

People & Places

In search of the perfect sweet potato

Scott Stoddard's quest 'like trying to rope a cloud'

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

MERCED, Calif. — For 17 years, Scott Stoddard has been on a quest to find the perfect sweet potato.

Stoddard, 45, a University of California Cooperative Extension vegetable crop adviser, has done numerous field trials of new varieties in an effort to find the right combination of color and storability.

A predecessor, retired adviser Bob Scheuerman, spent more than 30 years trying to perfect sweet potato crops and helped develop the red-skinned Garnet variety that's popular in grocery stores around Thanksgiving and at Christmas.

"It's sort of like trying to rope a cloud, it seems sometimes," Stoddard told the Capital Press. "It's been very elusive."

Stoddard plants numerous plots in cooperating growers' fields to test varieties developed in labs at Louisiana State University and North Carolina State University, with which the UC has collaborated for more than 50 years. Often what works in a lab doesn't play out in the field, he said.

"The thing that makes these so difficult is that what really looks good in evaluations and trials one year ends up not being a good variety," he said. "The genetics on them are very squirrely. They drift around a lot — more so than with other varieties. Just when you think you've got something that's a nice, new cultivar, all of the sudden it's no good anymore."

All the work on sweet potatoes is natural for the UC office in Merced County, which is in the heart of the state's prime sweet potato growing region. Nearly



Courtesy of UCANR

Scott Stoddard, a University of California Cooperative Extension vegetable crop adviser in Merced, Calif., holds several sweet potatoes. He has been involved in numerous tests of new varieties that attempt to capture the right attributes such as color. The commodity is popular during the fall and winter holidays.

Western Innovator Scott Stoddard

Age: 45

Occupation: University of California Cooperative Extension vegetable crop adviser

Residence: Atwater, Calif.

Family: Wife, Andrea; sons, Ben, 6, Miles, 9, and Gavin, 12

Website: <http://cemerced.ucanr.edu/>



19,000 acres of sweet potatoes are grown in Merced County alone, bringing a value in 2013 of about \$207 million, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Sweet potatoes can be a healthful, sweet treat, assuming the consumer doesn't go overboard with butter or brown sugar. They're sources of Vitamins A, B-6, C and E as well as potassium and manganese.

In California, sweet potato classes come in four colors — tan Jewell with or-

ange flesh, light yellow Jersey with white flesh, purple Oriental with white flesh, and red Garnet with deep orange flesh, the UC explains on its website. Sweet potatoes are harvested from July through October but they're in demand year-round.

Identifying lines with red and purple skin that grow and store well is a high priority for the industry because the Garnet class dominates many markets in California, a UC essay notes. The red variety is in high demand in Los Angeles, the San Fran-

cisco Bay area and Seattle markets, grower and California Sweetpotato Council vice president Jason Tucker said in the essay.

Stoddard said many people in the West choose sweet potatoes in the same way they shop for peaches, looking for more red blush in the skin.

"About 10 years ago at a meeting I did a survey of growers as to what issues, what things I should be working on," he said. "One of the big ones that came up consistently is finding a new red. ... That's a major part of the market here in California, so I've tried to put a lot of emphasis into those results."

Stoddard tests about 10 to 20 new varieties each year, he said.

"Of the 20 ... I end up throwing away 80 percent of those," he said. "There are only a few we go forward on that look promising."

The last new variety that enjoyed widespread commercial success was developed in the 1980s, when the Red Diana "came along by accident," Stoddard said. But the scientists keep trying.

One variety that's emerged from Stoddard's fields six years ago is a purple sweet potato with white flesh called Murasaki, which is now grown commercially.

Stoddard has been working at it since 1998, when he came to the Merced extension office after having worked in private industry in Virginia. A Wyoming native, he studied soil science at the University of Wyoming and earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Kentucky.

"I really like the practical, applied side of extension," Stoddard said. "I like actually being in the field talking directly to growers. ... The real hands-on, applied nature of the job really appealed to me."

Chores remain a natural part of the day

By **RYAN M. TAYLOR**
For the Capital Press

TOWNER, N.D. — A friend of ours was visiting for a couple of days last week, so I extended the courtesy that I usually extend to our honored guests — the chance to help with chores. You know, get out in the cold and the wind, cut some twine off the hay bales, carry a few feed buckets.

I sprinkled in some special "one-time" chores (a.k.a. the neglected things that I was waiting for some help to do) with the regular tasks. As the sun was setting, I told him we could call it a day and head to the house for a little hot brandy. I don't know if he appreciated the chores as much as the hot brandy. For me, I



Cowboy Logic
Ryan Taylor

know it's the chores that make the hot brandy better, or the coffee or cocoa or hot cider or whatever's warm and tickles your taste buds.

Seasonal rhythms

If there's one thing to be said for life on a farm or a ranch, it's that everything has a season and there's a rhythm to things. I sometimes doubt my musical rhythm, but I know the rhythms of the ranch and I can keep the beat pretty decent.

I love chores, I hate chores, I tolerate chores, I share my chores. But, love them or hate

them, it doesn't really matter because, regardless, the chores will always be there.

That steady presence is both what I appreciate and despise about chores. It's the "to-do" on the list of things to do that never has to be listed. They're just there.

Value of chores

They're the foundation of the day to build from. First, get the chores done, and then tackle a bigger job or some special project, or go to town, or save the world. I appreciate the foundation. I can count on chores to give me a few hours of rote responsibility and do some thinking about the rest of the day.

There's a temptation to eliminate chores or get the time required for them down

to zero, but I think that would be a mistake. When I get out of the tractor to cut the twine off the bales, it takes time, but it lets me see the cows a little more closely and see if they're healthy and getting enough to eat. When I bucket the calves, and open the gate for them, I can see if one is getting a little droopy or needs a little extra care. I can see if the last one in has enough bunk space to get his fair share.

Teaching foals, kids

Most years, we have a foal on the ranch to wean and halter break. Dad always remembered one of the first horses he got when he was a kid, a wild 2-year-old colt that hadn't been touched and wasn't halter broke. Dad was about 12

and every day he'd lead that colt from the barn to the well north of the barn for a drink of water. By the end of the winter, the horse was plumb halter broke and not nearly so wild. A repetitive chore made for a good horse, and a responsible kid.

These days, I could turn on a hydrant and water our filly right in the barn, but I like to catch her, halter her, lead her to the well for a drink, give her some oats and brush her a little. They are chores that take some time, but it's good for the horse, and, honestly, it's good for me, too.

I've already finished one chore today — I got this column written. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to go catch that filly and lead her out for her morning drink.

Calendar

To submit items to the calendar, send an email with information to calendar@capitalpress.com

JANUARY NATIONAL

Jan. 28-31 — American Sheep Industry Association annual meeting, Nugget Resort and Casino, Sparks, Nev., www.sheepusa.org/About_Events_Convention

REGIONAL

Jan. 26-29 — Washington-Oregon Potato Conference, Three Rivers Convention Center and Toyota Center, Kennewick, Wash., www.potatoconference.com

OREGON

Jan. 17 — 2015 Lambing School, co-sponsored by the Oregon Sheep Growers Association and Oregon State University Extension, registration deadline Jan. 9, 541-673-0369 or email johnandpeggyfine@charter.net

Jan. 21 — Oregon Ryegrass Growers Association annual meeting, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Linn County Fair and Expo Center, Albany, 503-364-2944.

Jan. 26 — Agricultural Safety and Pesticide Accreditation Workshop, sponsored by the Central

Oregon Safety and Health Association, Deschutes Farm Bureau and Helena Chemical Co., 1-5 p.m. Bend, \$45 (\$20 for Farm Bureau members), www.cosha.org

Jan. 26-27 — Mid-Oregon Construction Safety Summit, The Riverhouse, Bend, www.cosha.org

Jan. 27 — Oregon Blueberry Conference, 8:30 a.m.-8 p.m., Jantzen Beach Red Lion Hotel, Portland, oregonblueberry.com/conference

Jan. 27-29 — Northwest Agricultural Show, Portland Expo Center, <http://www.nwagshow.com/>

Jan. 29 — Cattlemen's Workshop, 9 a.m.-4:15 p.m., Blue Mountain Conference Center, 404 12th St., La Grande, 541-562-5129

WASHINGTON

Jan. 20 — Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, sponsored by Washington Association of Wheat Growers, 1-877-740-2666, www.lcammo.org

Jan. 26-29 — Washington-Oregon Potato Conference, Three Rivers Convention Center and Toyota Center, Kennewick, Wash., www.potatoconference.com

CALIFORNIA

Jan. 16 — Young Almond and Walnut Orchards workshop, 8:30 a.m.-noon, Community and Senior Center, Woodland, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu/>

IDAHO

Jan. 16 — Family Foresters Workshop, Coeur d'Alene Inn, 208-446-1680, <http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/content/calendarofevents>

Jan. 20-22 — Idaho Ag Expo, Holt Arena, Idaho State University

Jan. 21-22 — Idaho Potato Conference, Idaho State University student union, Pocatello.

Jan. 21-23 — Idaho Horticulture Expo, Boise Centre on the Grove, Inlagrow.org

Jan. 30 — Organic conference of the use of cover crops to enhance soil fertility, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Herrett Center, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, sponsored by Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, University of Idaho and Oregon State University, preregistration required by Jan. 26, www.pesticide.org or 503-312-1415

FEBRUARY NATIONAL

Feb. 1-3 — American Sugarbeet

Growers Association annual convention, Long Beach, Calif., www.americansugarbeet.org

Feb. 19-20 — Family Farm Alliance annual meeting, Monte Carlo Resort and Casino, Las Vegas, 707-998-9487 or ffameeting@aol.com

OREGON

Feb. 3 — Focus on Weed Management pesticide applicator's short course, 7:45 a.m.-5:30 p.m., \$80, Building 19, Lane Community College, Eugene, 541-463-6103

Feb. 19-21 — Oregon Logging Conference, Lane County Fairgrounds and Convention Center, Eugene, 541-686-9191, www.oregonloggingconference.com

Feb. 24-25 — Oregon Dairy Farmers Annual Convention, Salem Conference Center, www.dairyfarmers.com/101-convention-general

CALIFORNIA

Feb. 5-7 — Sierra Cascade Logging Conference, Shasta District Fairgrounds, Anderson, sierracascadeexpo.com/

Feb. 6 — Tehama Walnut Day, 8 a.m.-noon, Elks Lodge, Red Bluff, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu/>

Feb. 6 — Glenn-Butte Walnut Day, 1-5 p.m., Silver Dollar Fair-

grounds, Chico, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu/>

Feb. 10-12 — World Ag Expo, International Agri-Center, Tulare, <http://www.worldagexpo.com/>

Feb. 25 — Sutter-Yuba-Colusa-Yolo-Solano-Sacramento Walnut Day, Veterans Hall, Yuba City, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>

WASHINGTON

Feb. 3-5 — Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum, Spokane Convention Center, <http://www.agshow.org/ag-expo-home.html>

MARCH OREGON

March 16-17 — Oregon State University Blueberry School, LaSells Stewart Center and CH2M Hill Alumni Center, OSU campus, Corvallis, <http://osuberrysschool.org/>

March 20-22 — Northwest Horse Fair & Expo, Linn County Fair and Expo Center, Albany, www.equinepromotions.net

CALIFORNIA

March 3 — Walnut (7-year-olds) No Pruning-Pruning Comparison Field Meeting, morning, Nickels Soil Lab, Arbuckle, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>

Capital Press

Established 1928
Board of directors
Mike ForresterPresident
Steve Forrester
Kathryn Brown
Sid Freeman Outside director
Mike Omeg Outside director

Corporate officer
John Perry
Chief operating officer

Capital Press Managers
Mike O'BrienPublisher
Joe Beach Editor
Elizabeth Yutzie Sell Advertising Director
Carl Sampson Managing Editor
Barbara Nipp Production Manager
Samantha McLaren Circulation Manager
Hannah Brause Audience Development

Entire contents copyright © 2015
EO Media Group
dba Capital Press

An independent newspaper
published every Friday.

Capital Press (ISSN 0740-3704) is
published weekly by EO Media Group,
1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem OR 97301.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, OR,
and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to
Capital Press, P.O. Box 2048 Salem, OR
97308-2048.

To Reach Us
Toll free 800-882-6789
Main line 503-364-4431
Fax 503-370-4383
Advertising Fax 503-364-2692

News Staff
N. California
Tim Hearden 530-605-3072

E Idaho
John O'Connell 208-421-4347

Idaho
Carol Ryan Dumas 208-860-3898

Boise
Sean Ellis 208-914-8264

Central Washington
Dan Wheat 509-699-9099

E Washington
Matthew Weaver 509-688-9923

Oregon
Eric Mortenson 503-412-8846
Mateusz Perkowski 800-882-6789

Graphic artist
Alan Kenaga 800-882-6789

To Place Classified Ads
Ad fax 503-364-2692
or 503-370-4383
Telephone (toll free) 866-435-2965
Online www.capitalpress.com/classifieds

Subscriptions

Mail rates paid in advance
Easy Pay U.S. \$3.75/month (direct withdrawal from bank or credit card account)
1 year U.S. \$49.49
2 years U.S. \$89.89
1 year Canada \$275
1 year other countries call for quote
1 year Internet only \$49
1 year 4-H, FFA students and teachers ... \$30
9 months 4-H, FFA students & teachers ... \$25
Visa and Mastercard accepted

To get information published

Mailing address:
Capital Press
P.O. Box 2048
Salem, OR 97308-2048

News: Contact the main office or news staff member closest to you, send the information to newsroom@capitalpress.com or mail it to "Newsroom," c/o Capital Press. Include a contact telephone number.

Letters to the Editor: Send your comments on agriculture-related public issues to opinions@capitalpress.com, or mail your letter to "Opinion," c/o Capital Press. Letters should be limited to 300 words. Deadline: Noon Monday.

Capital Press ag media

www.capitalpress.com
www.FarmSeller.com
www.AgDirectoryWest.com
www.OnlyAg.com
www.facebook.com/capitalpress
www.facebook.com/farmseller
www.facebook.com/onlyAgdotcom
twitter.com/capitalpress
www.youtube.com/capitalpressvideo
www.blogiculture.com

Index

California 9
Dairy 15
Idaho 9
Livestock 15
Opinion 6
Oregon 11
Washington 8

Correction policy

Accuracy is important to Capital Press staff and to our readers.

If you see a misstatement, omission or factual error in a headline, story or photo caption, please call the Capital Press news department at 503-364-4431, or send email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.