

# Oregon



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Members of the Agrinos board of directors cheer after snipping a ceremonial ribbon at the company's new plant in Clackamas, Ore. The company makes organic soil amendments through a fermentation process.

## Agrinos opens microbial soil input facility in Oregon

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

CLACKAMAS, Ore. — With a snip of oversized scissors, board members of Agrinos, a microbial soil amendment company with an international presence, opened a 28,000-square-foot production facility southeast of Portland.

The company makes an organic liquid soil amendment that can be used separately or added to and applied with fertilizers or other inputs. According to the company, its products increase yield and crop quality. Its products are marketed under the High Yield Technology name and include brands such as iN-vigorate, N-Gage and AM-PLUS.

The products are made using under proprietary process in which various feed-stocks are fermented in steel tanks. The Oregon facility has four 38,000-liter tanks with space to double that number. The new plant is in the shakeout phase and will begin commercial production in 2017. It is the company's second production facility; it has another in Sonora, Mexico, plus research and development facilities in Davis, Calif. In addition to the U.S., the company sells in China, India, Brazil and elsewhere.

Biologically based crop in-

puts have gained favor as synthetic products have come under increased criticism from consumer and food safety activist groups. The website Bioenterprise reported in 2014 that "Rising regulatory scrutiny of novel synthetic crop inputs, and increasing weed and pest resistance to long-standing, often over-used chemicals has resulted in soaring interest in developing biologically derived options."

The online journal Corn and Soybean Digest warned in 2012 that biological products aren't a "silver bullet" and advised producers to "watch out for unregistered microbial cocktail mixtures called growth enhancers."

Agrinos CEO D. Ry Wagner, a former University of Oregon biology professor, said the company is pleased to locate in Oregon and called the expansion a "really important event" for Agrinos as it seeks a bigger market share.

The Clackamas site appealed to the company for several reasons, said Steve Sinkula, vice president of global business development. The local water district provides clean water, important for the fermentation process, and the site, just off I-205 southeast of Portland, provides ready access to transportation networks, including the Port of Portland.

## Oregon conservation easement program seeks \$4.25M

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Oregon legislators will likely be asked for \$4.25 million next year to pay for conservation easements that would protect farmland from development.

Plans are beginning to solidify for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, which would provide grants to farmers interested in easements and succession planning, said Meta Loftsgaarden, executive director of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

OWEB, which will oversee the program, plans to hold "listening sessions" this autumn based on concepts developed by agricultural and conservation groups before drafting proposed legislation for the 2017 legislative session, she said.

"We didn't want to go out to farmers and ranchers with a blank slate. We really wanted to have something they could react to," Loftsgaarden said during the Sept. 12 Oregon Board of Agriculture meeting in Pendleton, Ore.

Conservation easements are usually sold or donated by farmers who give up their development rights in exchange for tax benefits and lower property values, reducing inheritance taxes.

They haven't been as commonly used in Oregon as in other states because of the statewide land-use planning system, but this system alone isn't enough to prevent the fragmentation of working lands, Loftsgaarden said.

The \$4.25 million wouldn't be enough for everyone who wanted to sell an easement, but it would serve as a pilot program — particularly for lands inhabited by threatened or endangered species, or that are subject to "urban growth boundary" expansion, said Doug Krahmer, a blueberry farmer who is part of a work group advising the program.



Sean Hart/EO Media Group

Roger Ediger, a rancher in Grant County, Ore., has decided to place a conservation easement on his land that will preserve its current condition in perpetuity. Oregon legislators will likely be asked for \$4.25 million next year to help pay for conservation easements.

The easements will have a conservation component and could be used to provide properties with regulatory protections, offering an additional incentive for farmers, Loftsgaarden said.

Currently, a similar approach is used for forestlands where owners want to grow trees older than 30 years but are afraid of creating habitat for the northern spotted owl, hindering future timber harvest, she said.

"They want bigger trees, we want bigger trees, so what we needed to provide was that protection," Loftsgaarden said, noting that forestland owners submit management plans to the Oregon Board of Forestry and receive regulatory assurances from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

OWEB currently funds conservation easements, but these are focused on preserv-

ing native fish habitat and water quality, without emphasizing agriculture, she said.

For that reason, landowners in Oregon have had trouble getting matching state funds needed to obtain federal money available for buying conservation easements, Loftsgaarden said.

"We weren't hitting for the same target," she said.

OWEB is funded with lottery dollars especially slated for wildlife and water quality, but the agency may seek money from the general fund or from lottery-backed bonds that don't have the same restrictions, Loftsgaarden said.

The fund would also be able to accept donations from organizations and individuals, said Krahmer.

Grant requests would be ranked based on the duration of the proposed easement — perpetual agreements will

score higher than those which end after a certain number of years — as well as the management plan and the threat of development to the property, said Loftsgaarden.

The program would be overseen by a commission consisting of representatives from the agricultural industry, the conservation community, tribes and land use experts, with OWEB providing staff support, she said.

Agricultural groups have asked why the program wouldn't be overseen by the Oregon Department of Agriculture while conservationists prefer the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Loftsgaarden said.

However, OWEB is already focused on grants and has representatives from both agricultural and conservation groups, she said. "OWEB sits sort of in the middle."

## Livingston, Frketich will be honored at Oregon Aglink's annual dinner and auction

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

Eastern Oregon cattle rancher Sharon Livingston and Willamette Valley farmer-blogger Brenda Frketich will be honored at this year's annual Denim & Diamonds dinner and auction.

Livingston, whose family farming and ranching roots stretch back 100 years in Grant County, was selected 2016 Agriculturalist of the Year. She's a member of the Oregon Board of Agriculture, which advises the state ag department, and a past president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. She's been active with the Oregon Beef Council as well, and in addi-

tion to ranching spent 10 years teaching school and coaching volleyball in Ontario, Ore. She and her husband, Fred, and their three children, started operating their own ranch in 1966.

Livingston is known for her plain-spoken advocacy on behalf of Oregon's farmers and ranchers, most of whom she counts as true conservationists. She's told an interviewer, "I have timber, I have water, I have grass, I have wildlife, and I am very proud of what I have, because we have always worked to make it sustainable."

Frketich was selected for the 2016 Ag Connection of the Year award. She comes at the urban-rural divide from a digital perspective, using her blog,

Nuttygrass.com, to explain farming practices and give city residents a taste of farm life. Frketich earned a business degree from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, but returned home to Kirsch Family Farms in St. Paul to intern with her father, Paul Kirsch. She's since advanced to manager and owner, and grows grass seed, hazelnuts and other crops with her husband and two sons.

She's among a cadre of young farmers who frequently testify on ag issues at the Oregon Legislature, and in 2014 was chosen one of America's Best Young Farmers and Ranchers by John Deere and DTN/The Progressive Farmer.

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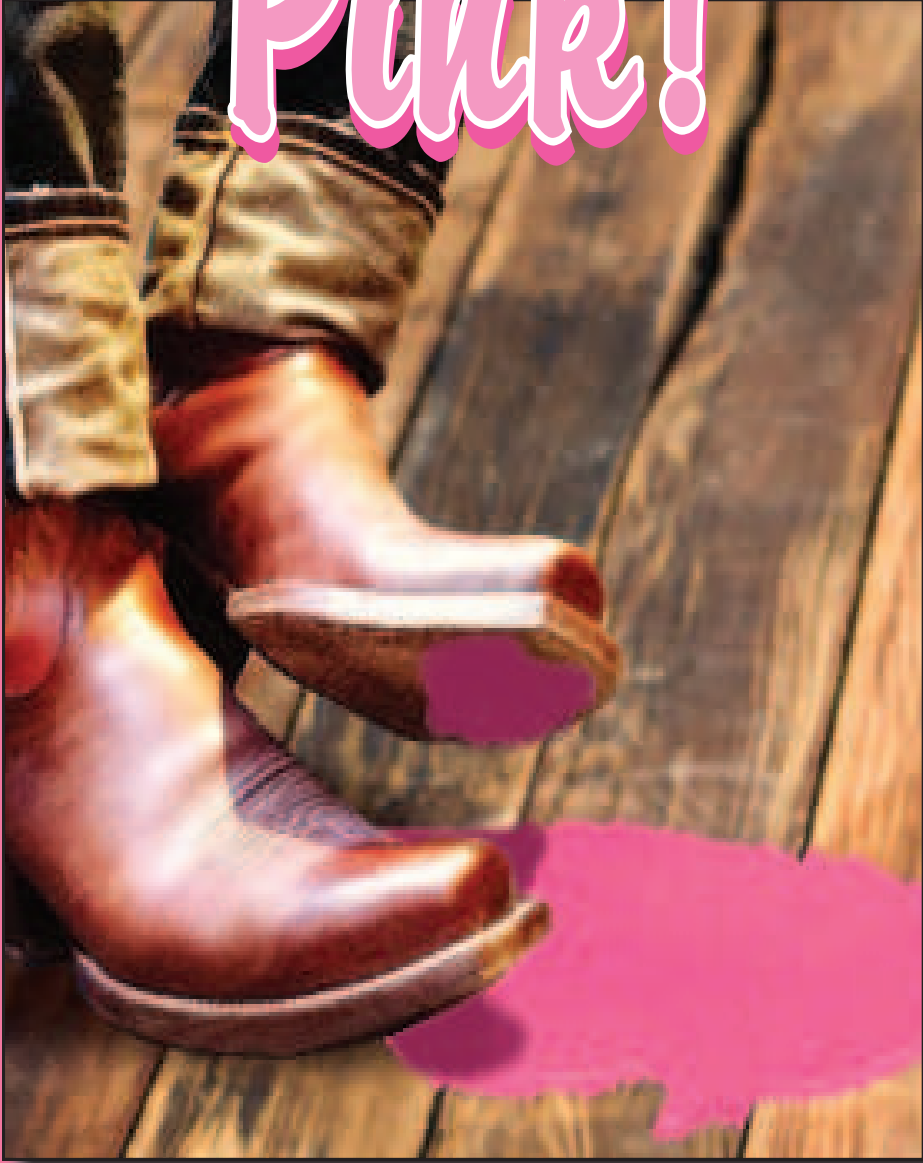
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