Beginners learn basics at OSU's farm school

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

OREGON CITY — He was speaking to a class of beginning beekeepers, but Joe Maresh's advice probably could apply to all the prospective farmers who attended Oregon State University's one-day Small Farms School:

"Take your stings."

In other words, accept the fact that you will take your lumps in agriculture. But that doesn't deter the people who continue to flock to OSU's popular small farms programs. At least 175 registered for the Sept. 12 farm school workshops and demonstrations held at Clackamas Community College in Oregon City southeast of Portland.

Classes offered through the day ranged from horse and sheep handling and emergency veterinary care to pasture management, small engine basics and how to grow blueberries.

Maresh, president of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association, led about 30 students through the basics of keeping pollinators and collecting honey.

Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Joe Maresh, left, president of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association, advises beginning farmers during an Oregon State University Small Farm School session Sept. 12.

Among his tips: Get into your hives frequently to see what's going on, join a bee club and get one or two good beekeeping books, not a bunch.

"Avoid beekeeping on the Internet," Maresh advised. "The Internet is not your friend.

"You can ask five different beekeepers a question," he added, "and get eight different answers."

Outside at the college's expansive crop plots, Aaron Guffy of East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District talked irrigation basics with two dozen beginning farmers.

In a fast-paced discussion of screens, filters, pump pressure tanks and variable frequency drives, Guffy emphasized the need to focus on getting water from one place to another.

"Before you decide the beginning" of an irrigation system, he said, "decide the end."

The turnout for farm school was indicative of the continued intense interest, especially in urban areas, about where food comes from and how it's produced, said Garry Stephenson, director of OSU's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems.

That interest can energize agriculture as legions of baby boomer farmers near retirement age.

"We have a generation of people in their twenties and thirties who are interested in going into farming as a business and as a statement of how they see the world," Stephenson said. "One of the hopes we have is that they will eventually scale up and become medium-size farms."

Deep Roots Coalition skips irrigation

By BRETT TALLMAN
For the Capital Press

DUNDEE, Ore. — In Oregon's Willamette Valley, 22 vintners and farmers, calling themselves the Deep Roots Coalition, are forgoing irrigation in favor of the traditional method of growing wine grapes.

For thousands of years, that method was the standard practice for grape growers, but since the introduction of irrigation it has become an alternative viticultural practice called dry farming.

"I started in California in the '70s so (the dry-farming method) is just how I learned to do it," John Paul of Cameron Winery in Dundee, Ore., said. "Before the late '70s everything was dry farmed."

Paul is the founder of the Deep Roots Coalition. As a group, their mission is to conserve agricultural water supplies, as well as make what they believe is more authentic wine.

"To irrigate is to interfere with the impact of rainfall on the wine," Paul said, "and rainfall, or lack of it, is an important part of terroir. In most grape-growing regions in Europe, a vintner will lose the right to put the appellation on the bottle if they irrigate their vines. That would be like telling someone they couldn't put Dundee Hills on their label, which would cost them a lot of money."

Paul argued that growing grapes by the dry-farmed method makes good ecological sense as well.

Kali Ramey Martin/For the Capital Press

Cover crops are used to regulate moisture at the Cameron Winery. Owner John Paul is the founder of the Deep Roots Coalition. As a group, their mission is to conserve agricultural water supplies, as well as make what they believe is more authentic wine.

"In Northern California, for instance, the Russian River is drying up," Paul said. "They've lowered the water table to the point where tributaries are running dry and nothing is making it downstream. The same thing is starting to happen here."

Paul addressed three advantages an irrigated vineyard has over a dry-farmed vineyard.

First, an irrigated vineyard will reach full production five to six years after it is planted, while a dry-farmed vineyard will take about seven years.

"But," Paul said, "a dry-farmed vineyard is way more stable. There are productive vineyards in California that are 80 to 100 years old. And some — not all, but some — irrigated vineyards start to slow down after just 20 years."

Second, an irrigated vineyard will produce larger crops.

"That's debatable," Paul said." If quality wine is the goal, you should be thinning crops anyway."

And third, irrigated vines can be planted closer together because there is less competition for water.

"The trouble is," Paul said, "roots will go where the water is. If the water is dumped on the surface, the roots stay shallow where they're more vulnerable to disease."

Oregon mill first certified to make cross-laminated timber

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Valerie Johnson acknowledges it's been a wild ride. Just 22 months after hearing about cross-laminated timber panels, her D.R. Johnson mill in Southern Oregon is making them, has partnered with state money and university researchers, bought new equipment and appears poised for a breakout that many think could revitalize Oregon's timber industry.

On Sept. 10 in Portland, Gov. Kate Brown announced D.R. Johnson is the first American company certified to make cross-laminated timber panels. Certification by the American Plywood Association and the American National Standards Institute assures the panels, called CLT, can be used in building construction.

Brown made the announcement at Best Fest, an annual conference that features clean-tech innovation. The conference organizer, Oregon BEST, is a quasi-public state agency that provides development grants and links entrepreneurs with a network of university researchers.

Oregon BEST provided $150,000 for CLT research at Oregon State University and will lend D.R. Johnson $100,000 for a new production line. The governor said the state is sponsoring a CLT design competition, with $200,000 in funding and services going to the winner.

Speaking from a podium made from cross-laminated timbers, Brown said she hopes the technology will "fuel the economic engine in rural Oregon." Cross laminated panels are strong, cost competitive, much quicker than steel and concrete to install, aesthetically pleasing and made from a renewable resource, the governor said.

"We are perfectly suited for this work," Brown said. "We grow the most desirable species. If this product is going to hit the market, it made more sense for it to emerge from our state than any other."

Ethan Martin, an engineer with the industry group WoodWorks, said cross laminated timbers are "like Glulam (beams) and plywood got together and had a baby."

The process can produce wooden panels 8- to 10-feet wide, up to 20 inches thick and 64 feet long, he said. Panels are formed by bonding layers of dimensional lumber such as two-by-fours.

They can be hauled to a construction site and quickly installed in a manner Martin and others jokingly compare to assembling products from Ikea, or like giant Legos.

The product's environmental impact is much less than other construction methods, Martin said.

"Every other material exudes carbon, except wood," he said. "Wood is the only product that sequesters carbon."

CLT construction has been used for high-rise buildings in Europe and Canada, but is limited in the U.S. to six stories, Martin said. The limitations come from building laws adopted in 1899 and 1910 in response to tragic tenement fires.

Martin said that's changing, and the technology is gaining acceptance. A 19-story wooden building is being designed in Portland, he said. A four-story commercial building, Albina Yard, is under construction in Portland and is the first project built with domestically produced CLT panels.