

WSU shows off barley lines to farmers, maltsters

Growers seek quality, herbicide resistance

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

REARDAN, Wash. — Washington barley farmers got their first glimpse at new varieties better suited to their production needs.

Washington State University barley and alternate crop breeder Kevin Murphy hosted the “Know Barley, Know Beer” event July 15, with stops at Spokane Valley craft malting operation Palouse Pint; field trials near Reardan, Wash., and Orliston Brewing Co. in Airway Heights, Wash. Murphy showcased six



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Walla Walla, Wash., farmer Joel Huesby holds a cup of beer made from feed barley Baronesse during Washington State University’s “Know Barley, Know Beer” event at the Orliston Brewing Co. in Airway Heights, Wash.

malting barley breeding lines, which require more data before they become available to growers, among other barley

varieties. “Really (farmers are) just looking for quality,” Murphy said. “They’ve been burned in

the past — when malting barleys don’t make quality, they have to sell them for feed.”

Establishing a relationship with maltsters early will help more farmers be willing to grow malting barley, as quality is not as hard to achieve as it was in the past, Murphy said.

Barley growers are also interested in disease resistance and resistance to imidazolinone, a herbicide. Farmers who plant Clearfield wheat varieties have residual herbicide in the soil, so most non-resistant barley varieties don’t grow afterward. An imidazolinone-resistant variety would allow farmers to put barley back into their rotation.

For many growers, “their number-one thing by far is imidazolinone resistance, more than malting or anything, they

just want any barley that can grow,” Murphy said.

Colfax, Wash., farmer Bill Myers said barley is about a third of his operation, at roughly 1,000 acres. He’d like to see demand increase among maltsters and brewers so he can grow even more.

“We’re coming into a time now where this region is becoming known for beer, like it has previously become known for wine,” Myers said. “You go to France now, say you’re from Walla Walla, and everybody’s eyes light up. That’s going to happen here for beer. We found we’ve been sitting on something that is actually very good.”

Walla Walla farmer Joel Huesby grows malting barley organically, and is interested in malting a ton per week. He’s

interested in possible premiums for locally raised malting barley.

Huesby estimates roughly 800 craft breweries are in Washington and Oregon, many of which purchase malt from the same source, but very few micro-malting companies.

“I don’t want subsidies from the government, I want a marketplace that wants what I can produce and sell to,” Huesby said.

Phil Neumann is founder and maltster with Mainstem Malt, a start-up malt house in Milton-Freewater, Ore. He was excited to see new varieties planted around the region.

“We want to have at least a few varieties to choose from,” Neumann said. “We’re all looking to do things a little differently.”

Farmers, officials celebrate siphon gate milestone

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

WARDEN, Wash. — Farmers and state officials last week celebrated another milestone in the effort to bring more Columbia River water to Central Washington farms.

Farms there have seen the aquifers sink after decades of depending on wells for irrigation. The wells were initially anticipated to serve as temporary measures until Columbia River water could be brought to the region through the 1 million-acre Columbia Basin Project.

The East Columbia Basin Irrigation District last winter constructed two additional siphons at the Lind Coulee Siphon complex. According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, the new siphons run parallel to siphons built in the 1950s.

The new 14-foot 8-inch diameter siphons, with 17-inch walls of steel-reinforced concrete, run underground south of Interstate 90 for 4,500 feet.

Craig Simpson, irrigation district manager, said the new siphons help his agency prepare to deliver water to farms.

“We’ve written contracts in the last year to lands south of this,” he said. “It’s part of the infrastructure necessary to move water down.”

The new siphons provide the capacity needed to offer farmers access to Columbia River water along 31 miles of the canal, according to Ecology.

The Columbia Basin Proj-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Mark Booker, president of the East Low Columbia Basin Irrigation District, holds up a letter from 1973, signed by board members of the Eastern Big Bend Resources Inc., during the ceremony at the new Lind Coulee Siphon complex July 13 near Warden, Wash. The letter announced the “coming crisis” of the declining Odessa Subarea aquifer. “Their solution: Find water from anywhere, especially the Columbia Basin Project.”

ect, authorized by Congress in 1945, was intended to provide irrigation water to 1,029,000 acres. Currently, roughly 680,000 acres are served.

The current expansion will provide Columbia River water to 87,700 acres.

Of that, the irrigation district is negotiating with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to write master water service contracts for 70,000 acres. Water for 17,700 acres is already under contract.

The new siphon doubles the water capacity from the complex southward, said Mike Schwisow, director of government relations for the Columbia Basin Develop-

ment League.

“It’s a process of widening and removing bottlenecks until delivery capacity is sufficient to serve all the 87,000 acres,” Schwisow said.

Seven pump stations will be built, Schwisow said. Construction will begin this fall on the EL 47.5 pump station, which will serve 8,204 acres. Roughly 3,560 acres are under contract.

The irrigation district board recently passed a resolution authorizing the sale of municipal bonds to fund construction of the EL 47.5 pump station, which is estimated to cost about \$15 million, and funding for East Low Canal improvements.

“Our underwriter has told us the market is really good for municipal bonds right now,” Simpson said. “They said they’re ‘insanely good rates.’ Hopefully they can maintain that long enough that we can have our sale.”

Simpson hopes to make deliveries soon. The district has been meeting with landowners regarding the anticipated pumping plants.

The district board is capping capital improvement costs at \$190 per acre per year for farmers. The current design calls for \$144 per acre per year for the EL 47.5 pumping plant, Simpson said.

Western Growers seeks start-up companies for innovation center

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SALINAS, Calif. — Western Growers is looking for innovators who can help California agriculture solve its most pressing problems.

The organization that assists and advocates for produce growers received a \$30,000 grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation to support start-up companies working with the newly launched Western Growers Center for Innovation and Technology.

The grant will help more aspiring entrepreneurs gain access to the center’s amenities so they can develop products or services that will help growers save water or labor, compile and use crop data or meet other needs, explained Cory Lunde, Western Growers’ director of strategic initiatives and communications.

“We’re trying to encourage start-up companies that may not have the funds to rent ongoing space at the center,” Lunde said. “We have 20 companies in

the center, and when we started we had five or six. ... We’ve seen a lot of interest in this. It really seems to have taken off.”

Opened in December, the center in Salinas offers basic office amenities such as a desk, phone and internet access as well as the ability to network with other companies and collaborate on projects, Lunde said.

A committee screens applicants for dedicated desks and will award “scholarships” based on financial need, utility to industry and other criteria.

Wells Fargo, the largest banking and lending organization in the U.S. commercial agriculture sector, will lend its expertise to help speed up commercialization for ag-technology startups, according to a news release.

Western Growers opened the center because finding technological solutions has never been more critical for agriculture as food production will have to increase to feed a rapidly growing population, asserted Hank Giclas, a Western Growers senior vice president.



Courtesy of Western Growers

Tom Nassif, far left, president and chief executive officer of Western Growers, accepts a \$30,000 check from Wells Fargo officials for the organization’s new-product development center in Salinas, Calif. The center opened last winter and provides companies with a space for coming up with innovative products and services for agriculture.

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Ag group asks newspaper for more local farm news coverage

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A member of the Nampa-Caldwell Agribusiness Committee has asked Idaho’s largest daily newspaper to cover more local agricultural news. In a letter sent to the Idaho

Statesman July 8, former state Rep. Darrell Bolz thanked the Boise-based newspaper for running a story about crop-identifying signs in Lewis and Idaho counties in its July 5 Local section.

But Bolz, an agricultural consultant and former University of Idaho Extension agent, also said Lewis and Idaho counties, which are in Northern Idaho, don’t qualify as local. Boise is located in Ada County in Southwestern Idaho. “I thanked them for doing something about agriculture, but why don’t they do more local stories about agriculture?” Bolz told Capital Press.

The agribusiness committee is a joint creation of the Nampa

and Caldwell chambers, which are in Canyon County and adjacent to Ada County.

Bolz said that during the group’s July 6 meeting, a number of members were frustrated that the paper covered a story about crop signs in counties so far away when the committee has been putting out crop signs for three decades.

“The committee certainly appreciates any news in your paper that pertains to agriculture but wonders why more ‘local’ agricultural news is not printed,” Bolz states in his letter. “It needs to be noted that the Caldwell and Nampa chambers of commerce have been putting up crop signs for many years in Canyon County.”

Bolz encouraged the Statesman to cover more local agricultural issues and pointed out the committee also selects a farm family of the year, puts an agricultural position statement together annually for legislators and coordinates agricultural tours for legislators and local officials.

“Again, we want to thank you for putting an article in your paper regarding agriculture but would hope that in the future more ‘local’ articles could be featured,” he said. “The above activities along with the many other agricultural activities certainly merit consideration in a state that is highly agricultural in both diversity and in its contribution to the state economy.”

Statesman business reporter Zach Kyle, who also covers agriculture for the newspaper, said Bolz has a fair point about the paper not covering the local crop sign program and he plans to do that.

He also noted that the Statesman does have several front-page articles a year about agriculture and he wishes there were more.

“I enjoy covering agriculture,” he said. “I think it’s a big deal.”

In his letter, Bolz listed several of the major farming-based companies that employ thousands of people in the area and are vital to the region’s economy, including J.R. Simplot Co, Materne, Lactalis American Group, Crookham Co., Land O’Lakes, Bayer, Seminis Vegetable Seeds, Syngenta, Meadow Gold, Forage Genetics and Rain For Rent.

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