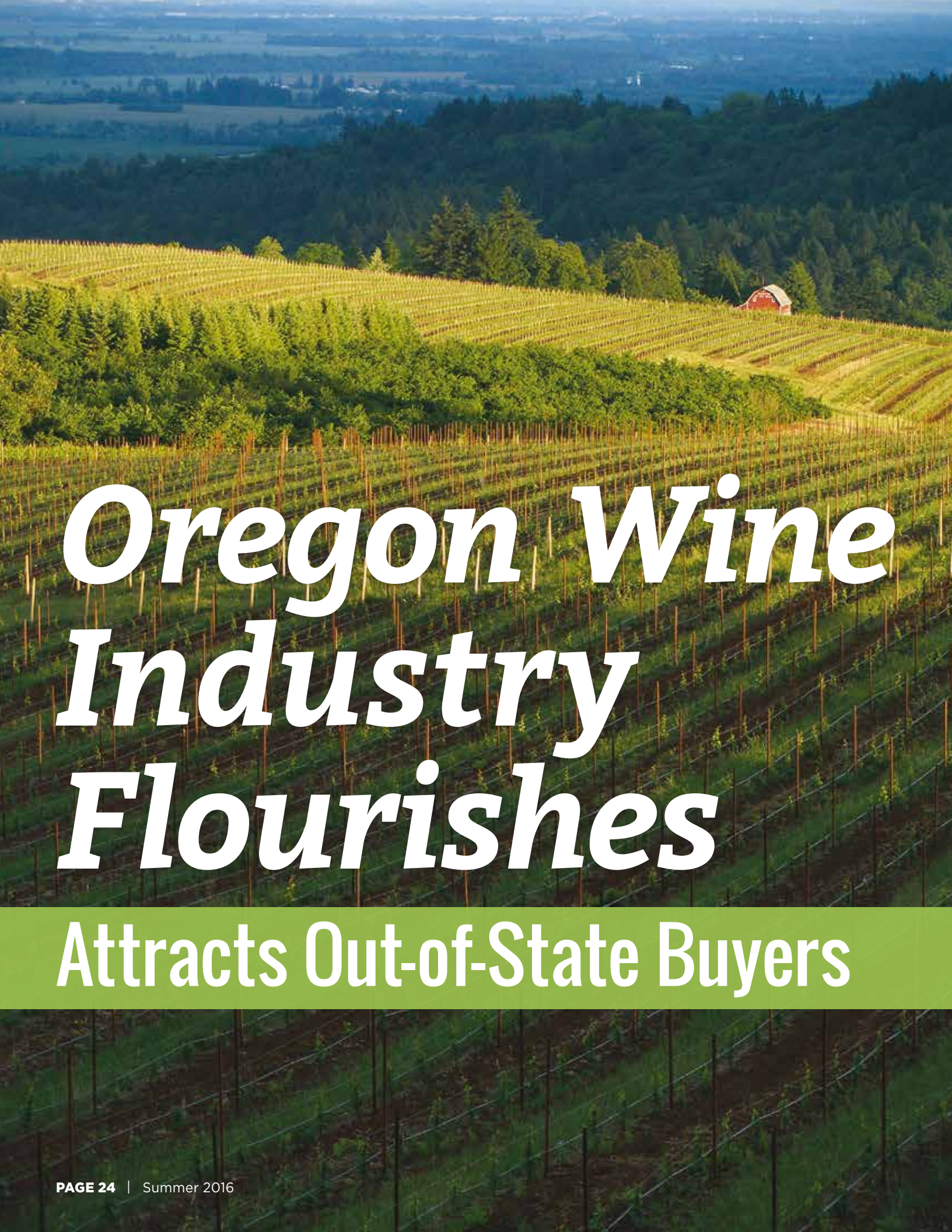
"Those opportunities are endless," says Letsch. In the month of May alone, OFFA hosted nine career development events. FFA members become shining stars and leaders in their communities. They excel in public speaking, participate in dozens of leadership camps, address issues in agriculture and the management of natural resources, and compete in dozens of categories from science and

research to sales and marketing.

Oregon students want to know how their food and fiber are produced and want to be a part of it. Agriculture is relevant to an expansive field of technology. Aside from the production and livestock aspects of ag-sciences, students whose aptitudes follow bio-research, engineering, computer, science, and even drone technology—are increasingly attracted to Oregon FFA chapters.

Lee Letsch herself is an upshot of Oregon FFA. She came to "intern" at the office while attending OSU as an ag major and former FFA chapter president (Dallas, OR). That was 14 years ago. She is a one-woman beehive of activity, mentoring six state officers each year and bursting at the seams with passion for OFFA. She never stops talking about opportunity. "The opportunities for growth, the opportunities for our members, the opportunities for students, are endless. Scholarships. Internships. Careers. It's growing all the time as technology advances."

Learn more about individual students and opportunities at OregonFFA.com. ■



Oregon Wine Industry Flourishes

Attracts Out-of-State Buyers

BY MATT EVANS

In the last decade, Oregon's wine industry has evolved from a cottage industry into one the state's burgeoning economic engines. According to the National Association of Wineries, Oregon ranks third among wine-producing states, trailing only California and Washington. While land in viticulture hotspots like Napa Valley come at an expensive premium, Oregon wine land is excellent for growing and much more affordable. As a result, the number and size of vineyards continue to grow and attract out-of-state interest.

According to the Statesman Journal, the most recent comprehensive study from the Oregon Wine Board establishes the remarkable growth of the state's wine industry. In the four-year period between 2010 and 2013, the economic impact of Oregon vineyards grew 28%, supporting more than 17,000 jobs and $525 million in wages. The industry injected an estimated $3.3 billion boost into the state's economy in 2013 alone. Between 2011 and 2014, the number of acreage devoted to planting spiked 18%; the number of wineries grew by 45%, and the volume of wine sales grew 39%. 71 new wineries opened in 2014, as the total number approached 700 across the state. Wine grapes are now the state's most valuable fruit crop.

The history of Willamette Valley Vineyards, just south of Salem, mirrors Oregon's wine evolution from a novelty to a major industry. In operation for more than three decades, the vineyard was initially small enough for owners to water the vines by hand with a 75-foot garden hose. Now,

the vineyard boasts nearly 500 acres and ranks as one of the top Pinot Noir producers in the country. Sensing the growing interest in Oregon wine, the owners significantly invested in an expanded show room in 2013. Sales immediately grew by 25% that year. The owners have also recently raised $4 million in funding to open two new wineries. Vineyards across the state, small and large, are experiencing relative growth trajectories as demand continues to increase.

In the four-year period between 2010 and 2013, the economic impact of Oregon vineyards grew 28%, supporting more than 17,000 jobs and $525 million in wages.

Interest in Oregon's wine growing potential extends well-beyond the state's borders. The Wall Street Journal recently chronicled the attraction of out-of-state vineyard operators to Oregon. The interest starts with excellent growing conditions—a combination of good soil and plentiful rain make parts of Oregon ideal for wine growing. The affordability of Oregon wine country is also attractive. Land that costs $125,000 per acre in Napa can be purchased for $45,000 in Dundee, Oregon—one of the most coveted wine-growing areas around. The median home price in Dundee is also just over $250,000—a steal compared to home prices in California wine country. Interestingly, Dundee's home prices are up 6% in the last year due largely to California buyers.

Experts believe Oregon's wine industry is poised for ongoing growth. Among other things, Pinot Noir, the state's most important grape, is one of the fastest-growing varietals in the wine market. Oregon's reputation as a destination for hospitality and culinary sophistication continues to strengthen. Wine-related tourism alone hit $207 million in 2013. International wine sales continue to increase and diversify, with significant distribution to places like Hong Kong, Scandinavia, Japan, Mexico, and Canada. ■

Miss Oregon: Agricultural Ambassador to Japan

Oregon's Department of Agriculture (ODA) deployed a new culinary ambassador this recent February when Miss Oregon 2015, Ali Wallace, flew to Japan to promote trade and raise eyebrows for her home state's sensational food and beverage exports.

BY NAOMI INMAN

Japan is Oregon's top agriculture trading partner, buying both fresh produce and processed foods.

PHOTO BY OREGON DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

While Miss Wallace never modeled a swimsuit, she did pageant the sexier sider of Oregon's agricultural exports at the Portland Fare in Osaka's upscale Hanshin department store. In one photo-op, Wallace proudly crowned the Colossal Onion for its spunky personality and plus-size waistline of 4.25-inches or more. She sampled silky artisanal chocolates and Cacao drinking chocolates, and showcased the sweet and sassy characters of Oregon's craft beers and ciders, among other varieties of coffee, tea,

and even honey from Portland's backyards.

Miss Wallace's celebrity status and dazzling crown afforded her an eager audience as she spoke to shoppers about the Portland food scene and life in Oregon saying "Portland is definitely what everyone says—it's weird, it's cool, it's crazy, it's fun, it's up and coming."

The newest sipping sensations among shoppers were Rev. Nat's Cider, and Kombucha Wonder Drink, who sponsored Miss Oregon's tour of promotional events in Japan. She also represented the state of Oregon, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and the city of Portland. Miss Wallace was formerly Miss Portland.

After Osaka, Miss Wallace went to Tokyo for the iron chef-inspired competition, United Tastes of America Chef's Challenge, where she made a guest appearance promoting Oregon's super colossal onions as a star-studded American ingredient. The winning Tokyo teammates, Susumu Ogashiwa and Shinji Nagano (Milial Resort Hotels Tokyo), were invited to Portland for the annual Portland Feast 2016 as part of the international culinary ambassador program.

While in Tokyo, she made diplomatic appearances at the Supermarket Trade Show, and was received by the Japanese Consul General. She also visited Portland's sister city Sapporo. To set the stage for the trip, Wallace had paid a visit to the Japanese Consular Office of Japan in Portland, where she proudly presented a gift basket of Oregon products to Consul General Hiroshi Furusawa.

"Miss Wallace's celebrity status and dazzling crown afforded her an eager audience as she spoke to shoppers about the Portland food scene."

Theresa Yoshioka, International Trade Manager for the ODA, told KATU's AM Northwest, "Portland is very popular in Japan right now. Japan is Oregon's number one trading partner in food and agricultural products." Miss Oregon's appearance helped to enhance the state's image in Japan and will hopefully lead to more sales of Oregon food products. ■

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