

People & Places

Extension educator keys on sustainability

Carlo Moreno helps conventional and organic farmers thrive using fewer inputs

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

University of Idaho Extension Educator Carlo Moreno looks up from examining plants during a Nov. 4 cover crop tour hosted by soil and water conservation districts near Burley.

New University of Idaho Extension Educator Carlo Moreno has worked in far-flung parts of the world in the last 10 years, experiencing agricultural challenges that have fueled his passion for sustainability on the farm.

“Safe food should be made available to all people who need it; lowering the cost makes it accessible,” he said.

Sustainable production helps decrease the cost by reducing inputs, and in small-scale operations it tends to increase yields, he said.

Sustainability has been the focus of his work — from the salad bowl of the world in California to the impoverished Mexico-Texas border region and subsistence farming high in the northern Andes Mountains of South America.

“I like the idea of going into communities, seeing what their problems are and working together to solve them,” he said.

A couple of things he’d like to do in his current role with the university is explore cover crops for weed and pest management and work with organic growers, even though some stigma is associated with organic production and could present a bit of a challenge, he said.

“Like politics, there’s a risk of alienation. But you don’t necessarily have to be organic to be sustainable,” he said.

He wants to assist organic and conventional growers alike and help empower farmers to experiment to find out what works in their operations, he said.

Moreno’s path to agricul-

ture began with his interest in insects. He never really thought there was a career in insects — a notion his parents reinforced — so he started studying biology at San Jose State University.

While there, he was helping out a graduate student with a project looking at the influence of annual flowering strips on the biological control of aphids in broccoli fields in the Salinas Valley. The project exposed him to agriculture and integrated pest management and opened his eyes to career opportunities.

The New York native went on to study entomology while pursuing his master’s degree at the University of Maryland.

Pursuing a Ph.D. in environmental studies with a focus on agroecology took him to the northern Andes in Venezuela where he worked with peasant farmers to break down barriers

to production.

Trying to grow enough food to feed themselves, the farmers had switched from native potato varieties to higher-yielding varieties. But those varieties proved susceptible to invasive pests. His work there was to understand how traditional practices could contribute to management of the invasive potato pest, the Guatemalan potato moth, as well as to local farmer livelihoods.

“I learned that native potatoes are not only more resistant to damage from this invasive potato moth pest, but that they also indirectly help farmers build their social capital and diversify their livelihood sources,” he said.

He worked with an innovative farmer who had a strategy to intercrop the native variety with the non-native varieties. It worked, but the other farmers had resisted the strategy,

Moreno said.

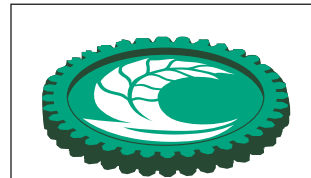
“Like anything else, it’s hard to change people’s minds,” he said.

Returning from South America, Moreno did post-doctoral work with the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley through a grant from the National Science Foundation to help boost organic production in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas.

His focus was to address the major barriers facing migrant farmers along the Texas-Mexico border, one of the poorest areas in the U.S.

The area was steeped in agriculture and is a major supplier of winter vegetables to the U.S. Farmers there were dealing with serious pest and weed problems, and his work was mostly directed at organic practices to manage the challenges.

He sees the opportunity



Western Innovator

Carlo Moreno

Age: 36

Title: University of Idaho cereal crops Extension educator, Minidoka County

Degrees: Ph.D. in Environmental Studies with a focus on agroecology, University of California-Santa Cruz; master’s degree in entomology, University of Maryland; bachelor’s degree in biology, San Jose State University

to work in Idaho as a chance to improve his skill set and a challenge to take what he’s used in small-scale production and work with a different set of people to promote an interest in sustainable agriculture, he said.

He’s teaming up with the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides for a Dec. 3 Organic 101 workshop in Twin Falls, at which he hopes to identify obstacles faced by organic producers with the goal of developing research and extension programs to help, he said.

He started on July 1 and is still getting his feet wet, but said Idaho is beautiful and the job is “fantastic.”

“Everyone has been very welcoming, nice and open to the idea of trying things differently, to differing degrees. I’ve met some really inspirational people and farmers, in what they’re willing to do and the challenges they’ve faced in doing it,” he said.

UN agency: Carbon dioxide levels hit record high

By KARL RITTER
Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — Levels of carbon dioxide and methane, the two most important greenhouse gases, reached record highs last year, continuing the warming effect on the world’s climate, the U.N. weather agency said Monday.

CO2 levels rose to nearly 398 parts per million, from 396 ppm in 2013, the World Meteorological Organization said.

The CO2 level fluctuates throughout the year and the monthly average crossed the symbolic 400 ppm threshold in March 2015. The WMO said the annual average “is likely to pass 400 ppm in 2016.”

Pushed by the burning of coal, oil and gas for energy, global CO2 levels are now 143 percent higher than before the industrial revolution. Scientists say that’s the main driver of global warming.

WMO said methane levels

reached a new high of about 1,833 parts per billion in 2014. About 40 percent of methane emissions come from natural sources and about 60 percent from human activities, like cattle breeding, rice agriculture and the extraction of fossil fuels.

“Every year we report a new record in greenhouse gas concentrations,” WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud said. “We have to act now to slash greenhouse gas

emissions if we are to have a chance to keep the increase in temperatures to manageable levels.”

World governments are meeting in Paris later this month to craft a new U.N. pact to rein in greenhouse gas emissions. More than 150 countries including top greenhouse gas polluters China, the United States, the European Union and India have pledged to cut or curb their emissions in the next decade.

Meanwhile, climate change is already transforming the Earth, melting Arctic sea ice, intensifying heat waves, and warming and acidifying the ocean.

Climate scientists say that if global warming continues unabated, dangerous effects could include flooding of coastal cities and island nations, disruptions to agriculture and drinking water, and the spread of diseases and the extinction of species.

Wyoming Game and Fish considers migration route protections

By CHRISTINE PETERSON
Casper Star-Tribune

CASPER, Wyo. (AP) — Nearly all of Wyoming’s big game animals migrate, and in much the same way. They wander from lush, green mountains in the summer to dry, wind-swept prairies in the winter.

And recent mule deer research has shown their movements are surprisingly precise. Pathways trickle together like county roads that merge into highways before becoming interstates.

Those paths, with food-rich spots along the way, allow Wyoming’s elk, deer and pronghorn to take advantage of the best seasonal vegetation available in an arid, high-elevation state. It’s what keeps them healthy, with their numbers in the thousands.

Research shows the high-

use areas and stopover points are critical to the animals’ futures. As a result, some say they should be protected.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission discussed Friday changing its policy to recognize these big game interstates and stopovers and recommend no oil and gas development on federal lands within them. If it passes, Wyoming would become the first state in the country to formally recognize some of the most cutting-edge big game research.

Sportsmen and conservationists say that this is a critical move to protect some of Wyoming’s largest deer, elk and antelope herds. Energy companies and agricultural interests, on the other hand, are concerned this could be another example of unnecessary government overreach.

“In order to be sustained

for the long term, (migrations) have to be sustained for their entire length. If any one part of the corridor becomes so degraded animals can’t or won’t go through it, it puts the entire corridor at risk,” said Matt Kauffman, director of the Wyoming Migration Initiative at the University of Wyoming. “We absolutely should expect that if we lose these migrations, we will have far fewer animals in our big game herds.”

Part of the controversy, and enthusiasm, behind migration research is its relative infancy. Only in the last 10 to 15 years have GPS collars allowed researchers to continuously track movements of elk, deer, and pronghorn. And only in the last several years has it become part of the public debate.

The longest migrating mule deer herd in the world was discovered in 2013 in southwest

Wyoming by wildlife researcher Hall Sawyer. The herd, he found, migrates more than 150 miles from the Red Desert in the winter to the Hoback Basin in the summer. About 5,000 animals complete all or a portion of the trip. The discovery garnered national interest with features in the New York Times, National Geographic and Field and Stream.

As researchers learned more about the importance of these corridors, routes and stopover points, wildlife managers have begun to realize they should update their policies to try to lessen human impact on those landscapes.

The proposal Game and Fish Department officials offered the commission on Friday included an update to add bottlenecks — places where animals move through restricted areas — and stopovers into pol-

icy language. It also suggested Game and Fish recommend no oil and gas development such as well pads on the surface in the animals’ high-use corridors and stopover points.

Even if the policy is adopted, said Scott Smith, Game and Fish’s deputy chief of the wildlife division, it applies only to recommendations to the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service. Game and Fish ultimately has no authority to decide where development can and cannot occur.

The department already recommends no surface use occupancy for migration corridors less than half a mile wide, and up to four well pads per square mile for larger corridors. This would simply change the precision of the recommendation, Smith told the Casper Star-Tribune.

Calendar

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Saturday Nov. 14

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

Saturday-Sunday Nov. 14-15

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

Saturday, Nov. 14

Oregon Hay King Contest, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Klamath Basin Equipment, Klamath Falls, 541-891-6248. Bale Delivery 7:30-9. Judging 9-4. Up to 7 classes of hay will be judged. Sponsored by OHFA and OFGC. Hosted by KBHGA and KBE. OSU Extension Service and KBRE cooperating.

Monday-Thursday Nov. 16-19

Washington Farm Bureau 2015 annual meeting & Trade Show, Yakima Convention Center, Yakima.

Tuesday-Thursday Nov. 17-19

15th annual Willamette Valley Ag Expo, Linn County Fair & Expo

Center, Albany, Ore. 541-967-3871, wvaexpo.com/

Wednesday-Thursday Nov. 18-19

Pacific Northwest Vegetable Association annual conference, Three Rivers Convention Center, Kennewick, Wash. <http://www.pnva.org>

Thursday-Friday Nov. 19-20

Idaho Water Users Association annual water law and resource issues seminar, 8:30 a.m. Riverside Hotel, Boise, (208) 344-6690. Several hot-topic water issues are on the agenda for the Idaho Water Users Association’s annual fall water law and resource issues seminar.

Friday, Nov. 20

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

Friday-Saturday Nov. 27-28

Open Alpaca Barn, Alpacas of Oregon, Sherwood, 503-628-2023.

Tuesday-Thurs. Dec. 1-3

Idaho Farm Bureau 2015 annual meeting, Shoshone Bannock Hotel, Fort Hall, Idaho.

Saturday-Wednesday Dec. 5-9

California Farm Bureau Federation 97th annual meeting, Pepper-

mill Resort and Spa Casino, Reno, Nev.

Monday-Tuesday Dec. 7-8

Oregon Seed Growers League annual meeting, Salem Conference Center, Salem, 503-364-1673.

Tuesday-Thursday Dec. 8-10

Oregon Farm Bureau annual meeting, Sun River, Ore., <http://www.oregonfb.org/events/>

Sunday-Wednesday Jan. 10-13

American Farm Bureau annual convention, Orlando, Fla.

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