

Oregon

Expo examines new frontiers of precision high-tech farming tools

Speakers will discuss drones, satellites, other topics

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Drones offer a revolutionary way for farmers to check on their crops, but the technology has its drawbacks, says entrepreneur Young Kim.

The unmanned aircraft aren't cheap and require people to operate, said Kim, the CEO of Digital Harvest, an agricultural technology firm.

"That doesn't scale very well," he said.

Satellites, on the other hand, can more easily monitor vast swaths of farmland but don't provide as much detail.

"They both have limitations," he said.

Working in conjunction, though, drones and satellites will allow farmers to sort through layers of data and zero in on details that are relevant to decision-making, Kim said.

The constraints and possibilities of remote sensing in

Precision Farming Expo

Date: March 17-18

Location: Salem Convention Center

Cost: \$120

Information: www.precision-farmingexpo.com

agriculture will be the focus of Kim's presentation during the upcoming Precision Farming Expo, which will be held March 17-18 in Salem, Ore.

As low orbit micro-satellites come online, the resolution of images shot from space is expected to improve and add to the spectrum of information available about crops, he said.

However, Kim said the tech industry should be careful to "manage expectations" and not oversell its current capabilities.

His company, Digital Harvest, runs raw data through algorithms to gauge the chemical health and water usage of crops, among other attributes.

"We want to absorb complexity and deliver simplicity to the growers," he said.



AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

In this May 8, 2014, file photo, a Parrot Bebop drone flies during a demonstration in San Francisco. Drones will be a major focus of the Precision Farming Expo March 17-18 in Salem, Ore.

Agriculture is a large, stable industry that's primed to take advantage of the growing power of mobile computing, robotics and data analysis, said Jeff Lorton, the expo's organizer.

"Venture capitalists are all tuning in to agritech," he said.

Aside from technological developments, speakers at the Precision Farming Expo will also discuss the regulatory landscape, he said.

Since last year's event, the Federal Aviation Administration has proposed rules to

clarify the commercial use of drones, which had previously been in a regulatory gray area.

Drones create new economic opportunities but the federal government is concerned about risks to safety and privacy.

An important component of the FAA's proposal is that drone operators would be required to get certificate ensuring basic aeronautical knowledge but not full pilot's licenses, which will open the field to an "enormous number of people," said Lorton.

Oregon State chooses new dean to head its veterinary school

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Susan Tomquist is the new dean of Oregon State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Tomquist has served as interim dean since October 2013, and oversaw a fundraising campaign that raised \$47 million. In addition to her administrative work, Tomquist is a clinical pathologist with particular expertise in diseases that afflict camelids — alpacas and llamas.

In a news release announcing the appointment, OSU Provost Sabah Randhawa said Tomquist has "the skill set for enhancing the college's education, clinical services, research and outreach."

Although agricultural producers support the college, some grumble privately that OSU focuses too much on dogs, cats and unusual animals such as camelids instead of traditional livestock.

Tomquist said the college does not cater to students who want to work with cats and dogs, "but having said that, there are many more jobs now available



Courtesy of Oregon State University
Susan Tomquist is the new dean of OSU's College of Veterinary Medicine.

for veterinarians in that sector." Tomquist said 30 percent to 40 percent of students each year say they either want to work solely with large animals or work in a mixed practice.

"We provide a balanced curriculum that provides approximately the same amount of hands-on rotation time in large animal and small animal medicine and surgery," Tomquist said in an email.

The college is a popular choice for students. It admits only 56 students per year but this past fall had nearly 900 applicants. A total of 222 students were enrolled as of fall term 2014.

Lawmakers consider new lime fee

Fertilizer evaluation fee increase also proposed

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A new fee on lime would be imposed as part of a fertilizer and soil amendments bill supported by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Under House Bill 2443, distributors would pay up to 5 cents per ton of lime sold in Oregon, increasing the total tonnage fees collected by ODA by about \$9,500 per year, but fees on fertilizers would stay flat at up to 45 cents per ton.

During the 2013-15 biennium, such tonnage fees are projected to total more than \$370,000.

The legislation would also allocate \$70,000 per year from tonnage fees for research on fertilizer impacts to ground and surface water and increase ODA's fees for registering and evaluating fertilizers.

The revised fees would be "fairly negligible" for distributors, who would probably raise prices to growers slightly — if at all — due to the changes, said Katy Coba, the agency's director, during a March 3 hearing before the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Oregonians for Food and Shelter, an agribusiness industry group, supports HB 2443 as setting up a "sustainable trajectory" for ODA's fertilizer program, said Scott Dahlman, the group's policy director.

"We think this is the right way to move forward," Dahlman said.

A provision of the bill that increases ODA's fertilizer evaluation fee from \$50 to \$500 for new products is equitable, as the agency has spent a lot of resources analyzing niche products that don't end up generating much in tonnage fees, he said.

Katie Fast, vice president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said the group supports the bill because ODA's fertilizer program ensures that fertilizer claims are truthful.

The research funding is a "supplementary benefit" of the program, but not the primary purpose of fertilizer and soil amendment fees, she said.

The Oregon Environmental Council supports HB 2443 but believes that \$70,000 is not sufficient to study the effects of fertilizer on water, said Angela Crowley-Koch, the group's legislative director.

Finding ways to reduce fertilizer usage could save money for farmers while preventing water contamination, she said.

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