

Horticulturist seeks one more hit

Pat Moore searches for next superstar raspberry cultivar before retiring

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

PUYALLUP, Wash. — Since 1987, Washington State University berry breeder Pat Moore has occupied the same office, a cubbyhole crammed with books, family mementos, worn furniture and plaques.

The plaques commemorate milestones in Moore's career. He's patented three strawberry cultivars and four raspberry cultivars. Last year, he was awarded the Wilder Medal by the American Pomological Society, a national honor given for contributions to fruit breeding.

Four or five years from retirement, however, Moore, 63, has ambitions to top his past accomplishments.

He hopes to develop the red raspberry that will succeed the



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State University plant breeder Pat Moore sits in the office that he's occupied since 1987 at the Puyallup Research and Extension Center. Moore was nationally recognized last year for developing new strawberry and raspberry cultivars.

renowned but aging Meeker as the king of Washington raspberries.

"The growers really want a new raspberry," Moore said. "They feel Meeker, the term they use, is 'running out.'"

Raspberry farmers have relied for several decades on the Meeker, which was released by WSU in 1967 and named for Oregon Trail pioneer Ezra

Meeker, Puyallup's first mayor.

Meeker, the man, grew rich growing hops and built a mansion 2 miles from the WSU Puyallup Research and Extension Center.

Meeker, the berry, was the superstar of its generation, and the next.

In the 1980s it surpassed the venerable Willamette, a cultivar released by Oregon State Uni-

Pat Moore

Age: 63

Position: Horticulturist at Washington State University's Puyallup Research and Extension Center

Education: Bachelor's degree in forestry, Oregon State University; master's degree in forestry, University of Minnesota; doctorate in forestry, Michigan State University

Background: A Portland native, after earning his doctorate, Moore worked for International Paper Co. breeding pine trees in the South; did post-doctoral work under Michigan State University horticulture professor Jim Hancock, a breeder of popular blueberry varieties.

versity and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1943.

Meeker provided the consistency processors crave, and nearly all Washington raspberries are sold to processors. Raspberries are a \$57 million-a-year business in Washington. Only California produces more raspberries, but almost all of its berries are sold as fresh fruit.

However, Meeker's popularity may eventually be its downfall. Any disease Meeker is vulnerable to spreads from field to field, Moore said.

"Meeker may be showing its age," he said.

Fifteen years ago, Meeker

made up 70 percent of the plant sales in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia. Now, Meeker holds about one-third of the market, while another one-third is held by a relative newcomer, Wakefield, bred in New Zealand and tested in Washington.

No other cultivated variety claims more than 10 percent of the market.

The privately developed Wakefield plants cost more than cultivars released by public institutions such as WSU, and while that works for some growers, it doesn't work for all, Washington Red Raspberry Commission Executive Director Henry Bierlink said.

"We would love to see the hot new berry come out of WSU," he said.

The commission, a financial supporter of Moore's berry breeding program, wants a high-yielding, summer-bearing, winter-hardy, virus-resistant, machine-harvestable raspberry.

"He's been very willing and able and responsive to our needs, but we also recognize he's got a big challenge in front of him," Bierlink said.

Many years ago, Moore decided to brand WSU's raspberry cultivars with the name "Cascade."

Beginning in 2003, Moore has released Cascade Gold, Cascade Dawn, Cascade Delight, Cascade Nectar, Cascade Bounty and Cascade Harvest.

Bierlink said it doesn't appear any of the Cascades will inherit Meeker's throne.

"I would have to say the consensus opinion of the raspberry growers community is 'no.' They have been tried and have some positive attributes, but none of those varieties will dominate in the future," Bierlink said.

A raspberry can excel in one area, but fall short in another. Moore, who fills raspberries with chocolate pudding for church socials, said Cascade Dawn, released in 2005, was particularly tasty. But the variety doesn't shake off the vine until it's too ripe, a flaw for machine harvesting.

Cascade Harvest was the cultivar most recently released, in 2013, and the first full harvest won't be until 2017. There's hope the berry will perform well, and it currently ranks fourth in plant sales. But Moore said the berry has not proven as tolerant to root rot as he had hoped.

Each new cultivar represents years of work. WSU has released 13 raspberry cultivars in 85 years. The average time between crossing parents and commercial sales has been 15.8 years.

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