

People & Places

Quinoa thrives in Northern California

Blake Richard establishes exotic crop in state's cool coastal climate

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

FERNDALE, Calif. — Tucked amid the vast cattle and dairy properties on California's north coast are fields of quinoa planted by Blake Richard.

An area resident for all his adult life, the 48-year-old Richard started growing quinoa — a crop that's become popular in foodie circles as a gluten-free alternative to wheat — 17 years ago.

After years of experimenting with different varieties and planting methods, Richard and his family now have one-pound bags of their quinoa being sold in Whole Foods Markets.

"I just thought this was a good fit for quinoa," Richard said, referring to his rented fields near Eureka, Calif. "It needs cooler temperatures so it can set seed. I knew there wasn't much, if any, that was grown in this country ... so there was a wide-open market."

Now a few of Richard's friends and neighbors are growing it, too.

"I think it's a good food," he said. "I was just interested in messing around with growing it and for a long time we experimented with lots of ways to grow it."

Quinoa, a species of goose foot, produces a gluten-free seed that can be substituted for wheat and other grains. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization declared 2013 the International Year of Quinoa, heralding the crop's nutritional value and adaptability.

The crop is commonly grown in parts of South America but is being adapted



Courtesy of Blake Richard

Grower Blake Richard examines a field near Eureka, Calif. He and his family have been perfecting ways of growing quinoa, which he sells through a wholesaler to Whole Foods Market.

for cultivation in the Pacific Northwest and other regions of the world. About a dozen farmers scattered across Eastern Idaho are experimenting with quinoa as a rotation option, and the businessman who is contracting for the acres has three Idaho-specific quinoa varieties in development.

A group of farmers in Oregon's Wallowa County are working with Washington State University to study the viability of growing quinoa in the region, and quinoa was included in a presentation on alternative crop trials at an Oregon State University field day this summer.

Richard bought his first seeds from White Mountain Farm in south-central Colorado, one of the pioneers of growing the crop in the United States. The farm's owner, Ernie New, can attest that growing quinoa isn't easy; he advises growers to start by planting only as much as they can afford to lose because it's not likely to work the first time, he told the Capital

Press in 2013.

"There's risk involved; it's not that easy to get a stand," Richard said. "It can be hard. And there's risk at harvest time with the rains. ... We harvest between late August and mid-September, and you can have a perfect storm of bad weather during that time."

Richard only started selling his quinoa six years ago. In the early years, he experimented with different varieties, including a "rainbow" variety, and adopted unique planting methods. Growing organically, he plants his quinoa in rows, which assists cultivation and weed control, he said. He dry-farms the crop, which means it doesn't depend on irrigation water.

Richard began by selling to local stores on the north coast, then last year began selling to Veritable Vegetables, a San Francisco-based organic produce distributor. This year he is selling quinoa to Lundberg Family Farms in Richvale, Calif., which specializes in bringing sustainably grown

whole grains and whole grain products to consumers and has marketed Richard's product to Whole Foods.

Richard is growing quinoa on some land owned by Lundberg, which has also contracted with several farmers in the area and has a representative working with growers.

"We are honored to partner with talented farmers like Blake Richard who are growing quinoa right here at home," company vice president of agriculture Bryce Lundberg said in an email. "We are excited to be the first national brand to bring American-grown, organic quinoa to American consumers."

"The reception to this product has been very positive, and we look forward to continuing our work with Blake and our other growers to bring more American-grown, organic quinoa to consumers in the coming years," he said.

Lundberg Family Farms was recognized in 2011 as one of California's top 25 agricultural innovators — a group



Western Innovator

Blake Richard

Age: 48

Residence: Ferndale, Calif.

Occupation: Farmer

Family: Father George Richard, son Tae Richard, 21

that included other businesses as well as universities and nonprofit programs. Sponsored by the business-promotion group Grow California, the awards sought to encourage investment in agriculture by Silicon Valley companies.

Richard certainly doesn't consider himself an innovator; he says he's just trying to grow a crop the best he can. He started working on farms as a teenager and stuck with it, he said, earning a biology degree from Humboldt State University.

"I knew I was going to do something in farming," he said.

Today his father, 75-year-old George Richard, and son, 21-year-old Tae Richard, work with him on the farming operation, as does Tae's mother, Sarah Fredy. The family also grows vegetables.

Blake Richard believes he and his friends have demonstrated that quinoa can be grown in the north coast's cool climate.

"We're going to continue experimenting with ways to grow it," he said. "We get excited about developing new varieties. We've made a lot of selections in our field out of odd types. ... We like experimenting with ways to grow it. We're kind of adventurous that way."

Team of sheep shearers has only one speed — fast

Dusty McCord can shear a sheep in 1 minute, 20 seconds

By JAN JACKSON
For the Capital Press

JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — If it takes you longer than 1 minute and 20 seconds to shear a sheep, your chances of beating Dusty McCord are nil.

McCord and his fellow shearing team members decided to stage an impromptu eight-hour shearing contest last month as they started on a flock of 100-pound crossbreed lambs belonging to Wall 3 Ranch in the southern coastal Oregon town of Langlois.

The winner hands-down was 26-year-old McCord, who sheared 400 sheep in 8 hours. He was followed by Mike Cowdrey with 260 sheep, Chris Mayorga with 206 and Morgan McKenzie with 185.

It's not a world record for McCord, but his team thinks it might be a U.S. record.

"We just thought it would be fun so we did it," McCord said of the last-minute contest. They started at 8 a.m.,



Photos by Jan Jackson/For the Capital Press

Dusty McCord sheared 400 lambs in eight hours to win his team's sheep shearing contest.

took 30-minute breaks every 2 hours, took an hour off for lunch, and sheared until 6 p.m.

"I was excited and nervous all through it and got tired a few times but I didn't slow down," he said. "I didn't let myself think about the other guys, just raced the clock."

McCord, who was born and raised in Monroe, Ore., learned to shear from his father and grandfather.

"I watched my dad and grandpa shear and it looked like fun to me," McCord said. "I got them to show me how to do it and started shearing for hire in 2008. I love it. I get to compete with my friends every day and have fun trav-

eling on top of it."

He's gone to New Zealand a couple of times but mostly travels around Oregon, Idaho and Washington shearing sheep.

Official sheep shearing contests are held regularly in Ireland, the United Kingdom, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. While speed and skill are key, International Sheep Shearing Association judges also check the quality of work and animal welfare.

Cowdrey, a third-generation shearer who claims an over-age-55 record of 260 sheep sheared in a day, participated in the contest.

"My son shears, and my dad was still shearing 100



Dusty McCord, top left, is shown with his his shearing team members. At the top right is Chuck McBeth; Mike Cowdrey is at the far left; and sitting are Kenny McBeth, left, and Chris Mayorga. They sheared 1,296 sheep in a single day.

sheep a day when he was 74, so I can't let up," Cowdrey said. "After Dusty hit 400 sheep in eight hours, we spent three days on the Internet trying to see if he broke a record. New Zealand has the world records tied up but we think Dusty holds it for the U.S."

The team works together throughout the season.

"Mike and I both have shearing trailers and it de-

pends on the job which one we use," McCord said. "It also doesn't matter which team member gets the call, we pick up the phone and call the rest of them. We get paid by the head so the harder we work the more money we make. For me it is like a drug addiction, except we're only addicted to competing with ourselves. It is great to get to do this every day with your friends."

Calendar

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Friday-Saturday

Oct. 23-24

Montana Farmers Union Convention, Mansfield Convention Center, Great Falls, Mont.

Wednesday-Saturday

Oct. 28-31

National FFA Convention & Expo, Kentucky Exposition Center, Louisville, Ky.

Friday-Saturday

Oct. 30-31

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

Tuesday-Thursday

Nov. 3-5

Practical Food Safety & HACCP Workshop, Idaho Water Center, Boise, 208-364-6188. HACCP or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points, is a preventive system for the control of health-threatening biological, chemical and physical food hazards during food processing. This is a comprehensive workshop designed for those individuals responsible for implementing and manag-

ing a HACCP system in a food manufacturing facility.

Tuesday-Thursday

Nov. 3-5

UC-Davis Produce Safety Workshop, University of California-Davis campus. This 2½-day workshop is an integrated approach to building a foundation of awareness and improved understanding of the current scientific basis for produce microbial safety systems and preventive controls.

Wednesday-Friday

Nov. 4-6

2015 Weed Conference, Wenatchee Convention Center, Wenatchee, Wash.

Tuesday, Nov. 10

Governor's Conference on Agriculture, Culinary Academy of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Nev. Conference highlights include local food successes in southern Nevada, breaking down barriers within the local food movement and making important connections in the local food chain.

Wednesday-Saturday

Nov. 11-14

Tri-State Grain Growers Convention, Davenport Grand Hotel, Spokane, Wash.

Thursday-Friday

Nov. 12-13

Oregon Water Law Conference,

Hilton Executive Tower, Portland.

Friday-Sunday

Nov. 13-15

Tilth Producers of Washington 2015 Annual Conference, Spokane Convention Center, Spokane, Wash. 206-632-7506.

Monday-Thursday

Nov. 16-19

Washington Farm Bureau 2015 Annual Meeting & Tradeshow, Yakima Convention Center, Yakima.

Friday, Nov. 20

Denim & Diamonds Auction, Dinner & Awards, 5 p.m. Oregon Convention Center, Portland, 503-595-9121.

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Index

California 9
Dairy 15
Idaho 9
Livestock 15
Markets 14
Opinion 6
Oregon 8
Washington 11

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