

# People & Places

## Taking the guesswork out of harvest

Kevin Oldenburg uses expertise to develop weigh-pay system for harvest

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Growers would be able to more accurately pay workers for what they pick, if Kevin Oldenburg has his way.

Oldenburg is CEO of 2nd Sight BioScience. The company recently completed summer trials for FairPick, a weighing system designed to take the guesswork out of paying pickers for hand-harvesting fruits and vegetables.

The system measures weight instead of volume. Pickers wear a radio-frequency identification bracelet or card. They scan their card on a FairPick scale, weigh the fruit or vegetables they have harvested and get a receipt.

“The grower is paying for exactly what the picker is picking, and the picker is being paid for exactly what he or she picks,” Oldenburg said.

Currently, field managers typically use punch cards to record pickers’ information. The information is entered manually to create payroll, with the grower sending the data to accounting, which has to count it again, Oldenburg said.

“The grower hopes they’re on the positive side, they’re not overpaying, and the pick-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

2nd Sight BioScience president and CEO Kevin Oldenburg talks about his company's FairPick electronic weighing system in Spokane. The system helps pay workers based on the weight of the crop they harvest and digitally tracks the information for growers.

er hopes they’re not being underpaid,” Oldenburg said.

FairPick records the data electronically, sends it to a website and turns it into a payroll report, taking the variables out of the process.

The system also tracks the time pickers work.

“The growers can prove they gave the person a half-hour lunch break,” Oldenburg said. “They can also prove that to meet state law, they’ve given the person two 10-minute breaks, and that those two breaks were paid at their average hourly piece rate. It’s really got a lot of sophistication behind it, to make sure the grower has good documentation. Any time they get audited, they can prove they’ve

met all the requirements for state law.”

The system can be set up in any state, said Oldenburg, who relied on his background in science and technology — he has a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of California-Los Angeles — to develop the device.

“It’s an area that’s really ripe for automation and technology,” Oldenburg said.

The company is taking orders. Oldenburg expects to produce 150 units before harvest next year.

Harley Stoltes tested FairPick on his 6-acre blueberry farm in Bow, Wash., after seeing a demonstration at a trade show.

Stoltes said his pickers

liked the system. They received a printed receipt every time they weighed their berries.

“It gives you a real-time estimate of what each picker is making per hour,” he said. “We want our pickers to make enough money so we have good, stable staff and keep track of what we’re paying. It gives us a really good handle on our costs as we go.”

Stoltes liked Oldenburg’s technical understanding and willingness to listen to feedback.

“To have a device that allows us to actually pay for exactly the mass of what we’re picking is new. This scale gives us that opportunity,” said Robin Graham, who



### Western Innovator

#### Kevin Oldenburg

Age: 53

Title: President and CEO, 2nd Sight BioScience

Current location: Spokane

Education: Bachelor’s degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison in biochemistry, Ph.D. in biochemistry from University of California-Los Angeles

Family: Wife, two children.

Website: <http://www.2ndsightbio.com/>

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We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.

## Bigger is better for this pumpkin grower

By **SPENSER HEAPS**  
The Daily Herald

PROVO, Utah (AP) — Ed Dennis is not your typical gardener.

The 750-square-foot plot in his backyard in Highland was dedicated to just one plant this year: a pumpkin.

On Saturday, Dennis saw the culmination of nearly six months of toiling in the dirt as his prized pumpkin was hoisted by a fork lift and gently placed on a digital scale at this year’s Utah Giant Pumpkin Growers Weigh Off.

Calculations based on the size of the pumpkin indicated it would be somewhere in the mid-900-pound range, but whether Dennis could break the 1,000-pound mark was up in the air.

“You just never know until you put it on the scale,” Dennis said.

This was Dennis’ fifth year growing giant pumpkins, and each year he’s steadily improved. He’s about doubled the size of his pumpkins every year, growing one in 2014 that weighed in at 432 pounds.

“Obviously the first few years we really didn’t know what we were doing,” he said.

While growing vegetables of any kind requires a bit of attention to detail, growing a giant pumpkin takes the science to another level.

This year’s adventure began with soil preparation in March. In mid-April, Dennis began germinating a pumpkin seed from the Atlantic Giant variety. Soaked in a mix of water, seaweed and hydrogen peroxide, the seed was placed on a hot pad and kept at 85 degrees for a couple days until it sprouted.

The seed was then placed in high-quality potting soil, along with special bacteria and seaweed to stimulate root growth. A grow light illuminated the sprout for 16 to 18 hours a day. Once the sprout’s first true leaf showed, it was transferred to a hoop house in the garden, where heating coils keep the soil at exactly 75 degrees.

Dennis said there’s not much visible action for the first month while the plant spreads and the root system develops. A mix of soil, fungicide and

fertilizer is used to bury the vines to help grow more roots.

On May 17, Dennis cross pollinated one of his plant’s female blossoms with pellet from another grower’s male blossom. About 15 days later was when the pumpkin began to grow quite aggressively, Dennis said. From days 25 through 40, the pumpkin really started to explode.

“Over that 15- to 16-day window it gained over 500 pounds,” Dennis said. “So it was averaging a little over 32 pounds per day. And there were a few days where it gained over 40 pounds.”

Dennis, who works as a CPA in Salt Lake City, would get home from work and marvel at how much bigger the pumpkin had gotten since he left that morning.

“It’s just unbelievable how fast it can grow,” he said.

After work, Dennis would strap a headlamp on his head and go spend some time tending to the plant.

“You’re with it just about every day. In fact, it was difficult even to go on vacation,” he said.

Dennis and his wife, Laurel, did take a four-day vacation in August, but they had a friend come over and fertilize and spray insecticide and fungicide every day while they were gone.

Insects and fungus are big problems for giant pumpkins, Dennis said, so they use insecticide and fungicide aggressively. There’s no effort to grow the plants organically because they wouldn’t be good to eat at that size anyway.

On the day before the Weigh Off, Dennis enlisted the help of a friend and his fork lift to remove the pumpkin from the garden.

“We’ve never had one big enough that we had to have a piece of equipment to lift it,” Dennis said.

His stress was apparent as the giant pumpkin was slowly lifted off the ground using a specially made pumpkin lifting ring and straps.

The next morning, Dennis towed his giant pumpkin on a trailer to the 11th annual Utah Giant Pumpkin Growers Weigh Off at Thanksgiving Point in Lehi. There it sat next

to other giant pumpkins, ready for its turn on the scales.

When the time came, Dennis stood with his wife, daughter and grandchildren and waited for the pumpkin’s number to be revealed.

It weighed in at 953 pounds. Dennis threw a fist in the air, but his celebration was restrained.

“We’re pleased that it was that big. It was a little lighter than we’d hoped, but that’s still really good,” he said.

Dennis said hitting 1,000 pounds is the mark of a good grower, and he would really like to crest that mark.

“I’m relieved,” he said. “I really can’t be disappointed with a 950-pound pumpkin.”

Dennis acknowledged not everybody would want to sink the kind of time, energy and money he spent on his pumpkin to grow something that you can’t eat in the end.

He said the reward is not only the satisfaction of having refined the skills necessary to grow such a huge plant, it’s also the camaraderie between growers and the time he gets to spend with his family.

## Farmer finds woolly mammoth bones in soybean field

LIMA TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — An eastern Michigan farmer has made a mammoth find while digging in a field.

The Ann Arbor News reports the bones of a woolly mammoth were found by James Bristle in a soybean field Monday night in Washtenaw County’s Lima Township. Bristle says he and a friend were digging when they found what they thought was a mud-covered, bent fence post.

University of Michigan professor Dan Fisher confirmed the remains were a woolly mammoth Thursday morning. He and others worked to dig out the skull and a huge tusk.

Fisher says there are only 10 similar sites in Michigan in recorded history where such a significant portion of a woolly mammoth skeleton was found. He says this one was likely 40 years old and was probably killed by humans.



In this photo taken Oct. 1, University of Michigan professor Dan Fisher, top left, leads a team of students and volunteers as they excavate woolly mammoth bones found on a farm near Chelsea, Mich.

Melanie Maxwell  
The Ann Arbor News via AP

### Calendar

#### Saturday, Oct. 10

Oregon Ag in the Classroom  
Fall Harvest Dinner, 5-9 p.m., \$50 in advance, \$65 at the door, CH2M Hill Alumni Center on the Oregon State University campus in Corvallis.

#### Saturday-Sunday Oct. 10-11

Oregon Hemp Convention, 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Portland Expo Center, \$10 plus a suggested donation of canned food for the Oregon Food Bank.

#### 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 Highway, Clatskanie, Ore.

Livestock grazing water quality seminar, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Wash-

ington State University Extension rangeland and livestock management 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 during a livestock grazing water quality seminar. Fairfield Community Center, 218 E. Main St., Fairfield, Wash.

Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District annual Meeting, guest speaker will be

Rufus LaLone of the Weather Cafe, 5:30-9 p.m. Creekside Golf Club, Salem, Ore.

#### Friday-Saturday Oct. 23-24

Montana Farmers Union Convention, Mansfield Convention Center, Great Falls

#### Friday-Saturday Oct. 30-31

Northwest Farmers Union Convention, Northern Quest Casino, Airway Heights, Wash.

#### Tuesday-Wednesday Nov. 3-4

Practical Food Safety & HAC-CP, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Idaho Water Center, Boise, Idaho, <http://www.techhelp.org/events/197/practical-food-safety-and-haccp/>

#### Wednesday-Friday, Nov. 4-6

2015 Weed Conference, Washington State Weed Association, Wenatchee Convention Center, Wenatchee, Wash., [www.weedconference.org](http://www.weedconference.org)