

People & Places

Consultant offers business expertise

Thistlethwaite focuses on improving farm efficiency

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

For small farmers, the difference between making a profit and losing money often comes down to seemingly minor decisions, according to agricultural consultant Rebecca Thistlethwaite.

People often decide to become small farmers because they enjoy working outdoors but don't thoroughly appreciate the financial challenges of agriculture, she said.

"They don't necessarily approach it from a business perspective," Thistlethwaite said.

Without a well-considered strategy, growers risk going deeper into debt and a "downward spiral" of financial chaos, she said.

"I don't like to see that," said Thistlethwaite. "We've got to keep farmers on the land."

Some growers try to produce a multitude of different crops rather than specialize in just a few, which hinders them from selling anything in large enough volumes and complicates their cost analysis, she said. It's easier to track costs for a handful of crops to see if they make financial sense.

Such analysis can uncover ways for farmers to more effectively use their resources — for example, growing kale instead of broccoli generates multiple harvests per season, instead of just one.

"It takes up the same amount of space but you're getting so much more yield out of it," Thistlethwaite said.

Such changes may appear insignificant but they can collectively push a farm into profitability, she said.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Rebecca Thistlethwaite is an agricultural consultant, author and program manager of Oregon State University's Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network. She lives in Mosier, Ore.

Buying large machinery is tempting for many farmers, but such purchases can lead to operate less efficiently and blind them to the true source of problems, she said.

Thistlethwaite gives the example of a farmer who bought a feed mixer to process hay and molasses to provide supplementary feed for his livestock.

A more economical solution would be to manage his pastures to prevent overgrazing, which would avoid the need to bring in outside feed, she said.

Such lessons became apparent to Thistlethwaite and her husband, Jim Dunlop, during their six years raising meat animals in California.

Jim had always wanted to buy a tractor, but once he figured out how infrequently it would actually be used, it became clear that the investment wasn't worthwhile.

The couple instead opted to have neighboring farmers do custom work, and over time found cheaper

ways to perform the same functions.

Releasing pigs onto a field, for example, will effectively "rototill" the soil in preparation for planting as the animals root around for food.

Small farmers should also get creative in financing their operations, Thistlethwaite said.

When Thistlethwaite and her husband were raising chickens, a local grocery store loved their eggs but their farm couldn't produce an adequate supply.

The couple convinced the company to provide them with a zero-interest loan that would be repaid with eggs, using the money to increase the size of their flock.

They were able to boost production enough to repay the loan and have enough eggs leftover to increase cash flow, she said.

"If you really want this, put some money on the table," Thistlethwaite said.

Thistlethwaite's introduction to agriculture occurred when she apprenticed at an

organic farm in Idaho, which led her to work at several other operations across the West.

"After that, I was basically hooked on ag," she said.

After earning a master's degree in international agricultural development, she conducted research in Central America and later worked at a "farm incubator" in California where farmworkers learned to run their own operations.

Many of the pupils had experience growing crops, but not managing a balance sheet or putting together a marketing plan.

"I seemed to gravitate to the business and marketing aspects," Thistlethwaite said.

She also met her husband at the incubator, and together they launched a farm aimed at selling meat and eggs through farmers' markets and other niche channels.

After eventually leaving California, the couple traveled to small farms around the country to study their business models, resulting in a book, "Farms with a Future."



Western Innovator

Rebecca Thistlethwaite

Occupation: Consultant, author, farmer, program manager of Oregon State University's Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network

Age: 41

Family: Husband, Jim Dunlop, two children

Hometown: Mosier, Ore.

Education: Bachelor's degree in natural resources management from Colorado State University in 1997, master's degree in international agricultural development from the University of California-Davis in 2001.

"We gleaned as much wisdom as we could from them," she said, noting they've also written a book on meat producers, "The New Livestock Farmer."

They now own 5 acres in Mosier, Ore., where they raise fruits, vegetables, chickens and hogs while Jim works as a horticulturist at a nearby cherry orchard.

Thistlethwaite, meanwhile, was recently hired as program manager of Oregon State University's Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network. She also speaks at sustainable farming conferences and provides one-on-one consulting about developing farm business plans.

"I look at it from a natural resources perspective as well as a financial and marketing perspective," she said.

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Index

Dairy 9
Markets 13
Opinion 6

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Great Oregon Steam-Up puts history on display

By JANA SARGENT
Capital Press

BROOKS, Ore. — Antique Powerland brings families, hobbyists, enthusiasts and artists together each year to experience the history and romance of steam-powered machinery at the Great Oregon Steam-Up.

The 46th annual Great Oregon Steam-Up is a volunteer-driven event that draws approximately 25,000 people to the Antique Powerland living museum to see fully operating steam-powered machinery over two weekends.

This year's event continues Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 6-7.

Show Manager Evan Burroughs said most of the equipment in the show is pre-World War II and fully restored.

The show will feature early steam-powered farm machinery, fire trucks, vintage trucks, antique cars, logging gear, a unique operating steam sawmill and various steam-powered engines.

Burroughs said the event features more than 500 individual pieces from Or-



Joe Beach/Capital Press

An Aultman & Taylor steam tractor is on display at the Great Oregon Steam-Up in Brooks, Ore. The annual event will continue on Aug. 6-7.

regon, California and the Midwest.

Executive Director Pamela Vorachek said her favorite part of the event is seeing the interest expressed by generations of attendees.

"We truly have something for

everyone," Vorachek said.

Each day of the show opens at 7 a.m. in Brooks, Ore. Visitors should take Interstate 5 to exit 263 and turn west on Brooklake Road.

More than 700 volunteers run swap meets, flea markets, raffle drawings, youth-focused events, educational booths and a daily parade of antique tractors.

Favorites for children are the 1/8-scale railroad rides and the steam-driven ice cream maker.

A feature new to the 2016 show is the Steampunk Art Show. Steampunk is a genre of science fiction that features steam-powered machinery. Vorachek said the volunteers added it to attract younger attendees.

This weekend, Vorachek said visitors are invited to watch steampunk artist Chuck Dolence demonstrate how he creates artwork from radio cables.

Burroughs described the event as educational entertainment, saying attendees can come just to be entertained or can dig in and learn a lot from the vendors and hobbyists who bring

their machinery to the show.

"I like being able to show the modern public the tools their grandparents, great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents used to provide a living for their families," Burroughs said. "These are tools you can trace to modern agriculture and see that a lot of the features are very similar."

Adult admission is \$12 for one day or \$20 for a weekend pass. There is a \$30 pass for families. Admission for children younger than 12 is free.

Antique Powerland is a campus made up of 12 power museums whose mission is to educate the public about the history and operation of machines and the role they played in modern society and the quality of life.

"Having events like this where you see the machines running makes it real and relevant," Vorachek said. "At Great Oregon Steam-Up you can watch the transition and technology changes that happened to get us where we are today. It's what we mean when we say history comes alive."

Washington youths win awards at Holstein convention

By JANA SARGENT
Capital Press

Five Junior Holstein Association members from Washington state took home awards from the National Holstein Convention June 27-July 1 in Saratoga, N.Y.

The Washington State Holstein Association took 21 junior members to the convention to compete in jeopardy, quiz tournaments and banner-making contests.

The convention is aimed at educating young people about the dairy industry, providing



Courtesy of Michelle Schilter

From left to right, Noah Berry, Gary Young, Jacy Smith, Cassidy Schilter and Lauryn Young, all from Washington state, won the State Banner Contest at the National Holstein Convention. Gary, Lauryn and Cassidy are from Chehalis and Jacy and Noah are from Snohomish.

opportunities to see dairy operations across the U.S. and helping young farmers network.

Among the Washington contingent was Cassidy Schilter from Chehalis, Wash., who

won the Junior Jeopardy contest. Michelle Schilter, a planning committee member and Cassidy's mother, said Cassidy is the first junior member from Washington to win the national contest.

The Washington state juniors also won the banner-making contest, beating out contestants from nine other states.

"It's pretty amazing how many juniors were there," Schilter said. "Our kids did a really great job working as a team on the banner."

The convention is hosted by the National Holstein As-

sociation, which has 20,000 adult members and 8,000 junior members. The association is open to anyone interested in breeding, raising and milking registered Holstein cattle.

Schilter said the convention, which is held in different locations from year to year, is a great opportunity for kids to see a world beyond their own backyard.

The 2017 National Holstein Convention will be at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Bellevue, Wash. Schilter said she expects between 1,500 and 2,000 people to attend the convention.

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Saturday and Sunday Aug. 6-7

The Great Oregon Steam-Up, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The Great Oregon Steam-Up is the largest event at Antique Powerland during the year and it involves all of the museums and many other participants. One of the unique aspects of the event is that

most of the equipment is operating. 3995 Brooklake Road NE, Brooks, Ore. Daily admission \$12 per person, 12 and under free. www.antiquepowerland.com/html/steam-up.html

Sunday, Aug. 7

'Raised Country' Music Festival, 1 p.m. Antelope Church lawn, Antelope,

Ore. The festival kicks off at 1 p.m. with Joni Harms, followed by an authentic Chuckwagon Barbecue with Paradise Rock and the harmonies of Central Oregon's Mud Springs Gospel Band, while the kids stay busy with the ranch animal petting area, face painting and other activities. Headlining the festival at 3:45 p.m.

will be Susie McEntire.

Saturday and Sunday Aug. 13-14

Oregon Cannabis Growers Fair, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem. Over age 21 only. https://oregoncannabisgrowersfair.com/