

# People & Places

## OSU specialist mentors small farmers

Lauren Gwin helps new, growing farms take root and thrive

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Lauren Gwin is associate director of Oregon State University's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems. She also co-founded the national Niche Meat Processor Network, an online service that allows small processors to pose questions, offer suggestions, figure out the rules and support each other with peer-to-peer consulting.

CORVALLIS, Ore. — The way Lauren Gwin sees it, helping small farmers and processors thrive is right in Oregon State University's sweet spot as a land-grant university. It's all about collaboration, sharing information and wading through the regulatory thicket.

A successful local food system, she says, bridges the gap between farmers and community nutrition and public health in a way that producers don't get caught in the "price-point conundrum." Meaning they can make a living while providing people access to an affordable, healthful diet.

It's a complicated challenge, but it has become part of the College of Agricultural Sciences' mission at OSU. Gwin is associate director of the college's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems. She and center Director Garry Stephenson head up a program that helps beginners and small-scale producers learn how to raise crops, operate machinery, find markets, improve soil, understand regulations and many other lessons.

Meanwhile, Gwin has emerged as one of the country's go-to experts in small-scale meat processing. She co-founded the national Niche Meat Processor Network, an online service that allows small processors to pose questions, offer suggestions, figure out the rules

and support each other with peer-to-peer consulting.

She's also developed an Introduction to Food Systems course at OSU.

To her, the term local food takes on a regional definition. Some food can be grown in close proximity to markets, but others — such as beef — need more landscape.

"When I talk about local food I'm talking about environmentally regenerative, possibly organic, humane and minimizing the use of external inputs," she said.

The OSU small farms center is expanding its focus beyond ground-level operations to include long-term profitability, Gwin said.

Not every county needs or can support a meat pro-

cessing plant, for example, but there are ways local producers can cooperate to save money and time. Small producers might share livestock transportation to a plant, so one producer isn't wasting time and money taking just a few head "over the mountain" for processing.

"We have a vision for agriculture and food in Oregon and the region and the country," she said. "These farms will persist."

A combination of technical knowledge, business management and supportive political and consumer environments will help that come about, Gwin said.

"It's important to our economy that these things thrive," she said.

### Western Innovator Lauren Gwin

**Position:** Assistant professor and Extension Service food systems specialist, Oregon State University. Associate director of OSU's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems.



**Personal:** 44, two daughters, Lillie and Susannah. Husband Clint Epps is a wildlife biologist and an assistant professor in OSU's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

**Background:** Grew up in Connecticut, was an English and liberal arts major at Harvard, earned a Ph.D. in Environmental Science, Policy and Management from the University of California-Berkeley. At OSU since 2008.

**Notable:** Co-founded and coordinates the Niche Meat Processor Network, an online resource to help small processors wade through regulatory issues, share tips, ask questions.

**At a glance:** Bubbling with information and enthusiasm for local food systems, small growers and processors and the need to help them thrive. "You ask a simple question, you get a pageant," she says. "I come from a long line of people who tell very long narratives."

## Alaska fishing trip a welcome break for rancher

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press

COFFMAN COVE, Alaska — Making a fishing trip to Alaska didn't come without some major planning by Ken Miltenberger.

The Bend, Oregon, area cattle rancher, hay grower and hay hauler started planning for his 10-day bucket list fishing vacation after being invited to join a fishing group three years ago. Saving a few dollars was one matter, but scheduling the planting, cutting and hauling of his first cutting of hay was most important. And he had to have somebody look after his livestock.

It all came together and worked out for Miltenberger, who in early July drove away from the ranch he had grown up on and now works. After a flight from Portland to Seattle and then to Wrangell, Alaska, the fishing party he was a member of took a 60-minute boat ride and finished their trip at Coffman Cove on Prince of Wales Island.

For the next six days, Miltenberger and his fishing friends enjoyed reeling in halibut, silver salmon, Pacific cod and a few rock fish.

"Going on a fishing trip like this is something I wanted to do all my life," said the 64-year-old rancher.

Miltenberger was invited to join the group on its annual trip to Coffman Cove three years ago, but needed a couple of years to save and plan.

"This year, I just said I'm going to go," he said. "It took quite a lot of planning and quite a bit of luck."

The planning included planting his fields early, getting his first cutting completed in June and having a field of oats ready for cutting after his return from Alaska.

"Luck was with us," Miltenberger said. "We had good weather and no major breakdowns. It seems every time you want to do something like this, the baler blows up or the tractor blows up. This year everything came together so well. We finished the first cutting by working from can-see to can't-see. We got all the hay put up and the deliveries I had to



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Ken Miltenberger, right, a Bend, Ore., area cattle and hay rancher, and Larry Shipley of Roseburg, Ore., pose for a photo with a 127-pound halibut their fishing party caught during a trip to Coffman Cove, Alaska. Miltenberger had to do some planning and early planting in order to get his first cutting of hay in the barn before leaving on the trip.

make done."

While he was gone, Tom Miller, a neighboring rancher, did some irrigating on Miltenberger's fields and looked after his cattle.

"He'll be paid with some halibut and some green," Miltenberger said with a laugh.

Miltenberger worked on the ranch as a kid and then after a two-year stint in

the U.S. Army, he returned in 1973 to the 490-acre operation and at age 22 partnered up with his father, Don. The two worked together until the father retired in the mid-1990s, leaving the management of the ranch to his son.

With sole responsibility for the cattle and hay, Miltenberger found it difficult to talk himself into taking an extended summer vacation. But after downsizing the ranch to 240 acres, he decided it was time to take some time for himself.

He has no regrets.

"This has been one of the best fishing trips I've ever been on," he said, noting he had previously made some day-long halibut and salmon fishing trips off the Oregon coast.

"The fishing is peaceful here," he explained. "I feel like I can relax, not think about work and about the things I have to do. It's been a time to rest and rebuild some energy."

The fishing party of eight caught both halibut and salmon during each of their six days of fishing and returned with about 100 pounds of fillets each.

Larry Shipley of Roseburg, Ore., extended the invite to make the Alaskan trip to Miltenberger. The trip was Shipley's 12th.

"There's the fishing, but there's the appeal of being away from cell phone service, from the day-to-day routine and from the problems that come up," Shipley said of the Alaskan experience. "You can concentrate on friends, fishing and relaxing. It renews your soul, your spirit. You can call it a week of therapy."

Even before making the return trip home to the ranch, Miltenberger said he would be going to Alaska again to fish.

"It was worth every penny and every minute I took off to go do it," the rancher said.

"My advice to those guys who keep putting something like this off is to go do it because eventually you may not be able to," he said.

After a long day of travel by boat, plane and pickup, Miltenberger arrived back at his ranch at about midnight. He was back on a tractor at daybreak.

### Calendar

To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at [www.capitalpress.com](http://www.capitalpress.com) and click on "submit an event." Calendar events can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301.

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Harvest Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Yamhill Valley Heritage Center Museum, McMinnville, Ore. Featured will be a tractor parade and threshing, binding and baling oats

using antique farming equipment and horses. Cost: Adults \$5, kids under 12 free.

#### Saturday, Aug. 22

Rural Living Field Day, 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Howell Territorial Park, Sauvie Island, Ore. Cost: \$15 per

person; \$20 per family.

#### Thursday-Saturday Aug. 27-29

Farwest Nursery Show, 8 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Thursday, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Or-

egon Convention Center, Portland.

#### Thursday-Friday Sept. 17-18

California Poultry Federation Annual Meeting and Conference, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monterey Plaza Hotel, Monterey, Calif. Cost: \$250.

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