

People & Places

College farm helps pay its way

B.J. Macfarlane runs operation to make money to fund its annual budget

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

REDDING, Calif. — A cattle producer all his life, B.J. Macfarlane discovered a knack for training young farmhands.

He was working as a research assistant at Michigan State University in the early 2000s, focusing on reproduction in dairy cattle.

“With my time at Michigan State, I worked with lots of undergrads on projects,” said Macfarlane, 39, who earned an animal science degree at California State University-Chico in 2001.

“I really liked helping students and working with students,” he said. “The best part of my job is interacting with students and giving them contacts in the industry.”

A former beef herdsman at Chico State, Macfarlane brought his gift for mentoring youngsters to Shasta College in Redding in 2010.

He was hired to take over as farm manager for the college’s agriculture program, which was nearly shut down a year earlier because of a budget crisis.

Macfarlane has played a key role in putting the 90-acre farm in the black, producing show-quality goats, pigs and cattle and selling them at a premium, said Trena Kimler-Richards, an instructor and program coordinator who rallied community support during the budget crisis.

Industry perspective

Macfarlane brings an industry perspective to his teaching, said Kimler-Richards, who had him as a student at Chico State.

“His industry experience makes him invaluable to this program,” she said. “He just brings so much. He works really well with the students and is really an asset. He’s still in the industry, so he’s current.”

He still works with his father raising 75 head of mostly Hereford cattle on leased land near Hat Creek, Calif.

Having grown up on a ranch his father managed near Hat Creek, about 70 miles east of Redding, Macfarlane



Photos by Tim Hearden/Capital Press

B.J. Macfarlane, manager of the Shasta College farm in Redding, Calif. A cattle producer and ranch manager, he was hired in 2010 to run the farm.



Farm manager B.J. Macfarlane, left, discusses hogs with agriculture students at Shasta College.

always thought that “sitting behind a desk wasn’t my cup of tea,” he said.

After returning to California from Michigan in 2004, he worked on several purebred ranches while partnering with his dad on their cattle business, which raises mainly embryo-transfer calves and places a heavy emphasis on artificial insemination.

Macfarlane’s wife, Melissa, is a nursery supervisor at the Driscoll Strawberry Associates Inc. plant in Red Bluff, Calif.

At Shasta College, Macfarlane manages the farm as a working business. Its dormitory program immerses students in the operation, which

has about eight students who act as employees.

The farm grows winter wheat and alfalfa and has irrigated pasture for its livestock, which includes cattle, goats, pigs and chickens.

No fallow ground

Macfarlane makes a point not to leave any ground fallow, he said.

“To me, like any small farm, it’s got to make money,” he said. “So to have a piece of ground that’s fallow isn’t a favorable thing.”

Students who enroll in the program expect to get their hands dirty, and they develop contacts for work opportunities or at four-year universi-

ties when they leave, he said.

“Both Trena and I have been around the state our whole lives, so we’ve got connections in lots of different industries,” Macfarlane said.

FFA project animals

One of the college’s specialties is to raise goats and cattle that are sold for 4-H and FFA projects. The animals go on to win awards and contests; a steer from the college was recently the Reserve Supreme Champion at the Shasta District Fair, Macfarlane said.

“It’s a tried-and-true recruitment tool,” he said, noting that many youngsters that purchase livestock from the farm wind up enrolling as college students.

Another point is that as a working farm, Shasta College has relationships with — and is supported by — numerous area agribusinesses.

The college gets help with genetics from Ottenwalter Showpigs in Colusa, Calif., and several area ranchers lend their bulls to breed the cows that don’t take to artificial insemination.

“Our community backs us 100 percent,” said Macfarlane, noting that he was aware of the petition drive to save the farm before he arrived.

The program was on the chopping block in 2009, when the board was looking for places to cut and ag classes were only drawing about 15 students per class.



Western Innovator

B.J. Macfarlane

Occupation: Manager, Shasta College farm

Age: 39

Residence: Cottonwood, Calif.

Family: Wife, Melissa; daughters, Addison, 11, Ellis, 9, and Maddox, 4

Local growers, county Farm Bureaus and alumni brought overflow crowds to board meetings and persuaded trustees to keep the 60-year-old program open.

Annual fundraisers

While the administration allowed the college’s ag instruction to continue, the program was tasked with raising some of its own funds. It hosts an annual fall harvest festival with farm tours, locally produced food and beverages, and entertainment, and produces a Country Christmas Fair to raise funds for the student leadership team.

The fair, which includes Christmas tree sales as well as craft booths and kids’ attractions, gives the students marketing, customer service and event-planning skills and teaches them how to work as a team, Kimler-Richards has said.

He said he likes the fact that the program “doesn’t just get farm kids,” but also students from urban or other backgrounds that are eager to work in agriculture.

The farm is in the midst of an effort to improve its infrastructure, which is old.

Instructors and students recently used donated concrete to retrofit the pig barn, and Macfarlane wants to upgrade the corrals next, he said.

“I want to make things up-to-date and current with common practices in the industries,” he said, “and to continue to put out sought-after students who are either going to work or to universities, and to continue to raise good livestock.”

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Friday, Nov. 18
Denim and Diamonds Dinner and Auction, 5-10 p.m. Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland. Oregon AgLink presents its annual celebration of agriculture. www.aglink.org

Wolves, Livestock and People meeting, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Serpilio Hall, Plumas-Sierra County Fair, 204 Fairground Road, Quincy, Calif. Sponsored by the California Wolf Center.

Through Saturday Nov. 19
West Central States Wool Growers Convention. Sun Valley Lodge, Sun Valley, Idaho. The annual Wool Growers convention for Idaho, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming.

Saturday, Nov. 19
Oregon Hay King Contest, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Ag West Supply, 36 NW “A” St., Madras, Ore. The hay judging event is sponsored by the Oregon Hay and Forage Association and hosted by Central Oregon Hay Growers’ Association in cooperation with OSU Extension and Ag Experiment Station. Free, including lunch.

Forest Insect and Disease Field Day, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. North Idaho College Parking Lot “A” near Hubbard Street, Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Participants will get firsthand exposure to a wide range of organisms that impair the growth

of trees and forests in North Idaho. Those wishing to participate should pre-register at the University of Idaho Extension Office in Kootenai County by Friday, Nov. 11. Cost: \$15. http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry

Friday-Saturday Nov. 25-26
Open Alpaca Barn, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, 21345 SW Aebischer Road, Sherwood. In Washington County’s wine country, just off Highway 99. Meet the summer’s alpaca babies and their mothers. www.easygofarm.net/AOThanksgiving

Monday-Thursday Nov. 28-Dec. 1
Oregon Water Resources Congress Annual Conference. Best Western Hood River Inn, 1108 E Marina Drive, Hood River, Ore. owrc.org/calendar

Tuesday, Nov. 29
Gaining Access to Farmland Workshop, 5:30-8:30 p.m. WSU Snohomish County Extension’s Cougar Auditorium, 600 128th St. SE, Everett, Wash. Sponsored by Keller Williams Realty, American Farmland Trust and Snohomish Conservation District. Topics include lease agreements, succession planning, land trusts and unique farm shares along with tips and lessons learned when buying, selling or leasing land. Cost: \$15 per person, \$25 per family up to three. AccessFarmland.eventbrite.com

Hearing on proposed changes to agricultural worker protection standards, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Pine Grove Grange, 2900 Van Dom Drive, Hood River, Ore. www.oroasha.org

Tuesday-Thursday Nov. 29-Dec. 1
California Alfalfa and Forage Symposium, 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Peppermill Hotel, Reno, Nev. The symposium is organized by the University of California Cooperative Extension Alfalfa Workgroup, extension scientists serving the agricultural community and sponsored by the California Alfalfa & Forage Association. http://calhay.org/symposium/Tuesday-Thursday

Wednesday-Friday Nov. 30-Dec. 2
National Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference. Doubletree by Hilton, 1000 NE Multnomah St., Portland, Ore. The 5th National Conference for Women in Sustainable Agriculture will bring together farmers, educators, technical assistance providers and activists engaged in healthy food and farming to share educational and organizational strategies, build technical and business skills, and address policy issues aimed at expanding the success of women farmers and ranchers. http://2016wisa.org

Thursday, Dec. 1
Hearing on proposed changes to agricultural worker protection standards, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Woodburn Grange, 908 N. Settlemier Ave., Woodburn, Ore. www.oroasha.org

Saturday, Dec. 3
How to Do Farm Taxes Workshop, 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. WSU Snohomish County Extension’s Cougar Auditorium, 600 128th St. SE, Everett, Wash. Sponsored by Moss Adams LLP and Snohomish Conservation District. What to do throughout the year in order to have the data needed when tax time rolls

around. Step-by-step instructions for completing forms as well as one-on-one coaching sessions. Cost: \$15 per person, \$25 per family up to three. FarmTaxes.eventbrite.com

Sunday-Wednesday Dec. 4-7
California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting. Hyatt Regency Hotel, Monterey, Calif. http://cfbf.com

Tuesday, Dec. 6
The Nuts and Bolts of Ag Management. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. What you didn’t learn growing up on the farm, an Oregon Farm Bureau Leadership Conference presented by the Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee. oregonfb.org

Tuesday-Thursday Dec. 6-8
84th Oregon Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, Salem Convention Center. Open to voting and supporting Farm Bureau members. oregonfb.org

Oregon Interagency Noxious Weed Symposium, Oregon State University, LaSells Stewart Center, 875 SW 26th St., Corvallis, Ore. http://bit.ly/2dQBqOp

Wednesday, Dec. 7
Oregon Clover Commission meeting, 6-8 p.m. Golden Valley Brewery, 980 NE Fourth St., McMinnville, Ore.

Hearing on proposed changes to agricultural worker protection standards, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Medford City Hall, Suite 340, 411 W. Eighth St., Medford, Ore. www.oroasha.org

Monday, Dec. 12
Internal Auditor Workshop, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Idaho Water Center, 322 E. Front St., Boise. We will teach you how to conduct internal

audits in your facility against one of the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) Audit Schemes, which are becoming a standard for the food industry as a tool for assuring food safety and regulatory compliance and has become a customer requirement for many processors. http://bit.ly/2etdxP6

Oregon Fine Fescue Commission meeting, 7-9 a.m. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. www.oregonfinefescue.org

Monday-Tuesday Dec. 12-13
Oregon Seed Growers League Annual Convention. Salem Conference Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. The agenda includes industry speakers, educational sessions, displays, trade show and an industry reception. seedleague.org

Monday-Wednesday Dec. 12-14
Far West Agribusiness Association 57th Annual meeting. Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 Grand Ridge Blvd., Kennewick, Wash. Featured speakers are Chuck Conner, president and CEO of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives and Chris Jahn, president of The Fertilizer Institute. www.fvaa.org

Wednesday-Friday Jan. 4-6
Potato Expo 2017. Moscone Center West, 800 Howard St. San Francisco, Calif. potato-expo.com

Friday-Wednesday Jan. 6-11
2017 AFBF Annual Convention & IDEAg Trade Show. Phoenix Convention Center, 100 N Third St., Phoenix, Ariz. http://annualconvention.fb.org