

People & Places

Entrepreneur hops into new field

Frankie Arburua III raises free-range rabbits for meat at his sheep ranch

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

TRACY, Calif. — Frankie Arburua III, a farmer and sheep rancher, made a decision one afternoon to change his focus: He would raise grass-fed, free-range rabbits.

“We had a man drill a well on the ranch last fall and we got into a conversation about business,” he said. “He mentioned that he had been studying the rabbit industry for years and that it would be a terrific opportunity for young, ambitious people to get into.”

Arburua is also a sheep rancher and vice president of operations at Frank’s Basque Family Farm, and raises Rambouillet ewes crossed with Suffolk rams, with his father, Frank Arburua Jr.

Several months later, fate lent a hand to the entrepreneur. He met a student — Nicole Kochanowski — who was studying animal science at the University of California-Davis.

“I told Nicole about the possibility of raising rabbits and all of the calculations I had done,” he said. “We both fell in love with the idea and each other on our way to a business partnership.”



Julia Hollister/For the Capital Press
Frankie Arburua III and business partner Nicole Kochanowski of Tracy, Calif., believe Lapin Ahpen is the only free-range rabbit operation on the West Coast. The name means “Fancy Rabbit” in Basque.

In April of this year, Arburua was finishing his last year in business school at the University of the Pacific in Stockton when his professor told him about the San Joaquin Entrepreneur Challenge. It seemed like the perfect venue for his business plan.

He was among eight contestants in the final rounds of the competition. Each had five minutes to present the basic idea and the detailed business plan that covered startup costs, sales projections and management.

Arburua won the challenge and \$22,500. Their business called Lapin Ahpen — meaning “Fancy Rabbit” in Basque

— was born.

“It was neat to see Frankie win the competition with a new ag-related business idea, as many of the participants and winners have been inventions of some kind for a product or service,” said Nate McBride, director of the Northeastern California Small Business Development Center at San Joaquin Delta College.

“It was also fun to see a young entrepreneur win the contest this year,” he said. “He may be the youngest winner we have had in the six years we have been running this contest. We wish Frankie success with his new business endeavor.”

That was just the beginning of the learning.

“The rabbits can’t have one large pen because they all have different personalities and are territorial. Some will fight others,” Kochanowski said. “These are not the typical cuddly little bunnies. These are meat rabbits weighing up to 12 pounds with powerful hind legs. Most of the rabbits are Beverens for their fast growth and excellent temperament. The rest of the breeds are either Californians or American Chinchillas.”

Rabbits have a short gestation period — one month — and the average litter is five to eight.

There is also a huge market for the rabbit manure.



Western Innovator

Frankie Arburua III
Hometown: Tracy, Calif.

Age: 22

Occupation: Rabbit producer, sheep rancher

Education: Bachelor’s degree in business administration concentrating on marketing and entrepreneurship, University of the Pacific, Stockton, Calif.

Quote: “A complicated vision is simply a mirage. Doing one thing, and doing that thing whole-heartedly, is how we intend to change the world.”

Many gardeners love to use it because it is natural.

“Ours is the only free-range operation on the West Coast,” Arburua said. “We plan to land accounts by a team effort. Nicole is good at husbandry and I tend to be a numbers-cruncher. We are just trying to get our packaging and pricing of our products finalized. We plan to really ramp up production over the next two years.”

“By September of 2017 we intend to have roughly 500 producing does if all goes as planned.”

Nursery goes native to cope with dry weather

By BILL SCHAEFER
For the Capital Press

KIMBERLY, Idaho — Dry and getting drier — that’s the current drought outlook for California and the Pacific Northwest, according to the National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center.

The issue facing landscapers and gardeners in the Pacific Northwest today is how do you maintain verdant and beautiful yards and gardens in the midst of the current water shortages.

Steve Paulsen is trying to change not only the palette of gardens but also the amount of water necessary to keep gardens green and sustainable.

Paulsen, the owner of Native Roots nursery in Kimberly, Idaho, is preaching the doctrine of using indigenous plants in landscaping and gardens.

“They offer the best solution for water conservation anywhere in the continental United States,” Paulsen said of using plants native to the region. “The reason they offer the better solution is because



Bill Schaefer/For the Capital Press
Steve Paulsen, owner of Native Roots nursery, in a plot of Hercules buckwheat, in Kimberly, Idaho. He preaches the doctrine of using indigenous species plants in landscaping and gardens.

they’re of the place. A plant of the place, from the place, will react best to what it is given. Native plants have the opportunity to work with the environment and the water they’re given to still be gorgeous and beautiful and perform really well for you.”

Through a licensing agreement with the University of Idaho’s Office of Technology Transfer, Paulsen is methodically developing an outlet to sell native plants such as penstemon, buckwheat, columbine and sage, to name just a few of the 36 plant varieties

he is currently cultivating.

The Native Roots program began through the vision and efforts of Steve Love, Idaho’s consumer horticulturist, based at the University of Idaho’s Aberdeen Research and Extension Center.

Love began collecting native plants in 2005. He estimates that he’s collected more than 1,500 plants in that time.

He spends part of every summer, joined by one or two plant enthusiasts, collecting promising specimens in the higher elevations of Idaho and its neighboring states.

“We’re looking for plants that people can use in their landscapes and save a significant amount of irrigation water,” Love said.

Love said that he is searching for plants that would require 25 percent to 30 percent of the water required to maintain a bluegrass lawn in south-east Idaho.

“You need anywhere between 25 to 36 inches (of water), depending on the year, to maintain a bluegrass lawn,” Love said.

He said that the native plant plots he is developing at the Aberdeen R&E Center average 6 to 8 inches of irrigated water a year.

Love said that in past years he has focused collecting penstemons and buckwheat plant. This past year he changed his emphasis to the silene genus, commonly known as capion.

During the past couple of years, he has seen a growing demand for honeybee forage plants and milkweed plants, a forage plant popular for monarch butterflies.

Paulsen said that he has 15 acres under production.

“We’re focused on all

types of plants,” he said. “We have sedges, rushes, grasses. We have shrubs, trees and forbes. Forbes are flowering plants and popular as grouse habitat.

Paulsen said that he’s seen a consistent increase in demand for native plants.

“We haven’t seen a big pop or explosion,” he said, “but we see more every year.”

He sees a developing trend toward water conservation plants but that people are not fond of change and will continue to use more traditional plants until the cost of water becomes too expensive for landscaping practices.

“People, generally speaking, are not fond of change and the traditional plant world has been well ingrained and well trained and well marketed for a long time,” Paulsen said. “As a result that kind of change we’re asking people to consider, just frankly won’t come easy and it’s going to take a catalyst in the form of money to change it.”

“Still saving the planet one native plant at a time,” Paulsen said, describing the Native Roots business model.

Calendar

To submit an event, go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at www.capitalpress.com and click on “submit an event.” Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301.

Wednesday-Friday Sept. 30-Oct. 2

Harvesting Clean Energy Conference, 8 a.m., Billings Hotel and Convention Center, Billings, Mt. <http://www.harvestcleanenergy.org/>

Saturday-Sunday Oct. 3-4

Alpaca Harvest Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Alpacas of Oregon, 21345 SW Aebischer Road, Sherwood, Ore. 503-348-6954

Saturday, Oct. 10

Oregon Ag in the Classroom Fall Harvest Dinner, 5-9 p.m., CH2M Hill Alumni Center, 725 SW 26th St., Corvallis, Ore. oregonaitc.org/fall-harvest

Saturday-Sunday Oct. 17-18

The All About Fruit Show, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Clackamas County Fairplex, Canby, Ore. <http://www.homeorchardsociety.org/events/>

Thursday, Oct. 22

Columbia County, Ore., Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, 6:30-9 p.m., Fultano’s Pizza, 770 E. Columbia River Hwy., Clatskanie, Ore.

Thursday, Oct. 22

Livestock grazing water quality seminar, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Washington State University Extension rangeland and livestock management regional specialist Tip Hudson, retired Oregon State University rangeland ecology and management extension specialist John Buckhouse and University of California-Davis rangeland watershed specialist Kenneth Tate will address ranchers, Fairfield Community Center, 218 E. Main St., Fairfield, Wash.

Tuesday-Thursday Nov. 3-5

Practical Food Safety & HACCP workshop, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. This is a comprehensive, three-day workshop, designed for those individuals responsible for implementing and managing a HACCP system in a food manufacturing facility. Idaho Water Center, 322 E. Front St., CL156, Boise, Idaho, <http://www.techhelp.org/events/197/practical-food-safety-and-haccp/>

Thursday-Friday Nov. 12-13

Oregon Water Law Conference, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Hilton Executive Tower, 921 Sixth Ave. SW, Portland, Ore., www.theseminargroup.net

Friday-Sunday Nov. 13-15

Tilth Producers of Washington Annual Conference, 9 a.m.-10 p.m., Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., Spokane, Wash., www.tilthproducers.org

Drought is taming wild horses in Southern Nevada

By JACKIE VALLEY
Las Vegas Sun

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The beige mare’s skin stretched tightly over her ribs as she grazed at Oliver Ranch. It’s the temporary holding area for the wild horses the Bureau of Land Management rounded up at the end of August to save them from the drought that’s parching the American West.

Given the horse’s emaciated frame — protruding bones and no visible fat on her neck or around her tail — BLM officials assessed her condition as a one of nine, the most dire. Healthy horses are a five or six, said Karla Norris, assistant district manager for the BLM’s Southern Nevada District Office.

“It’s just sad,” Norris said, peering into a pen housing multiple sick horses. “That’s no way to live.”

Starting in late August, the BLM rounded up 201 wild horses from the Cold Creek range northwest of Las Vegas to keep them from starving.

Twenty-eight were euthanized.

The horses were kept near Red Rock National Conservation Area before being taken to a private facility in Utah, where they will be rehabilitated for adoption or life on off-range pastures.

A 1971 law requires the BLM to protect wild horses as “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West.” But the symbolism cuts both ways. The situation of today’s wild horses mirrors that of many people in the modern West: clinging to a frontier mentality but dependent on the federal government to provide resources — water, most obviously.

“They’ve lost the ability to forage for food,” Norris said. “They are not wild horses anymore.”

Well-meaning people feed the horses illegally — apples, peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches, gummy bears, Cheetos — even going so far as to drop off bales of hay. Because of the drought, the horses’ grazing lands have been stripped of

vegetation, forcing them to eat the bark off Joshua trees.

Like city pigeons cooing for bread crumbs, the horses have come to expect sustenance from humans, a dependency the BLM used in its favor. The bureau put out food and gathered the horses in days, more quickly than originally expected.

“These (horses) are so acclimated to people that when we put out hay and water, it was like putting out a ‘free buffet’ sign,” Norris said.

Some wild horse advocates, including Darcy Grizzle, who has documented and photographed the Cold Creek herd for six years, support the roundup. Grizzle said that although it was difficult to watch, the move was necessary.

“They were going to die,” she said.

Others disagree. Arlene Gawne, president of the Spring Mountain Alliance, argues that only half of the horses should have been rounded up. The younger, healthier ones could have found new territory, she said.

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