

People & Places

Seeking a better Christmas tree

Gary Chastagner wants to take needles out of holiday season

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

PUYALLUP, Wash. — As befits a scientist who studies Christmas trees, Gary Chastagner discusses his research with good cheer. Not that the job is a holiday. The Washington State University plant pathologist tackles problems that would make a pre-reformed Grinch smile. Slugs and yellowjackets lurk in firs, and no one wants that under the tree.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State University plant pathologist Gary Chastagner researches Christmas trees at the school's research center in Puyallup.

The American Phytopathological Society awarded him the Excellence in Extension Award in 2011 for his research. A university profile called him "Mr. Christmas Tree."

"Boy, as an industry, did we get lucky when he decided to do research in our industry," said Philomath, Ore., Christmas tree grower Betty Malone, chairwoman of the national Christmas Tree Promotion Board.

"You can trust what he says because he is so precise about his research," she said. Chastagner said he's not sure when he will retire. But until he does, he will continue working on a career-long project: Keeping Christmas trees from making a mess.

"If we can eliminate needle shedding, that would be a major improvement in the overall quality of trees," Chastagner said. It was needles that got Chastagner into Christmas tree research. Chastagner was hired in

1978 by WSU to research ornamental bulbs and turf grass. At the time, however, the plant disease Swiss needle cast was rampant among Douglas firs in the Pacific Northwest. Needles turned yellow and fell off. Some 84 percent of the Douglas firs on Christmas trees in Oregon and Washington Christmas tree plantations were infected in 1981, according to a USDA publication. The Legislature gave WSU money to study the problem, but the school needed a researcher.

"I was the new kid on the block. The dean came into my office — it's probably the only time the dean has been in my office — and wanted to know if I would be willing to work on Christmas trees," Chastagner said. Research and solutions followed, namely the application of an inexpensive fungicide. Only 13 percent of thousands of trees surveyed between 1987 and 2007 had the disease, according to the same USDA

publication. "We got a clear path to solving the problem, thanks to Gary," Malone said.

The success kept the Northwest Christmas industry from losing millions of dollars. Oregon leads the country in Christmas tree production. Washington ranks fifth. Some 92 percent of the trees are sent to other states or countries, according to the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association.

California is the No. 1 market, but trees also travel as far away as China, Japan and the Philippines. Some people like to have their trees up for weeks, testing the limits of even well-watered firs to keep their needles. Industry surveys indicate that consumers cite needle loss as a top reason for being dissatisfied with a real tree.

"It's absolutely primary," Malone said. Chastagner and colleagues at several other U.S. universities and in Denmark are collaborating on a multi-year re-



Western Innovator

Gary Chastagner
Age: 68

Position: Washington State University professor of plant pathology at Puyallup research center

Education: Bachelor's degree, 1971 California State University, Fresno; master's degree 1973 and Ph.D. 1976 University of California-Davis.

Favorite Christmas tree: Noble fir

search project to identify trees with superior needle-retention genetics.

Christmas trees of various types are being grown in different conditions. Branches will be sent to Chastagner to test needle retention.

"We are trying to identify genes that are associated with good needle retention and genes that are associated with resistance to Phytophthora root rot," he said in an email following up an interview.

"There has been some discussion about genetically modified trees, but our understanding of the genes that control desirable Christmas tree traits is very limited at this time," he said. "A few years ago there were a number of stories in the media about using a gene from jellyfish to make trees that glowed in the dark. These tend to get a lot of press, but the reality is that genetically modify Christmas trees is not something that is likely in the foreseeable future."

Boer goats spotlighted at Oregon show

By BRENNA WIEGAND
For the Capital Press

McMINNVILLE, Ore. — The fact that many were expecting twins didn't keep nearly 100 top meat goats from congregating at the American Boer Goat Association's Fall Show and Sale Oct. 1-2 at the Yamhill County Fairgrounds.

South African Boer goats, with their white bodies and red heads, are docile, fertile animals with rapid growth and density of frame.

"About 60 to 70 percent of the world eats goat meat," Ruth Kilgore, president of the Oregon Meat Goat Producers, said. "With our growing ethnic population, the demand for goat meat in the U.S. exceeds our ability to keep up."

In 2014 the U.S. imported more than 43 million pounds of goat meat, primarily from Australia, for a total value of \$94.7 million, according to North Carolina State University.

Before the Boers arrived in the U.S. in 1993 people ate



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press

Dana Childers of Medford, Ore., and 2-year-old "Made You Look" prepare to enter the ring at the American Boer Goat Association show Oct. 1. Childers says the demand for goat meat in the U.S. is skyrocketing because of the country's growing ethnic population.

in five months can provide a 100-pound goat that's ready to butcher," Dana Childers of Medford, Ore., said. Her 2-year-old doe, 'Made you Look,' weighs 225 pounds;

her males reach about 300 pounds.

With a 4-H beginning, 15-year-old Megan Walton and her older sister Riley started Little Star Farm at their home in Aurora, Ore.

"Goats are popular around the world because they can go in groups; they're easy to eat because the bone-to-meat ratio is better than cows and they're easier to keep cool in the heat because of their ears," Megan Walton said. The care they put into their animals can yield healthy returns, to which Childers can attest.

"The more that you show and the more that you promote your herd, the more money there is," said Childers who, with husband Bruce, owns Childers Show Goats. "Artificial insemination can be pretty expensive; you're looking at about \$100 for a single straw, but with the right buck the babies will sell like mad."

Bruce Childers would like to see goat meat take its rightful place in American refrigerators.

"I think if people tried it and it was prepared properly, it would become a highly consumed meat," he said. "Goat meat is so much better for you than other red meats and really tastes good if prepared properly. Goat meat would really appeal to people who are health conscious and want meat, if they really knew what it was."

The word's getting out, thanks to word-of-mouth Facebook-style.

"Facebook is amazing," Dana Childers said. "I've put goats on there and had them sell within 10 minutes. Websites are great, but the volume of people you can reach in a minute on Facebook is amazing."

The family goat may also be coming back into vogue.

"A lot of people are getting 5-acre plots now and goats could work very well there because you put five goats where you can put one cow," Kilgore said. "A family can handle them easily and still have other jobs."

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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.

Friday, Oct. 7
Perrydale Corn Feed, 4:30-8 p.m. Perrydale High School, 7445 Perrydale Road, Amity, Ore. The Perrydale FFA corn feed is a fun family community event, a good meal and a football game. Cost: \$25 for a family, \$12 couple, \$7.50 individual.

Friday-Sunday Oct. 7-9
Schafer Meadows Fiber Arts Festival, noon-5 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Grays Harbor County Fairgrounds Rabbit and Poultry Barn, Elma, Wash. The Alpaca

Ranchers of the Northwest will take part.

Saturday, Oct. 8
Northwest Farmers Union Annual Convention and Meeting. Walla Walla Community College, Walla Walla, Wash. www.nwfu.org

Oregon's Bounty: A Celebration of the Harvest. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Oregon State Capitol, 900 Court St. NE, Salem. Attractions ranging from a giant chinook salmon to a free pumpkin patch and an old-time tractor display are planned. www.oregoncapitol.com

Monday, Oct. 10
Why Save Farmland Discussion. 6 p.m. Boise State University Jordan Ballroom, 1700 University Drive, Boise. The Treasure Valley Food Coalition is launching this initiative with a series of questions: Why is the time right for preserving farmland in the Treasure Valley? What is the value of farmland

preservation in the Treasure Valley (economic, cultural, environmental)? Who is already working on farmland preservation in the TV? How can we work together moving forward? www.treasurevalleyfoodcoalition.org

Tuesday, Oct. 11
Why Save Farmland Discussion continues at 6 p.m. at the College of Idaho's Langroise Auditorium, 2112 Cleveland Blvd., Caldwell, Idaho. www.treasurevalleyfoodcoalition.org

Saturday-Sunday Oct. 15-16
All About Fruit Show, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Clackamas County Fairplex, Canby, Ore. This is an opportunity to taste hundreds of pears, apples, kiwis and grapes and order a custom-grafted tree. Speakers will answer questions and an ID Team will identify "mystery" apples. www.homeorchardsociety.org/events/2016-fruit-show/

Gorge Fruit and Craft Fair. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Hood River County Fairgrounds, 3020 Wy'east Road, Odell, Ore. www.hoodriverfair.org

Wednesday-Saturday Oct. 19-22
2016 National FFA Convention and Expo. Bankers Life Field House and Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, Indiana. www.ffa.org

Friday-Saturday Oct. 21-22
Montana Farmers Union Convention, Best Western Heritage Inn, Great Falls, Montana. montana-farmersunion.com

Saturday, Oct. 22
Oregon Agriculture in the Classroom 16th Annual Fall Harvest Dinner and Fundraiser, 5 p.m. CH2M Hill Alumni Center, Oregon State University, 725 SW 26th St., Corvallis. The social hour and silent auction start at 5

p.m., followed by dinner at 6:30 and the oral auction at 7:45. oregonaitc.org/

Tuesday-Wednesday Oct. 25-26
Oregon Society of Weed Science Annual Meeting, 8 a.m. Best Western Hood River Inn, 1108 E. Marina Way, Hood River, Ore.

Wednesday-Friday Oct. 26-28
FSPCA Preventive Controls for Animal Food Course, 8 a.m. Springhill Suites by Marriott, 424 E. Park Center Blvd., Boise, Idaho. The course will cover an overview of the FSMA requirements for animal food, current good manufacturing practice requirements, animal food safety hazards, an overview of the food safety plan and other related issues. Cost: \$650/person for 2 or more people from the same company registering at the same time or \$720 per individual.

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To Reach Us

Toll free 800-882-6789
Main line 503-364-4431
Fax 503-370-4383
Advertising Fax 503-364-2692

News Staff

N. California
Tim Hearnden 530-605-3072

E Idaho
John O'Connell 208-421-4347

Idaho
Carol Ryan Dumas 208-860-3898

Boise
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Central Washington
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