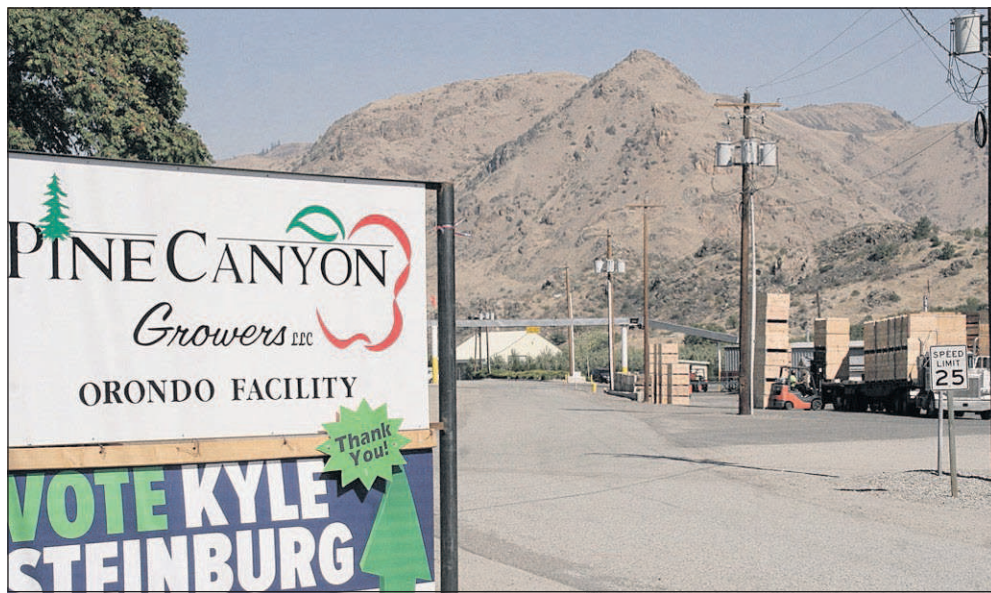


Washington



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

A group of growers has purchased the former Chelan Fruit Cooperative packing plant in Orondo, Wash., and formed Pine Canyon Growers LLC.

Group of growers starts new fruit company

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ORONDO, Wash. — A new tree fruit packing company is operating in the small town of Orondo, 18 miles north of Wenatchee.

The move apparently defies the industry trend of larger companies squeezing out smaller ones.

Pine Canyon Growers LLC was registered with the state on June 1. It bought 15 acres and the former Chelan Fruit Cooperative packing plant in Orondo June 24 for \$2.27 million, according to Douglas County assessor records.

Andy Feil, co-owner of the new business, said he and his partners did not want to be interviewed. Other co-owners are: Ryan Vickery, a fieldman for Northern Fruit Co.; Starla Graham; Stephen Skylstad, all of East Wenatchee; and Josh Lawrence of Royal City.

Chelan Fruit bought the plant from Orondo Fruit Co. in 2012 when Orondo Fruit went out of business. Orondo Fruit was owned by the Griggs family for three generations.

Marcus Griggs, former owner, said Feil and some of his partners have or-



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Bins belonging to the new grower-owned Pine Canyon Growers LLC are stacked at the former Chelan Fruit Cooperative packing plant in Orondo, Wash.

chards and are packing their fruit at the plant. A spouse of one the partners apparently is a buyer for a California produce company, he said.

Chelan Fruit outgrew the Orondo plant for use in its organic program, said Reggie Collins, Chelan Fruit general manager.

Prior to selling the plant, Chelan Fruit co-packed with Feil and his partners under the name Western Traders, Collins said. Orondo area growers who began taking their fruit to Chelan Fruit in

2012 still are doing so, he said. At that time, he said about 80 percent of seven dozen growers joined Chelan Fruit when Orondo Fruit dissolved.

Griggs said he still owns the rights to Orondo Ruby, a cherry variety, and sells it through Chelan Fresh Marketing.

Orondo Fruit packed about 1 million boxes of apples and 60,000 to 70,000 boxes of cherries annually. The only other fruit company in the Orondo area is Auvil Fruit Co.

After a good 2016, sweet onion farmers set for 2017

Walla Walla yields were average to above-average

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Yields for Walla Walla sweet onions were average to above-average this past season, officials say.

Average yield is 650 50-pound units per acre.

"If anything, they're up," said Kathy Fry-Trommald, executive director of the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee in Walla Walla, Wash.

Farmers recently finished seeding next year's crop, said Michael J. Locati, farmer and president of the marketing committee.

Walla Walla sweets are specialty onions protected by a federal marketing order that designates a specific growing area.

Harvest ended in mid-August.

Cool weather in June presented some disease problems, but made for a pleasant harvest, Locati said.

"It wasn't 110 degrees for 10 days like last year," he said.

Growers dealt with downy mildew, which hadn't been seen for three decades, according to some old-timers, Locati said.

"With an open winter and a cool, wet spring, it presented kind of different challenges than we've had in the past," he said. "Most people got through it and, I think, were satisfied with how things turned out."

Labor is also a big need. "Everything is hand-harvested," Locati said.

Acres held steady at roughly 500 acres.



Courtesy of Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee

Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee executive director Kathy Fry-Trommald, bottom right, poses with her aunt, uncle and husband during the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Festival in June 2016 in Walla Walla, Wash. Onion farmers are reporting average to above-average yields for the 2016 season, but cooler weather led to dealing with downy mildew for the first time in decades.

About 20 farmers raise Walla Walla sweet onions, and 10 handlers sell the onions, Fry-Trommald said.

"The sales and the acreage go hand-in-hand," Fry-Trommald said. "If you just plant a thousand acres with the hope of selling it, you might be really disappointed. These guys try to have their sales figured out a year ahead, so they know how much to plant and not have too much."

The market is full of sweet onion options, she added, but those alternatives are high in pyruvic acid, which make onions pungent, and "are not juicy and sweet like a Walla Walla."

Demand for Walla Wallas

remains high, she said.

"I think the Walla Walla sweet fan club is as big as ever," she said.

Fry-Trommald will begin receiving seasonal reports from farmers in mid-October for their fall planting and spring estimates to determine an assessment for next year's budget.

Locati expects the same acreage next year.

"I think we've kind of found that medium," he said.

Anything he's hoping for in 2017?

"High price and good yield," he said with a laugh. "And then someone to cut it."

Wash. FFA Foundation hires full-time director

Organization emphasizes member opportunities

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Marissa Dunn is the new Washington State FFA Foundation executive director, a position that has been expanded to become full-time.

"FFA makes such a positive difference in the lives of its members regarding their personal leadership development and their future career success," said Dunn. "One of our main objectives is to connect agriculture businesses and organizations with individuals in Washington FFA to create great opportunities."

The foundation also places a priority on supporting agricultural teachers, Dunn said.

Dunn lives on a farm in Central Washington with her husband and daughter, raising apples, pears, hay and cattle. She grew up in Spokane County, showing sheep and competing at the state convention during all four years of high school.

She was a state FFA officer and a national officer candidate. After high school, she worked a legislative session in Olympia for the Washington State Grange.

"The FFA is the organization that personally gave me such remarkable opportunities to learn, travel and develop leadership skills," she said. "I want this organization to be very successful, and I want FFA to continue to make a difference in the lives of students across the state — just like it did for me."

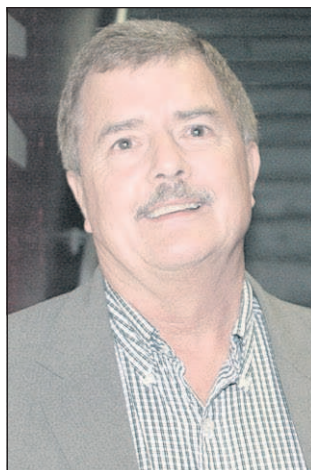


Courtesy of Marissa Dunn

Marissa Dunn is the new full-time executive director of the Washington State FFA Foundation.

Online

<http://waffafoundation.org/>
Contact Dunn at marissa@washingtonffa.org



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Stewart Padelford, the retired executive director of the Washington State FFA foundation.

and the industry and developing a three-day program in the summer that gives students the opportunity to meet with statewide agriculture industry leaders.

Dunn said financial support and volunteers are the foundation's biggest needs for the future. Corporate and individual investments help continue leadership programs, state career development events and to support members and state officers travel to various events, including nationals, and purchase FFA jackets for members who can't afford them.

"If anyone has the time and passion to help his or her local chapter, it makes a tremendous difference," she said. "Anyone who can be available to help with career development events, fairs, scholarship applications, the state convention, leadership trainings, travel and/or additional resources, we'd certainly love to connect with them."

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