

Cutting-edge technology boosts precision

Olga Walsh wants to expand use of drones to make ag more efficient

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — New University of Idaho researcher Olga Walsh is studying the use of cutting-edge technologies to help farmers use nutrients and water more efficiently.

Walsh, a cropping systems agronomist, said farmers have embraced technologies such as global positioning satellites but she believes the next big step is for producers to adopt the use of precision agriculture on a large scale to improve water and nutrient use efficiency.

The technology is already there to do that, researchers just need to develop ways to help farmers determine how best to use it, she said.

“Our big challenge is to use these precision tools to improve the efficiency of our cropping systems,” said Walsh, who started work at UI’s Parma Research and Extension Center in late September. “I think in the future precision agriculture is going to just be a normal part of agriculture.”

One of Walsh’s main priorities is to develop a system that uses unmanned aerial vehicles to monitor wheat fields for nutrient and



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

University of Idaho cropping systems agronomist Olga Walsh uses a pocket sensor to measure crop reflectance Feb. 27 in a winter wheat field at UI’s Parma research center. Walsh is studying the use of cutting edge methodologies to help farmers improve water and nutrient use efficiency.

Western Innovator

Olga Walsh

Title: Cropping systems agronomist, University of Idaho

Education: Bachelor’s degree in soil science, St. Petersburg State University, Russia; master’s and Ph.D. degrees in soil science, Oklahoma State University

Home: Nampa, Idaho

Family: Husband, Stephen, and three children, ages 12, 6 and 3

water stress. Remote sensing cameras on the UAVs would show the light reflectance of the crop’s canopy and an algo-

rithm specific to Idaho conditions would interpret the data and show farmers how they can best use nitrogen and water to optimize yields.

That type of system already exists but it is not specific to Idaho conditions, said Walsh.

“We just need to develop the methodology so a grower can go and buy the (drone and software) as a package,” she said.

That project will include using UAVs to drag sticky traps across wheat fields so researchers can monitor populations of fusarium spores and determine if the field needs to be treated for the pathogen, which can lead to fusarium head blight. Parma research station

superintendent James Barbour said Walsh’s work with UAVs and other precision agriculture techniques is exciting, and her background in that area is one of the reasons she was hired.

“We think (precision agriculture is) going to play a huge role in agriculture in the future,” he said. “There is a lot of untapped potential there. I think (Walsh) is going to be a real important player ... in agriculture in Idaho.”

Walsh is also working on a project to develop reference strips and precision sensors that can tell a wheat farmer how much nitrogen is in a certain part of his field.

“They will know exactly how much nitrogen they have down ... and can use that information to gauge the rest of their crop,” said Cathy Wilson, the Idaho Wheat Commission’s director of research collaboration.

Walsh also plans to develop sustainable cropping systems for dual-purpose biennial canola and evaluate biological seed and foliar products to improve bean yield and quality.

She was born in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Walsh worked as a soil nutrient management specialist at Montana State University from 2010 to 2014.

She is looking for growers interested in precision agriculture to work with. She can be reached at (208) 722-6701, Ext. 218, or by email at owalsh@uidaho.edu.

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Logging conference opens doors to students

By JAN JACKSON
For the Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Competitions, industry accreditation seminars and displays of the latest in timber management equipment were the most obvious components of the 77th annual Oregon Logging Conference held Feb. 19-21, at the Lane County Fairgrounds in Eugene.

Less visible were the more than 800 third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students who spent the better part of a day learning about the timber industry.

Women in Timber members, in cooperation with the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, Project Learning Tree and Society of Oregon Foresters and other industry groups, have sponsored the student education program since 1991. Industry members consider educating the young people critical to the future of Oregon’s forests.

Mary Loftin, a retired teacher who volunteers as a Lane County facilitator for Talk About Trees, talked about the



Photos by Jan Jackson/For the Capital Press

Elementary school children take an outdoor guided tour of equipment and displays at the 77th annual Oregon Logging Conference in Eugene.

role she played in Friday’s program.

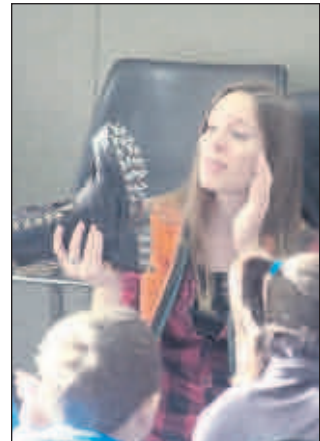
About 100 children arrived at a time and went to a classroom for a 30-minute overview of the forest industry, Loftin said.

“We want them to understand the importance of forest stewardship and what part it plays in meeting their own social, environmental and economic needs,” she said. “We

talk about the importance of science and teamwork, wildlife and clean water and show them a short video before they go into a couple of small group sessions.”

They also got a guided tour of the grounds so they could watch demonstrations and see the equipment up close.

K.C. VanNatta, a logger and tree farmer from Columbia County who has attended



Tiffany Roddy, a forester for Weyerhaeuser, introduces school children to the boots she wears on her job in the woods.

the conferences since the early 1970s, believes the future of the industry relies on educating young people.

“The next generation will be right at home with today’s eco-friendly computer-operated equipment the size of a cell phone that can now tell us where our equipment is located and what it is doing, the diameter measurement of a tree

Online
Women in Timber: www.womenintimber.org
For information on free classroom education programs: www.oregonforests.org or www.talkabouttrees.org

we are about to harvest and the weight of the logs as we load them on the truck,” VanNatta said. “While us old guys have had to struggle to learn how to use the new technology, these already computer-savvy kids will find it to be a piece of cake.”

“Everybody enjoys going to the conference to see friends and colleagues, watching the competitions and getting updates on the latest methods and equipment,” he said, “but it’s programs like the Women in Timber provide that will help keep our forests alive. Thanks to them and organizations like them, these kids are getting the education they need as well as an understanding of what is really going on in the woods.”

California couple married 67 years dies holding hands

By SCOTT SMITH
Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — After spending 67 years together as devoted husband and wife, there was no question how Floyd and Violet Hartwig would end their lives — together.

Sensing the couple was close to death, their children pushed their two hospice beds together and gently placed their father’s hand in their mother’s palm.

Floyd, 90, died first. Violet, 89, followed five hours later. They died Feb. 11 at home, just as they had

wished, the family said. “They wanted to go together,” their daughter, Donna Scharton, said Thursday. “It was meant to be that way.”

The two knew each other as children, growing up in the Central California farming community of Easton. Romance sparked at a local dance hall one night when Floyd, a decorated Navy sailor, was home on shore leave. They were married on Aug. 16, 1947, and while away Floyd showered Violet with affection through love letters the family cherishes.

Returning home for good,

the two raised three children on their small farm, growing cotton and raising turkeys. Violet helped on the ranch and kept the house. She prepared breakfast early each morning for her husband, seeing him off to work as a ranch foreman and delivering eggs.

“They were dedicated to each other,” Scharton said. “Even other people who met them said they had that connection.”

The couple, who had four grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren, remained active until recently. Around

the holidays, the family noticed that Violet’s dementia had worsened, and in late January a doctor said Floyd’s failing kidneys gave him two weeks to live.

The family moved the couches from the living room of their ranch house, making space for the hospice beds. Cynthia Letson said that after her grandfather passed, they told her grandmother that she could go, too. They told Violet that Floyd was waiting for her.

Letson said her grandparents are a positive example at a time with too many broken marriages.



AP Photo/Cynthia Letson

Floyd and Violet Hartwig pose together in 2014 in a yard in Easton, Calif.

Calendar

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 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
March 20-22 — Northwest Horse

Fair & Expo, Linn County Fair and Expo Center, Albany, www.equine-promotions.net

IDAHO
March 27 — Forestland grazing workshop, 1 to 5 p.m., Federal Building meeting room, Seventh Avenue and College Street, St. Maries, 208-245-2422, http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry

CALIFORNIA
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

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/
April 25-26 — AgFest, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday, Oregon State Fairgrounds, Salem, \$9 for adults, under 12 are free, http://www.oragfest.com

CALIFORNIA
April 18-21 — California State

FFA Conference, Selland Arena, Fresno, www.calaged.org/stateconvention

IDAHO
April 8-11 — State FFA Leadership Conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, www.idffaoundation.org/

WASHINGTON
April 4 — Washington State Sheep Producers Lambing and Management School, Sprague, \$50 (member), \$60 (non-member), 509-257-2230, dvm@feustellfarms.com
April 6-11 — Washington State Sheep Producers Shearing School, Moses Lake

April 16-19 — Washington State Spring Fair, Puyallup, 2-10 p.m. Thursday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday, http://www.thefair.com/spring-fair/

MAY WASHINGTON
May 14-16 — Washington FFA Convention, Washington State University, Pullman, www.washingtonffa.org/convention

CALIFORNIA
May 1-2 — Forest Landowners of California annual meeting, Holiday Inn, Auburn, www.forestlandowners.org/