



Celebrate National Ag Day

2015

Melville family strongly focused on soil health

By Jennifer Hobbs
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

All farmers face the perennial challenge of finding practices that are both sustainable for the land and economically viable. The Melville family of

the multi-generational Cornerstone Farms joint venture in Enterprise uses an innovative combination of strategies for success, including no-till direct seeding, custom farming/harvesting, seed production, partnerships, and technology. Farming in Wallowa Coun-

ty for more than 40 years, Tim Melville was a regional pioneer of direct seeding, a method that puts both seed and fertilizer directly into narrow rows cut into the residue from the previous year's crop. The residue — stubble, root structure, and accumulated organic matter — keeps water and the soil in the field, largely eliminating erosion and mitigating the movement of agricultural chemicals. Other benefits include improved soil fertility, reduced consumption of fuel,

better wildlife habitat and higher water and air quality.

The direct seeding technique requires expensive specialized equipment, but allows the farmer to plant a crop in one or two passes.

"It's a lot more expensive to buy equipment, but this one piece of machinery replaces a dozen others," said son Kurt Melville, who was born and raised on the farm and is now a partner in the joint venture.

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Courtesy photo
The growing Cornerstone Farms, J.V. family: Tim, Audrey, Kurt, Heather, Aubrina, Case, Alisha and Maclane Melville.

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Oregon farm facts

Did you know?

- Almost all Oregon farms are family owned. About 97 percent of Oregon farms and ranches are family owned and operated.
- About 12 percent of all jobs in Oregon are directly or indirectly connected to farming and ranching, or 1 in 8 jobs.

Source: Oregon Farm Bureau

By the numbers: Oregon farms in 2013 Source: USDA NASS

- 35,000**.....Number of farms
- 16.5 million**.....Land in farms (acres)
- 471**.....Average farm size (acres)
- 2,400**.....Value per crop land acre (dollars)

Value of Oregon agriculture exports, 2012

Commodity	Value (\$ millions)
Seeds	\$378.8 million
Wheat and products	241.5
Fruits and preparations	235.8
Vegetables and preparations	152.4
Dairy products	68.3

Source: USDA NASS

Value of Oregon agriculture in 2013 Source: 2012 OSU estimate

Crop	Acres	Production (Millions)	Value (\$ Millions)
Field crops			
Hay, alfalfa (tons)	400,000	1.8	369.8
Wheat (bu)	868,000	53.9	368.2
Potatoes (cwt)	39,600	21.6	170.5
Corn, grain (bu)	50,000	6.8	38.3
Hops (lbs.)	4,789	8.55	31.5
Fruits and nuts			
Hazelnuts (tons)	30,000	0.45	120.6
Wine grapes (tons)	18,500	0.49	107.3
Blueberries (lbs.)	9,600	89.5	94.3
Vegetables			
Onions, storage (cwt)	20,900	13.9	143.3
Corn, sweet (cwt)	24,520	4.7	34.8

Livestock inventory (As of Jan. 1, 2014) Source: USDA NASS

Commodity	Head	Commodity	Head
Cattle and calves	1.3 million	Market lambs	67,000
Beef cows	516,000	Horses and mules*	118,000
Milk cows	124,000	Mink, females bred	67,900
Cattle on feed	75,000	Hogs†	85,000
Sheep and lambs	195,000	Goats	37,500
Ewes	97,000		

*2012 OSU estimate †Dec. 1, 2013

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Wallowa County Agriculture Tidbits

Wallowa County contains 850,000 acres private land of which approximately 90,000 acres has been farmed at some point in the last century. There is currently just over 45,000 acres of land under irrigation. The vast majority of the irrigated land lies in the Wallowa Valley with small acreages in the Imnaha and the Chesnimnus areas.

Wheat, barley, hay and livestock have dominated agricultural productions for over 100 years. Prior to adequate transportation modes, farmers had difficulty in getting cereal grains to market so they raised pigs and then — walked their produce to market.

In the 1920s, Wallowa County marketed over 26,000 hogs. However, today there are no commercial hog farmers left in Wallowa County. When improved transportation was developed, wheat and barley were sent to market by trucks and train.

In the early nineteen hundreds 45,000 fat hogs, 34,000 cattle, 8,700 sheep and 4,500 horses were shipped in one year.

Today nearly 24,000 acres of cropland is in the Conservation Reserve Program. Another 13,000 acres of cropland has been seeded to permanent pasture. Over 3000 livestock ponds and 3600 watering troughs provide water in the uplands away from riparian areas.

Irrigation, Dams and Reservoirs

Prior to irrigation a large portion of the county was desert-like. Irrigation claims began with the first homesteaders into the valley. These early homesteaders claimed individual rights and later on, groups began claiming rights as ditch companies. Most of the water rights that exist today were filed by the mid-1960s. Today there are over 45,000 acres of water rights in Wallowa County with the earliest dating back to the 1870's.

Hay

Production of hay has been the largest crop in the county since the early 1930's. Wallowa County has traditionally been known for its high quality hay production. The higher elevation and cooler temperatures during the growing season allows Wallowa County producers to grow high quality hay with small stems and good relative feed value.

Trends in Livestock

Grazing in Wallowa County has occurred for centuries. Livestock grazing began in the early 1700's when the Nez Perce acquired horses and continues today with nearly 28,000 head of cattle in local operations. Over 12,000 head of those cattle graze on public land at some time each year. The total number of cattle swells during the summer when between 6,000 and 8,000 stock and paired cattle rent pasture and are seasonally grazed.

Livestock in the Early Settlement Years

The first permanent resident of the county is recorded in the Wallowa County Chieftain on October 3, 1940

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