

# People & Places

## WSDA official opens doors for ag exporters

Joe Bippert manages state's international marketing program

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Joe Bippert was almost through with college and his job prospects began circling the drain.

His school days were prolonged by a two-year church mission to Mexico and a time-consuming passion for ballroom dancing. But he was finally about to graduate from Brigham Young University in business finance with an emphasis in commercial real estate.

This was in 2008.

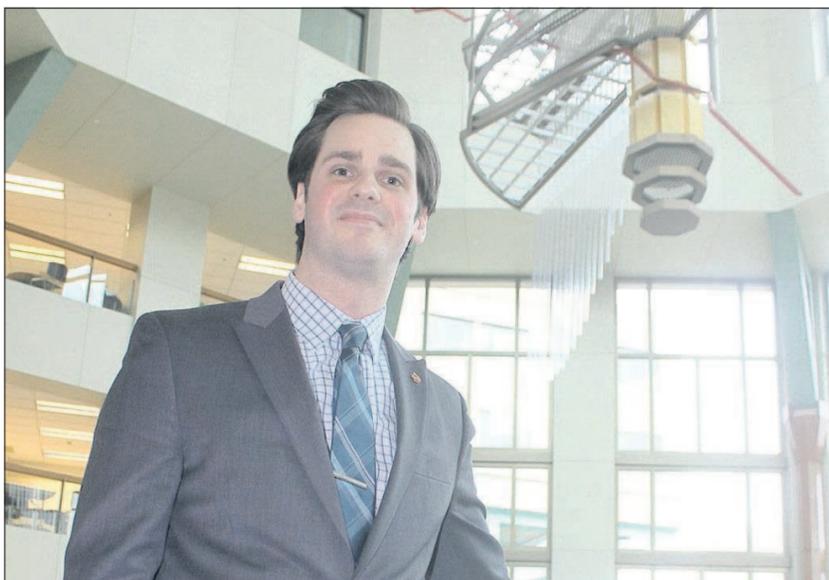
The banking world crashed and so did Bippert's idea to make a fortune in recreational vehicle storage in Arizona.

Instead, he got a job auditing food banks for the Washington Department of General Administration in Olympia, near where he grew up in Thurston County.

A couple of years later, his job was transferred to the Washington State Department of Agriculture. A little more than a year ago, he was promoted to manage the department's international marketing program. Part diplomat, part salesman and part go-between, Bippert, 33, introduces Washington agriculture to the world.

"We're in the business of selling a brand — the state of Washington," he said.

From a cubicle in WSDA's



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State Department of Agriculture International Marketing Manager Joe Bippert oversees the promotion of Washington agriculture abroad.

headquarters, Bippert oversees a marketing program with a \$1 million-a-year budget. The program helps businesses, from modest startups to well-funded commodity commissions, make connections with overseas buyers and foreign government officials.

"They do a great job on the introduction side," said Ryan Holterhoff, Washington State Potato Commission director of marketing and industry affairs.

The Washington and Oregon potato commissions teamed with the Washington and Oregon agriculture departments last fall on a trade mission to Southeast Asia. Holterhoff said the commissions

could have touted potatoes on their own. But having government representatives along helped the commissions get in to see officials to talk about trade barriers, he said. "More doors are open to us."

Trade missions involving agriculture department directors or governors are high-profile affairs. Bippert has been on four of them, but most of his work is low profile, providing small companies with information about markets, promotions, financing and barriers. Call it Export 101.

"We fill in the gaps where companies might be lacking," he said.

Right now, Washington agriculture has a big trade prob-

lem — the labor dispute at the ports that just ended. Bippert said he's worried that producers have lost contracts with overseas customers and may not get them back.

Meanwhile, there are all sorts of smaller problems for individual businesses. Bippert recalled arranging a meeting between a snack company and foreign contacts. From the meeting came the revelation that overseas sales depended on packaging that preserved dried fruit for a year rather than just six months.

"I love meeting all these companies and seeing what motivates them and see how I can help them," he said. "We're not into it to get mon-



### Western Innovator Joe Bippert

**Occupation:** Manager, Washington State Department of Agriculture's international marketing program

**Education:** Brigham Young University, business finance

**Family:** Wife, Corinne, two children

ey out of them. We're trying to use taxpayer dollars to help them, which in turn helps the economy and increases the success of Washington state."

In pitching Washington, Bippert stresses quality, food safety and the state's environmental responsibility. It doesn't pay to bad-mouth others, he said.

"It doesn't help our relationship with China to say, 'Our products are good, and your products are bad,'" he said. Now more about the ballroom dancing.

Bippert was a competitive dancer and time spent doing that helps explain why he was in college while everybody was getting rich in business finance.

He says he wasn't good enough to be a professional, but while dancing he met his wife, Corinne, and they have two children: Jack, 4, and Max, 2. So that worked out well, too.

## There's a fine line between dumb luck, good marketing

By RYAN M. TAYLOR  
For the Capital Press

TOWNER, N.D. — I once saw a "de-motivational" poster that said, "Mistakes: It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others." Pretty inspirational, huh?

There have been times in my 23 years of post-college cattle ranching where I felt my marketing decisions were best used as a warning to others. Kind of a "whatever I do, do the opposite" piece of marketing advice for others.

Maybe it wasn't that bad, but I have paid some tuition to the school of hard knocks. If I sold the calves off the cow, I'd have done better if I'd weaned them and fed them a while. If I contracted them early, I should have waited until later. If I sent them to a feedlot and re-

### Cowboy Logic

Ryan Taylor



tained ownership to finish, I shouldn't have.

And there were times when the market rallied and I was plumb out of stuff to sell. It was like the old joke from the "Hee Haw" show on television. A forlorn looking Archie would tell Grandpa Jones, "Ohhh, I lost \$10,000 this week." "How's that?" Grandpa would ask, and Archie would say, "Hogs went up and I didn't have any."

### Interesting times

These are interesting times in the cattle market. All the commodity markets are having interesting times, but some are a good kind of interesting and some are a bad kind of inter-

esting. The last few years have been good years to have cattle. The market went up, and, unlike Archie, we had some to sell.

There's a history to this joy ride of marketing in the ranching business. My middle son has taken to reading my old "Cowpokes" cartoon books that Ace Reid began drawing in the 1950s. I had to laugh when I was reading with him and we saw Ol' Jake explaining to his banker, President Tufernal, "Well, sir, it's like this: I wuz offered 35 cents on them 28-cent calves, but I was holdin' out fer 40 cents. Now it looks like we're gonna have to feed them 21-cent calves till spring."

Just add a zero to the prices and it would fit pretty close for some of today's ranch marketing scenarios.

I'm not sure what's going on, but, somehow, my

marketing decision this year won't serve as a lesson to others in what not to do. Just as last fall's crazy good calf market teetered at the tip-top peak, I pulled the pin and sold our steers. Check in hand, the market started going down. It's still good, but down. I was beside myself, wondering how that good fortune could have happened to a guy like me.

### Something's got to give

Then I watched the price of gasoline and fuel start dropping with lower crude oil prices. We're not the biggest consumers of gas and diesel in the world but we use enough that it'll make a decent dent in the year's income.

I thought it looked like a good time to buy, so I filled up the bulk tanks with gas and diesel. And, right after I did that, the price started to go

back up.

I don't know what this world is coming to. If I can sell our steers at the top of the market and buy our fuel at the bottom of the market, something's got to give. Makes a fella nervous.

Guess it's time to hunker down and wait. Along with "Hee Haw" quotes and "Cowpokes" cartoons, I'll throw in a bumper sticker prayer I saw pinned to a grain elevator bulletin board, "Lord, give me \$15 wheat again, and I promise not to 'throw' it away this time."

The sticker used an expletive other than the "throw," but this is a family friendly column.

There's a fine line between dumb luck and good marketing, but, either way, I'll take it. And hopefully heed the bumper sticker lesson while it's still useful.

## Ag students ponder opportunities at Chico State career fair

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

CHICO, Calif. — More than 20 years after graduating, Tyler Bramble was back at school.

The 1994 graduate of California State University-Chico works in Fresno as a regional manager for Alltech, a livestock feed additive company. But he was back at his alma mater on Feb. 18 telling current students about opportunities with his company.

"We try to hire students from Chico if we can," said Bramble, who's on the advisory board for the university's College of Agriculture.

Alltech, a 30-year-old multinational company that did \$1 billion in business last year, makes recruiting trips to many colleges and universities each year, he said.

"We get the chance to meet the future of agriculture and the future of our business," he said. The company likes hiring "young, enthusiastic, open-minded students" after they graduate because "they've got the creativity and hopefully the knowledge just coming out of school," he added.

Bramble's booth was one of 38 featured at Chico State's 12th annual career and internship fair for agriculture

students, held in the pavilion at the university farm. The career way started as a way to give students access to companies specific to ag, while the job fairs on the main campus mostly cater to other occupations.

"We really just want to expose the students to the best opportunities that we can," said Hillary Bertagna, a Chico State graduate who is the university's external relations coordinator.

About 300 students attended this year's career fair, mostly from Chico State but also from nearby community colleges, including Butte College

in Chico and Shasta College in Redding, Calif. Garrett Wallis, the student herdsman for the beef unit at Chico State, was interested in companies related to livestock and heavy equipment.

"It's definitely beneficial to students" to meet company representatives, said Wallis, who transferred to Chico from Shasta College in 2013. "You learn what they want and what they're looking for in future employees."

One long-time participant in the fair is Driscoll's, the world's largest distributor of fresh berries. Recruiters were telling students about intern-

ships related to plant health, production research, sustainability and other issues, said Maria Vieyra, a human resources representative for the company.

"It's a great way to get people into the company and excited about working with the company," said Jeff DeClue, a Driscoll's recruiter.

For many companies, Chico State is one of their favorite universities from which to recruit workers, Bertagna asserted.

"Most of them come every year," she said. "They come back because they keep hiring Chico State students."

## Calendar

### FEBRUARY OREGON

**Feb. 28** — Oregon Small Farms Conference, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Oregon State University LaSalle Sells Center, Corvallis, <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfc>

### IDAHO

**Feb. 27** — Idaho Hay and Forage Conference, Best Western Burley Inn, [www.idahohay.com](http://www.idahohay.com), 208-888-0988 or [cindy@amgidaho.com](mailto:cindy@amgidaho.com)  
**Feb. 27** — Drones for Forestry workshop, 1:15-4:30 p.m., University of Idaho Extension, 1808 N. Third Ave., Coeur d'Alene, \$15, 208-446-1680

### MARCH OREGON

**March 16-17** — Oregon State University Blueberry School, LaSells

Stewart Center and CH2M Hill Alumni Center, OSU campus, Corvallis, <http://osublueberryschool.org/>

**March 17** — What To Do with My Small Farm? Oregon State University Extension Small Farms, Jackson County, 541-776-7371, ext. 208 paula.burkhalter@oregonstate.edu. Cost: \$25 Register: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/farms>

**March 20-23** — Oregon FFA State Convention, Silverton, [www.oregonffa.com](http://www.oregonffa.com)

**March 20-22** — Northwest Horse Fair & Expo, Linn County Fair and Expo Center, Albany, [www.equine-promotions.net](http://www.equine-promotions.net)

### IDAHO

**March 27** — Forestland gazing workshop, 1 to 5 p.m., Federal Build-

ing meeting room, Seventh Avenue and College Street, St. Maries, 208-245-2422, <http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry>

### 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>

**March 3** — Walnut (2-year-olds) No Pruning-Pruning Comparison Field Meeting, afternoon, Nickels Soil Lab, Arbuckle, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>

**March 17-18** — Fruit Ripening & Retail Handling Workshop, University of California-Davis, <http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/Education/fruitripening/>  
**March 22-24** — California Fresh

Fruit Association Annual Meeting, The Grand Del Mar, San Diego, [www.CA-FreshFruit.com](http://www.CA-FreshFruit.com)

### APRIL OREGON

**April 18** — Oregon Women for Agriculture Auction and Dinner, Linn County Fair and Expo Center, Albany, 503-243-FARM (3276), <http://owaonline.org/>

### CALIFORNIA

**April 18-21** — California State FFA Conference, Selland Arena, Fresno, [www.calaged.org/stateconvention](http://www.calaged.org/stateconvention)

### IDAHO

**April 8-11** — State FFA Leadership Conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls,

[www.idffaoundation.org/](http://www.idffaoundation.org/)

### MAY WASHINGTON

**May 14-16** — Washington FFA Convention, Washington State University, Pullman, [www.washingtonffa.org/convention](http://www.washingtonffa.org/convention)

### CALIFORNIA

**May 1-2** — Forest Landowners of California annual meeting, Holiday Inn, Auburn, [www.forestlandowners.org/](http://www.forestlandowners.org/)

### JUNE CALIFORNIA

**June 15-26** — Postharvest Technology Short Course, University of California-Davis, <http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/Education/PTShort-Course/>

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