

People & Places

Farmers test biochar's benefits

Kelpie Wilson investigates substance to improve cropland

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Calling Kelpie Wilson a "biochar believer" isn't a joke.

"I'm a believer in science," she said, "and the science tells us biochar is worth pursuing."

And at this point in her life, Wilson is in chase mode. She is part of a Southern Oregon group, the Umpqua Biochar Education Team, or UBET, that is working with 10 farmers to make biochar, mix it with manure and apply it to their land.

The work is funded by a two-year, \$75,000 grant from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The UBET group's biochar findings will be shared with others through extension agents and NRCS.

"One of my roles, I feel, is to thoroughly investigate it and understand it, and communicate that to others," Wilson said.

Among other things, the group has teamed up with welding students at Umpqua Community College, who make farm-scale kilns in which farmers can burn debris and produce biochar. The group's work was displayed during a biochar conference held Aug. 22-25 at Oregon State University. About 300 researchers, educators and producers attended.

Biochar is essentially charcoal made from burning such things as woody debris or straw in the presence of little or no oxygen. As a soil amendment, it retains moisture and nutrients, increases pH and sequesters carbon. Limited field trials have shown it can increase crop yield.

Agricultural interest is high, but



Courtesy of Wilson Biochar Associates
Kelpie Wilson heads a project in Southern Oregon in which farmers are making biochar and applying it to their soil.

biochar is expensive to make. Research and commercial development is advancing in a herky-jerky fashion, in part because of the diversity of biochar sources and applications. In addition to being a soil amendment, for example, it can be used to control odor and absorb pollutants. In some instances, it's being used to help clean up mining sites.

Wilson said the industry needs to focus.

"It is all over the map," she said. "There are so many things to do with biochar, and so many ways to make it, and it impacts so many other industries. It needs to have suc-

cess in one aspect."

She has an idea about that, too. During the biochar conference at OSU, one speaker said California has an estimated 66 million dead trees in its public forests. The speaker, Raymond Baltar of the Sonoma Biochar Initiative, said dead trees could be logged and burned in converted biomass plants to make biochar, which then could be applied to California's drought-stricken farmland.

And that, Wilson said, could be the one big, quick, focused move that gets biochar off and running.

"Let's save California agricul-

Western Innovator

Kelpie Wilson

Occupation: Principal consultant at Wilson Biochar Associates.

Personal: Age 60, married to George Shook, a noted banjo player. Lives on rural property outside Cave Junction, in Southern Oregon. Avid hiker and backpacker, loves gardening, raises worms. The name Kelpie is Scottish, and refers to a water fairy said to inhabit ponds and lochs.

Background: Lived in Pennsylvania, Virginia and overseas growing up as her father worked for the government, was an English literature professor and eventually served as president of California State University at Chico, commonly known as Chico State. Wilson earned a mechanical engineering degree from Chico State.

Turning Point: Wilson got her driver's license as the Arab oil embargo of 1973 was unfolding. The disruption to American life, with motorists restricted to buying gas on alternate days, convinced her that pursuing renewable energy was critical.

Activist and advocate: Worked for environmental groups, particularly on forest issues, and lobbied for protection of roadless and wilderness areas on public land.

These days: Believes biochar has great potential to improve soil, retain water, boost crop yield and sequester carbon.

Website: www.wilsonbiochar.com

ture from the drought," she said. "It's one region, but it could have a huge impact."

Hanjin pledges \$90M to resolve shipping cargo chaos

By YOUKYUNG LEE
AP Business Writer

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Hanjin Group said Sept. 6 it will inject \$90 million, including \$36 million from chairman Cho Yang-ho's personal assets, to help resolve disruptions to container cargo transport caused by Hanjin Shipping Co.'s financial troubles.

The move follows South Korean government demands that the parent company do more to help as Hanjin's vessels remain stranded outside ports after the company filed for bankruptcy protection last week.

Hanjin Shipping is seeking protection from creditors in dozens of countries, hoping to minimize seizures of its assets. With the company's assets frozen, its ships are being refused permission to offload or take on containers at ports worldwide, out of concern tugboat pilots or stevedores may not be paid. Out of 141 vessels the company operates, 68 were not operating normally, were stranded or seized, as of Sunday.

The world's seventh largest



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson File

The Port of Seattle is shown in this file photo. The bankruptcy of Hanjin has sent shock waves through the container shipping industry.

ocean shipper, Hanjin Shipping is part of the Seoul-based Hanjin Group, a huge, family-dominated conglomerate, or chaebol, that also includes Korean Air.

The Hanjin Group said in a statement Sept. 6 that it will provide its stakes in overseas terminals, such as the one Hanjin operates in Long Beach, California, as collateral to borrow 60 billion won (\$54 million).

That still falls short of the fees that Hanjin Shipping must pay for services it needs to off-

load cargoes already on its vessels. According to local media reports, that amounts to 600 billion won (\$543 million).

It was unclear if banks or the government might provide more financing to resolve the immediate crisis.

In the meantime, South Korean regulators said they are directing Hanjin Shipping vessels to unload cargoes in a few key ports, including in Singapore and Hamburg, Germany.

With the country's largest ocean shipper idled and the

shipbuilding industry also in crisis, a government task force is directing moves to salvage the container shipping sector, which like ocean shipping worldwide has been battered by weak demand and overcapacity.

"The government is making all-out efforts to minimize damage and loss of consignors," Finance Minister Yoo Il-ho told reporters Sept. 5. "Korean government-led response teams will be formed in the selected offshore ports to swiftly receive stay orders

or guaranteed protection," Yoo said in Hangzhou, China, where he was attending a Group of 20 summit.

Officials appear set on a consolidation, without committing huge sums of taxpayer cash, of Hanjin and its smaller rival, Hyundai Merchant Marine, which already is being restructured.

Hanjin Shipping was handling nearly 8 percent of the trans-Pacific trade volume for the U.S. market, and with its container ships marooned offshore, major retailers have been scrambling to devise contingency plans to get their merchandise into stores.

The shipping company has posted net losses every year since 2011. Last week, creditors led by the Korea Development Bank rejected a plan by Hanjin Group to spend another 500 billion won (\$447.2 million) to rescue the shipping firm, way short of Hanjin Shipping's more than 6 trillion won (\$5.37 billion) in debts.

Hanjin's shares jumped 20 percent on Sept. 6 on hopes for government help for the company, after falling 13.7 percent on Sept. 5.

Illness linked to imported produce finds foothold in Texas

By DAVID WARREN
Associated Press

DALLAS — Health officials are trying to determine why there's been a dramatic increase in the number of people in Texas each year who contract a food-borne illness that's often linked to produce imported from Mexico and other warmer climates.

Although there have been outbreaks in several states in

recent years, including one in 2005 in Florida that sickened nearly 600 people, cyclosporiasis infection rates returned to normal levels after the sources were contained.

But in Texas, the number of cases shot up from 44 in 2012 to 351 in 2013 and has remained in the triple digits ever since, with 200 in 2014, more than 300 last year and more than 100 so far this year, according to the Texas

Department of State Health Services.

State and federal health officials say an increasing amount of produce that's imported from tropical and subtropical regions — where the parasite that causes the illness is endemic — is likely contributing to the recent outbreaks.

Some in the past few years were traced to tainted produce from Mexico, but offi-

cials haven't found a common source for this year's cases in Texas, said Christine Mann, a spokeswoman for the Texas department.

"It's very challenging for epidemiologists to investigate food-borne outbreaks," Mann said, explaining that investigators must consider myriad factors like the travel itinerary of people who become ill.

She said there are oth-

er circumstances that could be driving up the number of cases, such as the outbreaks raising more awareness of the disease, leading to additional testing for it and more diagnoses.

And given its long border with Mexico, Texas could be consuming more imported produce than other states, raising the risk of infection, Mann speculated.

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To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at www.capitalpress.com and click on "Submit an Event." Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301.

Saturday, Sept. 10
Practical Application of Soil Management Principles: Down and Dirty, 9 a.m.-noon SOREC Extension Building Auditorium, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Wear work clothes and bring gloves for the second session of this two-session class. Move beyond theory and learn about the Rogue Valley soils. https://secure.oregonstate.edu/osuext/register/1064

Washington State Fair, 9 a.m.-10 p.m., 110 Ninth Ave. SW, Puyallup. (253) 845-1771, www.thefair.com/

Eastern Idaho State Fair, 97 Park St., Blackfoot. 208-785-2480, https://funatthefair.com/

Sunday, Sept. 11
Oregon State Board of Agriculture meeting. Wildhorse Resort and Casino, Pendleton. www.oregon.gov/ODA/AboutUs/Pages/Board-Agriculture.aspx Washington State Fair, 9 a.m.-10 p.m., 110 Ninth Ave. SW, Puyallup. (253) 845-1771, http://www.thefair.com/

Monday, Sept. 12
Oregon State Board of Agriculture meeting. Wildhorse Resort and Casino, Pendleton. www.oregon.gov/ODA/AboutUs/Pages/Board-Agriculture.aspx Washington State Fair, 10 a.m.-9 p.m., 110 Ninth Ave. SW, Puyallup. (253) 845-1771, http://www.thefair.com/

Tuesday, Sept. 13
Oregon State Board of Agriculture meeting. Wildhorse Resort and Casino, Pendleton. www.oregon.gov/ODA/AboutUs/Pages/Board-Agriculture.aspx

Oregon Invasive Species Council 2016 Summit and Awards Luncheon 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Chemeketa Community College Eola Wine Studies Center, 215 Doaks Ferry Road NW, Salem. In addition to the strategic plan discussion the council will also celebrate champions in invasive species efforts at the awards luncheon. tinyurl.com/OISCsummit

Wednesday, Sept. 14
Washington State Fair, 10 a.m.-9 p.m., 110 Ninth Ave. SW, Puyallup. (253) 845-1771, www.thefair.com/

Thursday, Sept. 15
Small Farm School, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Clackamas Community College, Oregon City, Ore. Small Farm School

is aimed at beginning small-scale commercial farmers in the Willamette Valley. Workshop topics include goat, hazelnut, cut flower and vegetable production, on-farm veterinary care, electric fencing for pastures, new farmer business and marketing, tractor safety and operation, small engine repair, farming with native beneficial insects and pasture care. Several classes will be held at the OSU North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora. Small Farm School is a collaboration between OSU Extension, Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District and Clackamas Community College. Cost: \$75 for adults, \$50 for youths 13-18 with an adult