

THE BOOM IN HAZELNUTS

'Renaissance' turns around fortunes of popular nut



By **JANAE SARGENT**
Capital Press

CANBY, Ore. — Nurseryman Rich Birkemeier can't keep up with the demand for hazelnut trees.

The owner of Birkemeier Nursery supplies farmers with young hazelnut trees, but the demand has been so great that his 300-acre hazelnut farm and nursery is sold out for 2016 and has sold out of some varieties for 2017. Birkemeier has been forced to start a waiting list for new growers who want to plant the popular nut tree.

Birkemeier called the last four years a "renaissance in the hazelnut industry" and sees a bright future for Oregon hazelnuts.

"A lot of things have come together at the same time that have really pushed the hazelnut industry forward," Birkemeier said. "There's a gaining realization in the agricultural community that hazelnuts are the things to grow in Oregon."



Courtesy of Willamette Hazelnut Growers

Hazelnuts have become one of Oregon's fastest-growing crops, with 3,000-4,000 new acres planted each year.

Willamette Valley growers have planted between 3,000 and 4,000 acres of hazelnuts a year since 2014, according to Pacific Agricultural Survey. Owner Mike McDaniel said he expects even more new acreage to be added this year.

New growers with no agricultural experience, farmers looking to diversify their crops and long-time hazelnut producers are among those planting trees, with this year's statewide acreage blossoming to about 46,000 acres.

Hazelnuts have been grown in the Willamette Valley since the first tree was planted in 1858 because of the region's unique rich soil and mild climate. Today Oregon produces 99 percent of U.S. hazelnuts and 4 percent of the world's supply.

'God moments'

Oregon State University hazelnut breeder Shawn Mehlenbacher said he could have never anticipated the growth in hazelnut acreage he has seen during the last few years.

"This industry is growing faster than I ever imagined," Mehlenbacher said, adding that "we don't have any problem selling what we can grow."

The picture wasn't always so rosy. In a 2012 survey, the National Agricultural

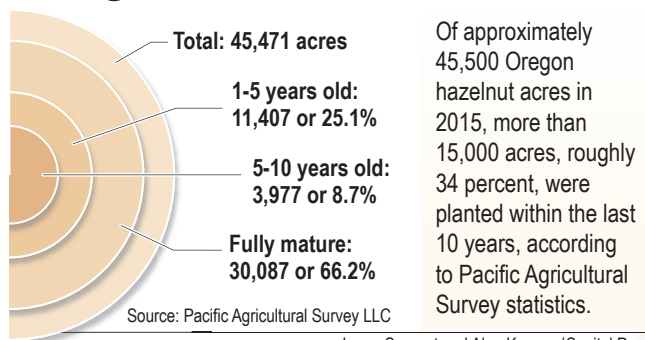
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Photos by Janae Sargent/Capital Press

Rich Birkemeier explains the difference between Jefferson and Yamhill hazelnut cultivars, two eastern filbert blight-resistant cultivars Oregon State University released in 2009.

Oregon hazelnut acres, 2015



Shawn Mehlenbacher evaluates hundreds of hazelnuts for eastern filbert blight-resistant qualities at the Oregon State University field lab.

"This industry is growing faster than I ever imagined. We don't have any problem selling what we can grow."

Shawn Mehlenbacher, Oregon State University hazelnut breeder

Bill prevents a Malheur County national monument

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — An Interior Department funding bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives includes a provision that blocks a proposed national monument in Malheur County, Ore., that is strongly opposed by local ranchers and farmers.

The bill passed 231-196 July 14 and is headed to the Senate.

It includes a proposal by Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., that prevents funds from being used to create a national monument in Malheur County.



Walden

Oregon Natural Desert Association, a Bend, Ore.-based environmental group, has proposed creating a national monument on 2.5 million acres in an area of the county known as the Owyhee Canyonlands.

It would cover 40 percent of the county and encompass about 33 percent of the county's total grazing land. County residents voted 9-1 against the idea during a special election in March.

Walden said in a news release that the House vote sends "a strong message to the president that the overwhelming majority of local residents and the People's House oppose a monument."

"The people of Malheur County have already spoken on this issue and they've come out adamantly opposed to a proposed unilateral national monument declaration on the Owyhee River canyon," Walden said. "Now the U.S. House has also voted on my proposal to block a monument in Malheur County."

Walden's communication director, Andrew Malcolm, said Walden will do everything he can to stop the proposal.

"We're going to continue to speak out against it and use every tool available to try to stop this monument," he said.

The vote was applauded by Jordan Valley rancher Mark Mackenzie, vice president of the Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition, which was formed this year to represent ranchers, farmers and others who oppose a national monument designation.

Regardless of what happens to the bill in the Senate, "it's sending a loud message ... that, hey, we're not happy with this proposal," Mackenzie said.

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Washington projects pollution-control costs for dairies

Industry: Estimate far too low

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Ecology projects that hundreds of dairies will each spend between \$11,407 and \$25,695 over five years to comply with new pollution-control rules, an estimate that an industry representative said "massively" understates

the full cost to farmers.

Ecology's analysis provides the first official estimate of expenses associated with its proposed Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation permit.

The agency anticipates up to 300 of the state's 400 dairies will need a CAFO permit under rules the department

expects to finalize by the end of the year.

About 100 dairies with fewer than 200 mature cows will be exempt because of the financial hardship the rules would pose for small operations, according to Ecology.

Large and mid-sized dairies, however, that discharge pollutants to groundwater or surface water will be required

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A cow looks out onto fields at a dairy in northwestern Washington. The state Department of Ecology has projected how much complying with new pollution-control rules will cost dairies, though an industry group calls the estimate incomplete and far short of the true costs to farmers.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press

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