

Oregon



Katy Nesbitt/For the Capital Press
Mary Hawkins raises Cornish cross chickens on her family's farm in Wallowa County, Ore. This month she opened a state-licensed processing facility.

Small-scale grower opens chicken processing facility

By KATY NESBITT
For the Capital Press

WALLOWA, Ore. — Following a growing national trend, state licensing is making it easier for small farms to bring locally raised chickens to market.

As of Sept. 1, Hawkins Sisters Ranch in Wallowa is the only Oregon Department of Agriculture-licensed facility in Eastern Oregon.

ODA-licensed facilities are exempt from U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulations and can process up to 20,000 chickens a year.

Mary Hawkins raises chickens on her family's farm in Wallowa. Hawkins said she and her sisters moved with their mother to Portland when they were in elementary school and spent summers on the farm. She started raising chickens on her own not long after she graduated from Smith College.

"I came straight home after college, had various jobs and raised and sold chickens," Hawkins said.

After a few years she said she took what she called a "walkabout;" she left Eastern Oregon and worked on farms in New York. While raising and preserving food was still the norm back home, it was becoming a movement across the country in the late 2000s.

"My time in New York pushed me into the idea that sustainable, local food is a growing national concern," Hawkins said.

While on the East Coast, she worked in a chicken slaughterhouse. While Wallowa County is known for its beef, Hawkins decided to continue raising chickens when she returned to Oregon.

"I thought meat processing

was something practical that could work here," Hawkins said.

With microloans from the USDA Hawkins bought chicks, feed, coops, feeders, water troughs and wire cages. She raised around 800 chickens a year, processing them at an ODA facility in Cove, an hour's drive away. But last fall the family who ran the processing plant moved to South Dakota.

She said she purchased their scalding, plucker and vacuum sealer, took out a home equity loan and combined with her savings she bought a pre-fab, 14x40 shell made outside Baker City.

Once delivered she and her partner, Mark Kristiansen, followed the ODA specifications to install washable walls, hand and commercial sinks, proper lighting and ventilation, and insect- and rodent-proofing.

"I can't believe how supportive ODA has been throughout," Hawkins said. "If I had a question about what paint to use I could email them and get a quick reply."

On Sept. 1, with license in hand and two helpers, Hawkins butchered and packaged chickens in her new facility. She said she expects to process about 150 a day two times a week through Thanksgiving and will start getting chicks again in May.

Hawkins said she sells her own chicken directly from the farm and at a local farmers' market and processes birds for other farmers as well. She said her goal is to process 2,000 of her own and 4,000 to 6,000 a year for customers.

For Hawkins, raising her chickens holistically is as important as creating a viable business and part-time employment in a rural county.

IR-4 Project leader ready to retire

Researcher obtains clearance for protection products on specialty crops

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

As the state liaison to the IR-4 Project for the past 10 years and as a researcher for the project for more than 20 years, Joe DeFrancesco has helped thousands of minor crop producers in Oregon gain access to crop protection products.

Those days are coming to an end, however. DeFrancesco, an assistant horticulture professor at Oregon State University, is retiring Oct. 1 after 30 years on the job.

To calculate the value of DeFrancesco's work to Oregon agriculture, one has to understand that most of the state's agriculture involves specialty crop production. And many of the pesticides cleared for use on specialty crops obtain their registrations through the Rutgers University-based IR-4 Project.

"Joe has been very central to getting all of these specialty crop products through the IR-4 process, both here in Oregon and in the IR-4 system itself," said Bryan Ostlund, administrator of six Oregon commodity commissions.



Mitch Lies/For the Capital Press
Joe DeFrancesco speaks to participants at the Oregon State University Blueberry Field Day last July 6 at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, Ore. DeFrancesco is retiring Oct. 1.

"I've been to some of the IR-4 meetings and seen how well-respected he is," Ostlund said. "When Joe speaks, oftentimes what he represents gets priority."

The project determines which pesticides to research in a Priority Setting Workshop, held annually in September.

DeFrancesco's history with the IR-4 Project dates back to the early 1990s when he and Bob McReynolds, a former OSU vegetable crops extension agent, saw a need for registering chemicals for minor crop uses and started working with the national project.

"Bob and I did a couple of (field) trials," DeFrancesco said. "Then they proposed we do more."

In the late 1990s, the North Willamette Research and Extension Center became an official IR-4 Field Research Center, guaranteeing the center a certain amount of trials per year and a certain amount

of funding for the trial work. DeFrancesco's program also obtains funds through research grants from the Oregon Department of Agriculture and state commodity commissions.

The IR-4 Project is funded through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

In 2006, DeFrancesco became the Oregon liaison to the project, and, when McReynolds retired in 2010, DeFrancesco became director of the North Willamette IR-4 Field Research Center. The center today has two full-time researchers on staff who conduct trials under DeFrancesco's management on crop

chemical efficacy, crop-safety and crop chemical residue levels.

Nationally, IR-4 data supplied 1,175 chemical clearances, or registrations, on food crops in 2015, the highest number of annual clearances in the organization's 53-year history.

In retirement, DeFrancesco said he plans to continue participating in a project he started working with two years ago in his off-time, the USDA's Global Capacity Development Residue Data Generation Project in Africa. Also, for at least one year, DeFrancesco will work part-time at OSU with the intent of training his replacement.

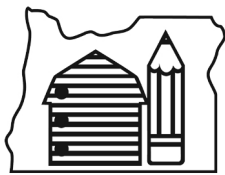
"Fortunately, we have seen some real leadership at OSU who are keeping this position a priority," Ostlund said. "And it certainly should be. It warrants that."

Work to fill the position today is in the interview stage, DeFrancesco said, with four finalists still in the running.

"Joe will be missed," said Mike Bondi, director of the North Willamette Valley Experiment Station. "Joe is very good at his job, and he is highly respected nationally, as well as locally. Finding the next person who will walk in his shoes is a little bit of a daunting task."

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File Photo
An Oregon gray wolf.

Conservation groups sue over Oregon's wolf delisting

BEND, Ore. (AP) — Conservation groups argue in a new lawsuit that Oregon violated its own Endangered Species Act by removing the endangered status of gray wolves.

The Bulletin reports that the lawsuit was filed Sept. 20, coinciding with preparations to update the state's wolf management plan. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission removed the wolf from the endangered species list last year, saying the species had rebounded within significant portions of its range.

But the Center for Biological Diversity's West Coast wolf organizer Amaroq Weiss says wolves are still in danger of extinction in Oregon and should not have been delisted. The group argues in its brief that wolves occupy only 8 percent of their natural range in Oregon.

Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Michelle Dennehy had no comment on the conservation groups' filing.

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