

# Beginning farmers get a helping hand

Headwaters Farm Incubator assists growers as they learn

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Beginning farmers generally face no shortage of obstacles — lack of land, lack of equipment, lack of money, lack of experience.

The Headwaters Farm Incubator, situated on 60 acres near Portland, Ore., helps new growers surmount these hurdles by providing resources and expertise at a price they can afford.

The program was launched in 2012 by the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District, which aims to equip growers with conservation-oriented skills they can later apply on their own land.

“We’re looking to increase the number of new farmers, we’re trying to keep land in production and we’re trying to make sure it’s well-stewarded,” said Rowan Steele, the incubator’s manager.

The district bought the former ornamental nursery for about \$1.3 million in 2012, dedicating part of it to riparian restoration and dividing 30 acres into blocks of about 1-2 acres apiece.

Growers rent these parcels and pay to use the incubator’s tractors and water, but the program offers ways to ease the financial burden.

The lease is set at \$600 per acre, but farmers are only expected to pay one-quarter of the price during their first year. The cost increases incrementally until growers pay the full value in their fourth and final year of the program.

Payments for water are waived for those who install water-preserving drip irri-



Rowan Steele, manager of the Headwaters Farm Incubator near Portland, Ore., speaks about the crops and facilities on the 60-acre property. The program trains conservation-oriented beginning farmers.

### Western Innovator

#### Headwaters Farm Incubator

**Location:** Southeast of Portland, Ore.

**Size:** 60 acres

**Property cost:** \$1.3 million

**Founded:** 2012

**Owner:** East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

**Number of farm operations:** 13

**Mission:** Preserving farmland and training conservation-oriented new growers

**Duration:** Farmers graduate after four years

**Amenities:** Irrigation system, two tractors, tillage equipment, barn, cooler, greenhouse, washing stations, office space

gation systems, and farmers who are diligent in controlling weeds can avoid the \$200 yearly management fee they’d otherwise incur.

While the district is unlikely to ever generate profits from the incubator — or even break even — the goal is to graduate farmers who share its values of conserving soil and preventing erosion, Steele

said.

“It’s a good investment, from our perspective,” he said.

Across North America, there are 111 farm incubators averaging more than 10 acres each, according to data from Tufts University.

Farm incubators allow growers to build a client base for their crops without first

making major investments.

Pete Munyon, a vegetable grower, said the availability of irrigation, cold storage, machinery and washing stations at the incubator has allowed him to concentrate on his business rather than worrying about developing “infrastructure.”

“You’re able to get a professional farm going a lot cheaper,” he said.

The incubator provides farmers with time to find their niche, said Emily Cooper, who is producing crops on the property for the second season.

Cooper initially focused on selling bulk vegetables intended for canning but found the demand was insufficient. She has now diversified to include fresh produce.

“It gives you the freedom to make some mistakes and experiment,” she said.

Not every aspiring farmer is offered a spot at the incubator, though.

Steele said he typically only accepts half the appli-

# N. Dakota farm boy who lost arms finishes high school

MILNOR, N.D. (AP) — An 18-year-old North Dakota boy who lost both arms in a farm accident 15 years ago is graduating from high school and preparing for college in Minnesota.

Parker Sebens fell into a running grain auger on the family farm near Milnor, in far southeastern North Dakota, in September 2000, when he was 3 years old. He spent 54 days in a medical center near Minneapolis, where he went through more than 50 hours of surgery before an infection forced doctors to amputate his arms.

Even without prosthetic arms, Sebens can still do things like driving and texting, using the remaining stumps of his arms.

“People can feel sorry for me, but I think that goes away after they see how much I can do,” he told KSTP-TV.

He even shoots pool with his dad, Mitch Sebens.

“He kept impressing us



Parker Sebens, 18, sits in a computer lab at Milnor Public School in Milnor, N.D. Sebens who lost both arms in a farm accident 15 years ago is graduating from high school and preparing for college in Minnesota. Sebens fell into a running grain auger on the family farm near Milnor, in far southeastern North Dakota, in September 2000, when he was 3 years old.

all the way through; he just learned one thing after another,” his father said. “When I think about it, it’s hard to think about what he’s had to

go through growing up when the other kids had it so easy, but he did it.”

Parker Sebens soon will be getting two prosthetic arms,

then heading off to college at Minnesota State University Moorhead. After college, he’d like to become a motivational speaker.

Mother Rene Sebens is finishing a scrapbook for her son as his graduation day nears.

“I thought for a long time he was going to die there, I really did,” she said. “I guess I just wanted everyone to know he’s living it and accomplishing everything that we want him to.”

Family, friends and even strangers have helped him immensely as he’s grown up, Parker Sebens said. He’s gotten thousands of cards and letters over the years and they keep coming.

“They really just push me to get everything done,” he said. “I just wish there was just a way to give back to everyone.”

Parker Sebens said he has been determined throughout his life to find ways to do the things he wants to do. Aside from cooking and laundry, there is very little he can’t do.

“Every day he amazes me,” Mitch Sebens said.

## Calendar

**Friday, May 15**  
Washington FFA Convention, 8 a.m., Washington State University, Pullman.

**Saturday, May 16**  
Washington FFA Convention, 8 a.m., Washington State University, Pullman.

PerryDale Parents Club Taste of Italy Dinner and Auction, 4-9 p.m., Polk County Fairgrounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-932-0558, fundraiser to supplement educational needs for students.

**Sunday, May 17**  
Frozen Assets: How we can and why we should save the world’s frozen water, 7-9 p.m.

Van Tassell Student Lounge at Wenatchee Valley College, Wenatchee, Wash., 509-943-0705. Mountaineer and climate scientist Steven Ghan takes us on a visual journey along the North Cascades, showing evidence of glacier retreat and shares solutions to prevent global ice melt and how to preserve our snowpack.

**Wednesday, May 20**  
Seafood HACCP Segment II, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. University of Idaho, Boise, 208-364-6188. This workshop is for seafood processor personnel who develop, reassess and modify the HACCP Plan and manage verification activities.

**Thursday, May 21**  
Food Allergen Workshop, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Holiday Inn, Yakima, Wash., 360-902-1961. Food allergen workshop for processors, retailers, consultants, sanitarians, regulators.

**Wednesday, June 3**  
Frozen Assets: How we can and why we should save the world’s frozen water, 7-9 p.m. Walla Walla Public Library, Walla Walla, Wash., 509-943-0705. Mountaineer and climate scientist Steven Ghan takes us on a visual journey along the crest of the North Cascades, showing evidence of glacier retreat and shares solutions to prevent global ice melt and how to preserve our snowpack.

**Saturday, June 13**  
Rickreall Gun Show, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Polk County Fair Grounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-623-3048.

Sheep in the Foothills, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Boise Foothills Learning Center, Boise.

**Sunday, June 14**  
Rickreall Gun Show, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Polk County Fair Grounds, Rickreall, Ore., 503-623-3048.

**Saturday, June 20**  
Ketchum Kalf Rodeo, 1-9 p.m. Glenwood, Wash., Glenwood.

**Sunday, June 21**  
Washington Potato and Onion Association Annual Convention, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Northern Quest

Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.  
Ketchum Kalf Rodeo, 1 p.m.-9 p.m. Glenwood, Wash., Glenwood.

**Monday, June 22**  
Washington Potato and Onion Association Annual Convention, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.

**Tuesday, June 23**  
Washington Potato and Onion Association Annual Convention, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.

**Saturday, July 11**  
94th Annual Idaho Ram Sale, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Twin Falls County Fairgrounds, Filer, Idaho, 208-334-2271.

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## Index

Drought ..... 3  
Ag Education ..... 14-16  
Dairy ..... 11  
Livestock ..... 11  
Markets ..... 13  
Opinion ..... 6

## Correction

A caption for a photograph provided by the Oregon State University Extension Service on the front page of the May 8 edition misidentified the grass being examined by Clare Sullivan, OSU Extension field crop agent. Sullivan is examining tall fescue, not perennial ryegrass. Capital Press regrets the source’s error.

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