

People & Places

Falconer keeps pest birds at bay

Brad Felger turns his passion into a full-time job protecting tree fruit crops, vineyards

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Brad Felger's life-long love of falconry has turned into a full-time job that also benefits farmers whose fruit crops can be devastated by pest birds such as starlings and sparrows.

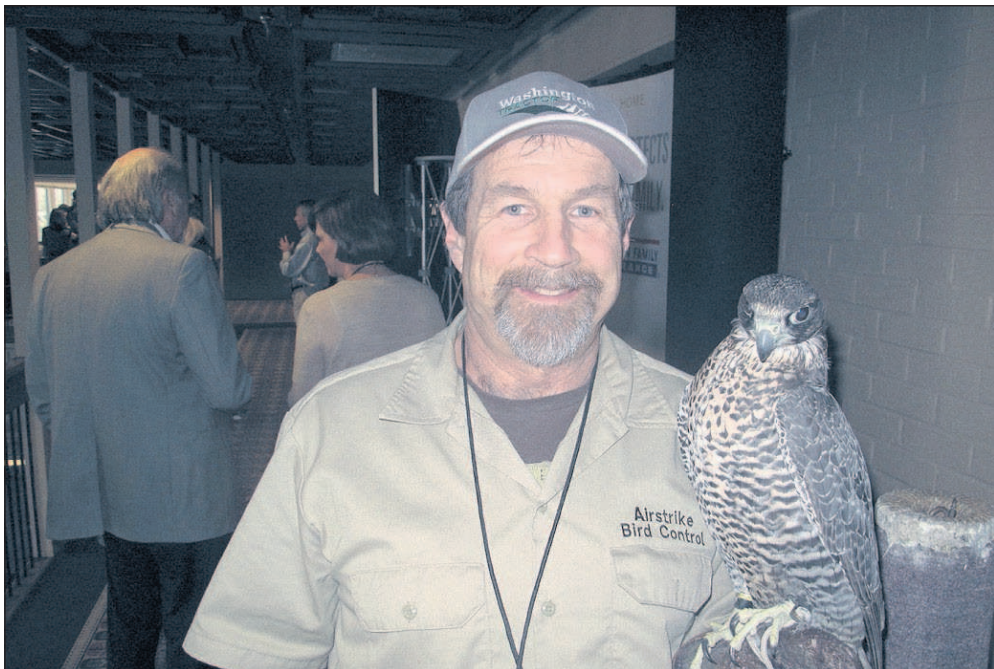
Felger, 56, began testing the effectiveness of using raptors — hawks or falcons — to scare away pest birds from vineyards and fruit orchards during the 1980s and 1990s.

While continuing his job as a farrier, he flirted with the idea of turning his falconry passion into a full-time job. While taking on part-time bird-abatement jobs for several years, he put the money away and used it to grow his falconry business.

In 2002, he left the horse-shoeing business and founded Airstrike Bird Control, which focuses on agriculture but also offers its services to landfills and resorts.

The company provides bird-abatement services for a variety of fruit crops, particularly blueberries, grapes and cherries.

That he can now make a



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Master falconer Brad Felger poses with a hybrid falcon Feb. 25 in Boise during the Idaho Wine Commission's annual meeting. Felger uses raptors to scare pest birds such as starlings away from grapes and other fruit crops.

living doing something he has loved since age 10 is a plus, said Felger, who lives near Mount Vernon, Wash.

"Falconry is not just a living. It's a passion and it's been a driving force in my life for 46 years," Felger said while visiting Idaho in late February during the Idaho Wine Commission's annual meeting.

While he was already experimenting with using raptors to scare birds away from vineyards, Felger got a break while he was performing a bird demonstration during a sustainable agriculture con-

ference in Central California in the late 1990s.

When a huge hidden flock of pest birds promptly rose up and left a vineyard, people took notice, and calls for work followed from vineyard managers.

The company has customers in Washington, Oregon and California and is exploring Idaho.

Idaho winemaker and vineyard owner Ron Bitner said the economics of using raptors to control pest birds in Idaho could make sense for some vineyards, depending on how

big their bird problem is.

"It's a real problem," he said of starlings and other pest birds. "They can be terrible. I know some vineyards around here that have been wiped out by them in the past. I would think they would want to look into that."

While starlings and other pest birds might adapt to the sound of noisemakers, visual deterrents or shotgun blasts, they are terrified of raptors and never lose that fear, Felger said.

"There's a predator-prey relationship in nature that is ex-

Western Innovator
Brad Felger
Founder: Airstrike Bird Control
Occupation: Master falconer, provides bird-abatement services for agriculture
Age: 56
Born: Los Angeles
Home: Mount Vernon, Wash.
Wife: Sue

tremely deep-rooted," he said. "We're using nature against nature for a positive thing."

"Anybody in the agriculture industry ... who has used a falcon to manage a bird problem will tell you it is by far the most effective and efficient solution," said falconer Kort Clayton, an independent contractor who works in partnership with Felger.

Felger said the economics of using a falconer to protect crops starts to make sense in the 100- to 150-acre range, but some smaller acreages can pencil out if smaller, neighboring vineyards split the cost.

Science sides with beef, expert says

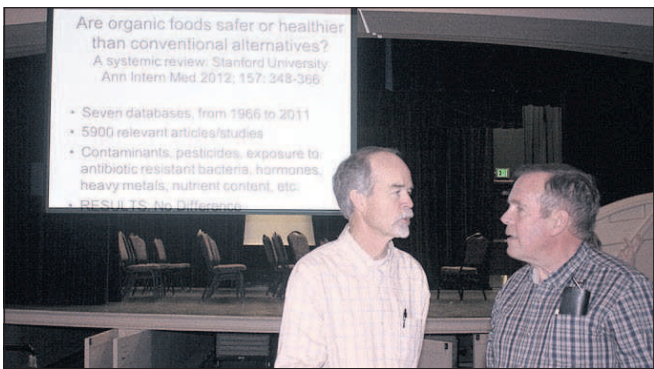
By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

WINSTON, Ore. — For nearly an hour, Gary Sides defended red meat as a meal choice and explained that the science of the past that said otherwise was flawed.

Sides, who works for Zoetis, a 60-year-old international animal health care company that offers medicines, vaccines, diagnostic products, genetic tests and other services for livestock, was the keynote speaker at the recent Douglas County Livestock Association's 2016 Spring Livestock Conference. He spoke to about 100 people, most of them Douglas County livestock producers.

"For the last 50 years we've been told by federal studies to eat a diet low in fat, high in carbs and to avoid red meat," Sides said. "But the results show that obesity has tripled in those years, diabetes has gone from 1 percent to 11 percent and 15 percent of children ages 6 to 19 are overweight."

He said diet presentations by the government have been pretty one-sided. His goal is to present a different scientific



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Gary Sides, left, talks with Scott Hendy of Roseburg, Ore., following Sides' presentation on the benefits of red meat at the recent Douglas County Livestock Association's 2016 Spring Conference. Sides says updated science indicates red meat has benefits, contrary to the science to a few decades ago.

understanding of diet, and specifically of red meat.

"The message I got was that the public has a perception that beef is bad for you, and actually that is not true at all," said Guy Kennerly, who has a cattle and sheep operation in the Dillard, Ore., area. "Beef is one of the best things for you. Diabetes and obesity are up (with some other types of diets) so maybe eating beef is not a bad idea."

"Maybe a little more research needs to be done before assuming something is

correct," he added of the beef information that was released many years ago, subsequently giving beef a bad image.

Woody Lane, a livestock and forage specialist in Roseburg, Ore., agreed that Sides' message emphasized that past diet recommendations were not based on good science.

Sides said school lunch menus emphasize fruits and vegetables, but not protein.

In his presentation, Sides showed a couple photos of skinny, but pot-bellied children

in a Third World country.

"They need fat and protein," he said of the kids. "Instead we shipped them white rice and white flour."

Sides said the nutritional profile of beef shows it has all 20 of the essential amino acids required in the human diet in addition to being a natural source of iron and potassium, B vitamin and trace minerals. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control, animal proteins are considered to be complete because of the nutrients they have.

Sides also said a Harvard University analysis of 21 clinical diet studies to see if there is an association between saturated fat intake and heart disease showed there was none.

Studies have shown high quality proteins help satisfy appetites longer, eliminating the urge to snack.

The 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee released a 600-page report a year ago that recommended 12.5 ounces of red meat per week per person, and Americans are consuming an average of 11 ounces.

Another study Sides dis-

puted was one done in 2006 by the United Nations that determined 18 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions came from cattle. He said a more recent study by the University of California-Davis found the cattle emissions were less than 3 percent.

Sides also explained that updated studies have countered the earlier World Health Organization's report that eating red meat increases the risk of getting cancer.

"Simple lies are more palatable than complicated truths," Sides said of more recent studies that show the benefits of eating red meat compared to studies done a few decades ago.

While Sides was talking to livestock producers who don't need any convincing about the product they produce, the speaker did emphasize that those people need to know the science of meat so they can better educate consumers when they have the opportunity.

When asked about counter views to his regarding beef, Sides said science favors beef.

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Saturday, April 2
26th Annual Dayton FFA Alumni Auction and Dinner, 5-9:30 p.m. in the old gym at Dayton High School, 801 Ferry St., Dayton, Ore. The silent auction starts at 5:30 and an "agricultural dinner" will be served at 7 with the oral auction following at 8. Tickets are \$10 per person and may be purchased at the door or in advance by calling the Dayton Ag Shop at 503-864-2080.

Spring Farming Days, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Eastern Washington Agricultural Museum, Pomeroy. www.co.garfield.wa.us/museum

Sunday, April 3
Spring Farming Days, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Eastern Washington Agricultural Museum, Pomeroy. www.co.garfield.wa.us/museum

Wednesday, April 6
Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls. idahoffa.org/

Thursday, April 7
Growing Agripreneurs — A Season of Farming Training, 6-9 p.m., Growing Agripreneurs is a seven-month program, beginning April 7, designed for beginning farmers

interested in gaining theoretical and practical knowledge through classes, field work, marketing, food preservation, farm tours and one-on-one mentoring. Pre-registration required. Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Cost: \$350 (couples discount, \$600) Partial scholarships available. http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/farms

Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls. idahoffa.org/

Friday, April 8
Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls. idahoffa.org/

Saturday, April 9
96th Annual California Ram Sale, Viewing starts at 8 a.m. Over 400 range rams from California, Oregon, Idaho and Utah. Crossbred, Hampshire, Suffolk and White-Faced (Columbia, Rambouillet) rams will be auctioned off in the sale. In addition three purebred ewes will also be sold. Also, ultrasound carcass measurements and a range ram index will be provided on all sale rams, Porterville Fairgrounds, 2700 W. Teapot Dome Ave., Porterville, Calif. http://cawoolgrowers.org/sale/ramsale.html

Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference, College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls. idahoffa.org/

Tuesday, April 12
Oregon Cranberry Growers Twilight Meeting, 4 p.m., Robinson Farm, Bandon, Ore. www.oregoncranberrygrowers.com

Wednesday, April 13
International Fair of Agricultural Technologies Conference and Exhibition, FEXPO Agricola Central, Talca, Chile

Thursday, April 14
International Fair of Agricultural Technologies Conference and Exhibition, FEXPO Agricola Central, Talca, Chile

Friday, April 15
International Fair of Agricultural Technologies Conference and Exhibition, FEXPO Agricola Central, Talca, Chile

Saturday, April 16
Oregon Women for Agriculture Auction & Dinner, 5-9 p.m. The organization's 29th annual fundraiser, themed "Oregon Agriculture A to Z," will take place at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E in Albany, Ore. Cost: \$40 per person. http://owaonline.org/owa-auction-2016/

Goat healthcare and nutrition and packgoat seminar, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Edelweiss Acres, Olympia, Wash., 360-742-8310. \$25 per person; \$7.50 for each 4-H member. The goat care clinic will go over general health care

and illnesses, nutrition and include a session on packgoats. Go to the website, http://edelweissacresobers.com/, or call.

Holistic Land Planning, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Create the ideal land plan for your ranch. What is the ideal layout of your fences? Where should infrastructure be located to facilitate animal handling and movement? Kittitas Valley Event Center, 901 E. Seventh Ave., Ellensburg, Wash. Cost: \$227 until April 2. www.rootsofresilience.org

International Fair of Agricultural Technologies Conference and Exhibition, FEXPO Agricola Central, Talca, Chile

Hood River Hard-Pressed Cider Fest, noon-7 p.m., 3315 Stadelman Drive, Hood River, Ore. http://hoodriver.org/cider-fest/

Sunday, April 17
Holistic Land Planning, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. This is the continuation of the workshop that began Saturday. Create the ideal land plan for your ranch. Kittitas Valley Event Center, 901 E. Seventh Ave., Ellensburg, Wash. Cost: \$227 until April 2. www.rootsofresilience.org

Tuesday, April 19
Idaho Range Livestock Symposium, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. American Legion Hall, Marsing, 208-896-4104. A one-day traveling program and networking event packed with information

on industry relevant topics, for producers and rangeland managers.

Thursday, April 21
Idaho Range Livestock Symposium, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Challis Community Events Center, Challis, (208) 879-2344. A one-day traveling program and networking event packed with information on industry relevant topics, for producers and rangeland managers.

Saturday, April 23
Oregon Ag Fest, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. We strive to bridge the gap between urban and rural life, and to share the wonder and abundance of Oregon's bountiful and diverse harvest. Most importantly, we do this in a family friendly way, where kids 12 and under receive free admission, and virtually all activities are free of charge. Oregon State Fairgrounds, Salem. http://oragfest.com/

California FFA State Convention, Selland Arena, Fresno. www.calaged.org/stateconvention

Sunday, April 24
Oregon Ag Fest, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. We strive to bridge the gap between urban and rural life, and to share the wonder and abundance of Oregon's bountiful and diverse harvest. Most importantly, we do this in a family friendly way, where kids 12 and under receive free admission, and virtually all activities are free of charge. Oregon State Fairgrounds, Salem. http://oragfest.com/

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