

# AG EDUCATION

## Blue Mountain Community College turns techies into aggies

Did you know that video games and agriculture have something in common?

Well, they do. I'm not talking about some absurd game or reality TV show either ... I'm talking technology. The technology that often confounds or frustrates the older, wiser generations is helping to propel agriculture into the next level of prosperity ... and precision.

This is why all generations of agriculturalists are adopting different aspects of precision agriculture, not only in Oregon but across the country.

While the most entertaining tool in precision agriculture, the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV, a.k.a. drone) is attracting loads of attention, practical application of miniature helicopters in agriculture is still in its infancy.

However, there are several tools that are much more advanced, and they save money, too.

For example, the increasingly popular GPS steering systems that can be installed on tractors, planters and combines actually add up to big savings, often enough to pay off the initial investment in only a few years.

They save in: fuel, fertilizer, pesticides and crop loss due to missed swathes or overlap. For those of us who are irrigators, you can now monitor and control your irrigation from your smartphone. Oh, and you can irrigate those low spots less and those dry spots more.

Similar technology exists for variable rate applications of fertilizer and seed. With all this technology, we are bound to experience some benefits and savings, but we're also doomed to deal with technology failures.

Failing and advancing technology is the focus of the new precision irrigated agriculture program at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC). While the older, wiser generations have readily adopted this new technology, few graduates or current agricultural workers have the



Blue Mountain Community College Ag students Nikoa Murchison and Amedy Swenson help fit sprinklers on a new pivot.

skills to operate, maintain, and, yes, repair precision ag technology.

The demand for technically skilled laborers in our region, across the country, and internationally is high, and it's projected to increase by about 14 percent in the next 10 years.

In response, BMCC developed a new program to meet local needs and provide the masses of tech-savvy high school graduates with some profitable and

productive career paths. Currently, a two-year, associate's degree in precision ag is sufficient to get graduates into positions with starting salaries of about \$30,000, but with the potential to earn over \$65,000 as they gain experience.

The new precision ag program at BMCC offers students three different career paths: precision irrigation maintenance, data analyst and farm management. All three pathways provide students with the skills to work safely and



Blue Mountain Community College ag students learn the different components of a yield monitoring system during the precision ag short-course this spring.

efficiently in an agricultural setting, troubleshoot new variable rate technologies, and develop recommendations using precision ag tools.

Students are also required to engage with the industry through internships and work experience.

This new program does not require many additional resources or courses. A partnership with Oregon State University Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center has provided a number of new center pivots for hands-on learning as well as land for the Precision Ag Center that is proposed in the May 19 BMCC Bond.

Local businesses and dealerships have also stepped up to provide access to new equipment for students.

The program integrates nicely with BMCC's current and outstanding agriculture program, as well as the new mechatronics program, which uses similar

technology in agricultural and industrial processing. Additionally, the precision ag curriculum is designed for both current ag workers and traditional students, offering many of the new courses online and on-campus.

While the precision irrigated ag program doesn't start until the fall, BMCC offered a short course this spring that was met with great success.

Soon-to-be graduates had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience and training in some of the basic concepts and technologies used in precision ag. Blue Mountain looks forward to welcoming the first cohort of precision irrigated ag students, from all walks of life, this fall.

If you are interested in more information regarding enrollment or financial aid opportunities for the new precision irrigated agriculture program, please contact Alex Murphy at 541-278-5781 or [amurphy@bluecc.edu](mailto:amurphy@bluecc.edu).



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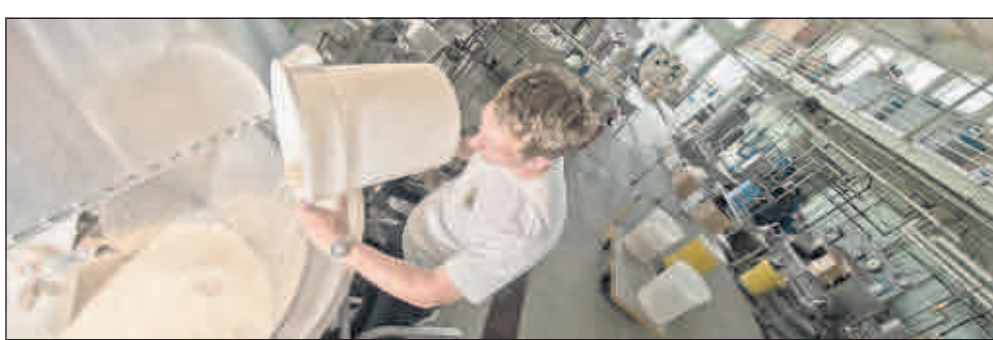
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Oregon State University Facilities such as these for malting barley are part of Oregon State University's fermentation sciences program. They are one small example of a much larger \$55 million research enterprise at the College of Agricultural Sciences that focuses on food, health, agriculture and natural resources.

## At OSU, the world is your classroom

There are no walls holding back ag sciences students at Oregon State University.

They are studying seals in Antarctica, mangroves in Honduras, and the international wheat market.

And they are engaged in real-world, hands-on research here in Oregon, too, in labo-

ratories across campus and at twelve experiment stations in every corner of the state.

The College of Agricultural Sciences at OSU is growing fast, preparing leaders for the 21st century. Students study food and beverage technology, plant breeding, wildlife science, and molecular tox-

icology, among many other topics that are critical to feed the world, protect the environment, and improve quality of life.

Our students are changing the world. Right here. Right now.

For more information, see <http://agsci.oregonstate.edu/>

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At Oregon State, we're training tomorrow's leaders. Our graduates are changing the world in fields such as sustainable agriculture, cancer research, marine biology, and food science. With more than 30 degree options, OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences offers students state-of-the-art learning and hands-on experience in world-class settings.

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