

Quinoa undergoing testing in Northeast Oregon

By **KATY NESBITT**
For the Capital Press

JOSEPH, Ore. — A group of farmers and Washington State University researchers are studying whether quinoa, a grain traditionally grown in the South American Andes, can be a viable cash crop in the Northwest.

In 2014 Ted Golder of Seal Rock, Ore., came to Eastern Oregon on an exploratory mission. He thought the climate would be similar enough to the Andes to grow quinoa. In a local coffee shop he met Jerome Goertzen of Joseph, who was also on the same mission. Last summer the two started quinoa test plots in fields around the Wallowa Valley.

Golder said he first became interested in quinoa when it became popular in health food markets a few years ago.

“A nutritionist friend of mine in Eugene told me the climate and altitude in Wallowa County is not that different than some areas in South America. Then I learned through Washington State University we really do have one of the most optimum areas to potentially to grow it.”

Golder and Goertzen discovered Washington State had a team of researchers led by professor Kevin Murphy who



Ted Golder checks on quinoa he and his partner Jerome Goertzen are growing next to a conventional quinoa field in the Wallowa Valley of northeastern Oregon.

are working with farmers all over the Northwest to grow different varieties of quinoa.

Last year Golder and Goertzen grew test crops at local farms. Using seed from last year’s crop and a variety from Colorado, this year they have 300 quinoa plants growing in seven rows near a conventional wheat field that Golder said are doing quite well.

In contrast, they have 16 rows of quinoa growing at Patrick Thiel’s Prairie Creek Farm outside of Joseph overseen by

Washington State University researchers.

“Quinoa is a good fit with what I do,” Thiel said. “We’ve always grown specialized crops.”

Thiel’s farm is organic,

which is more along the lines of what the researchers at Washington State have in mind, Golder said.

“It’s a good fit with WSU — they wanted their test plots grown organically,” Golder said.

Thiel said he was impressed with Washington State’s researchers when they came to lay out the test plots and outlined a uniform regiment for watering and weeding.

“They saw a value in doing a trial here. They get great research information while we keep it organic and grow it in a unique enough area,” Thiel said.

Farming is always a gamble. Golder said last year the weather was more consistent as was the crop.

This year a wet May stunted the growth of the newly planted starts. Thiel said quinoa is physiologically designed to come out of its seed in five days and puts down a taproot.

“If it’s overwatered they will stress and not survive,” Thiel said.

Rows were replanted, pushing out the harvest well into September, Golder said.

Not needing much water may be a major plus considering the extended drought in the West.

“Water is getting tighter every day,” Golder said.

Thiel said in South America quinoa is planted in a field and left until harvest.

“One of the things they liked about that crop is you leave it in an environment where it is doing well by itself,” Thiel said.

Golder said working with Washington State is important to help determine what traits farmers will want in their quinoa crop.

“Do they want it to be easily spotted from other similar plants like lamb’s quarter? Faster maturity?” he said. “The techniques we are using to grow quinoa will be repeated next year with a strategy. We are only half way there.”

Thiel said he couldn’t emphasize enough how important it is that Washington State is involved.

“They’ve worked with potatoes for more than 100 years. I see the same with the quinoa. They know how to do it,” Thiel said.

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Weather curtains El Niño expectations Climatologist says precipitation ‘not a certain outcome’

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — State Climatologist Michael Anderson is working with the National Weather Service to urge continued water conservation amid weather conditions that could bring a wet winter.

Anderson and Michelle Mead, the weather service’s warning coordinator in Sacramento, have put out a short video explaining what the El Niño weather pattern is and how it could affect the four-year drought.

El Niño is a warming of the ocean at the equator which interacts with the atmosphere, changing the jet stream that drives the winter storm track, Mead explained in the video posted on YouTube.

There have been six El Niño periods since 1950, Anderson told viewers, and all six have produced above-average precipitation in Southern California.

“There’s no reason to believe this year won’t be a seventh,” he said. However, there’s far from a guarantee the El Niño will produce more rainfall or snow in Northern California, where the state’s key reservoirs are, he said.

“Remember it has taken us four winters to get into this drought, and most of the state has lost an entire year of rainfall and some areas have lost two,” Anderson said. “While we could see some significant rain and snow develop this winter, it is not a certain outcome.”

The message continues a push by state and federal weather experts to tamp down expectations amid media hype over El Niño conditions that are expected to be the strongest in decades. El Niño years typically produce higher levels of precipitation in the U.S. Southwest and drier conditions in the Pacific Northwest, with Northern California having 50-50 chances of either.

“We all know that El Niño is all over the news lately,” Mead said in an email. “We’ve been working with (the state Department of Water Resources) on getting consistent messaging about El Niño and what it could mean for California.”