

People & Places

No California sun for this crop

John Ashbaugh grows mushroom farm by using renewable energy

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

COLUSA, Calif. — John Ashbaugh readily admits that running a large mushroom company is a huge leap from his previous job — as an electrical engineer in the Silicon Valley.



John Ashbaugh

“I grew up in Rockwell City, Iowa, where my father was a large animal veterinarian so I was exposed to the farming community,” he said. “I got my degree from Iowa State and spent 20 years working in hardware and software in the San Francisco Bay Area before relocating to Northern California with my family.”

Premier Mushrooms Inc. in Colusa started as an investment in 2007 with Ashbaugh involved in the daily operations.

“Although seemingly mushrooms will grow anywhere, they are an extremely sensitive product to grow consistent quality and yields,” he said. “Mushrooms are grown in environmentally controlled dark rooms and are very sensitive to temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide. These parameters change during the eight-week growing cycle.”

The soil is referred to as mushroom substrate, made from wheat straw, chicken litter, cottonseed meal and gypsum. Chicken litter and cottonseed meal provide nitrogen and the gypsum is used to adjust the acidity. The mixture is composted over 15 days, resulting in conditions that are specific to growing mycelium and not any other molds or fungus.

The company began 9 years ago with 16 growing



One of 64 growing rooms at Premier Mushrooms. The company produces more than 300,000 pounds of mushrooms a week.

Courtesy of Premier Mushrooms



Courtesy of Premier Mushrooms

Mushrooms thrive in a special substrate that provides the perfect growing conditions.

rooms producing 60,000 pounds of mushrooms per week and now has 64 rooms producing 300,000 pounds per week.

The company currently grows agaricus, white button and cremini mushrooms. A Portabella mushroom is a larger cremini that is allowed to grow for an additional two days.

“We sell mostly to local retail stores and food service companies in California,” Ashbaugh said. “We have been on the Inc. Magazine’s

fastest-growing companies list four out of the last five years. Locally grown and healthier eating choices are attributed to the growth of the market.”

There are some issues sprouting that impact the state’s mushroom industry.

“The fresh market mushroom industry is very labor-intensive; every mushroom is picked by hand,” he said. “Because all wages are relative to the minimum wage, the changes in California labor laws for minimum



Western Innovator

John Ashbaugh
Occupation: CEO, Premier Mushrooms
Location: Colusa, Calif.
Education: Bachelor of science in electrical engineering from Iowa State University

Quote: “It would be much more productive if everyone focused on reducing the waste of our natural resources versus debating the cause of global warning.”

wage and agriculture overtime will be the biggest challenge in the coming years. Imports from other states and countries (Canada and Mexico) with lower cost structures are a concern.”

Melodie Johnson, executive manager of the Colusa County Farm Bureau, had

praise for Ashbaugh’s contributions to the region’s agriculture.

“Premier Mushroom donates product to our annual fundraiser every year,” she said. “In addition, Mr. Ashbaugh provided guided tours for Colusa County Farm Bureau’s ‘Dirt Days.’”

These events include two full days of ag tours throughout the county to educate teachers about the food they eat and where it comes from.

The company also provides grants to local nonprofits, she said.

Ashbaugh stresses the company’s respect for the land and reducing its carbon footprint.

“Since we environmentally control our growing process, it is both capital- and energy-intensive,” he said. “About five years ago, we got serious about our sustainability program. Over that time we have reduced our energy usage by over 1.4 million kilowatt-hours and now produce about a third of our energy by burning walnut shells from the local area.”

The company also has zero water discharge and sells biochar and spent compost to local farms as a soil amendment.

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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.

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 American Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention & IDEAg Trade Show. Phoenix Convention Center, 100 N Third St., Phoenix, Ariz. <http://annualconvention.fb.org>

Tuesday, Jan. 10
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Alfalfa and Clover Seed School. Caldwell Elks Lodge, Caldwell, Idaho. Contact: benjamin@amgidaho.org

Thursday, Jan. 12
Inside the Family, Outside the Business. 7:30 to 9 a.m., BridgePort BrewPub, 1313 NW Marshall St., Portland. This session will explore how family members involved in the business can best communicate and collaborate with non-active members. We will share first-hand insights from a panel of non-active family members on how they have faced the challenges of being inside the family, but outside the business. Presented by the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University. \$40 per person. 800-859-7609 <http://bit.ly/2gQX6M4>

Thursday-Friday Jan. 12-13
Oregon Mint Growers Annual Meeting. Salishan Lodge & Golf Resort, 7760 Hwy 101 North, Gleneden Beach, Ore. oregonmint.org

Monday, Jan. 16
Oregon Blueberry Conference. 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE,

Salem. Presented by the Oregon Blueberry Commission and the North Willamette Research and Extension Center. 503-589-1700 or oregonblueberry.com.

Tuesday-Thursday Jan. 17-19
38th Annual Eastern Idaho Ag Expo. Idaho State University Holt Arena, 921 South 8th Ave., Pocatello, Idaho. www.spectraproductions.com

Wednesday-Thursday Jan. 18-19
49th Annual Idaho Potato Conference. Idaho State University’s Pond Student Union Building, 921 South 8th Ave., Pocatello, Idaho. Speakers include Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Frank Muir, Potatoes USA President and CEO Blair Richardson and National Potato Council Executive Vice President John Keeling. <http://bit.ly/2fayqPE>

Idaho Noxious Weed Conference. Riverside Hotel, 2900 Chinden Blvd., Boise, Idaho. www.idahoweedcontrol.org

Wednesday-Friday Jan. 18-20
Idaho Horticulture Expo. Boise Centre on the Grove, 850 W Front St., Boise, Idaho. Sponsored by the Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association, this annual event offers seminars and workshops on topics important to the nursery industry. inlagrow.org

Thursday, Jan. 19
Oregon Tall Fescue Commission meeting. 6-8 p.m. Cascade Grill restaurant, 110 Opal St. NE, Albany, Ore. www.oregontallfescue.org/

Friday, Jan. 20
Family Foresters Workshop. 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Coeur d’Alene Inn, 506 W. Appleway Ave., Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. The program will feature presentations on up and coming forest products, changes in Inland Northwest family forestry, managing forests in the face of droughts, effectiveness of prescribed burns in preventing fire; research updates on forest biofuels,

managing family forest habitats for moose and the annual family forest economics/policy update. Register by Jan. 13. Cost: \$85-\$90, www.uidaho.edu/FamilyForesterWorkshop

Tuesday, Jan. 24
Western Idaho Ag Expo. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Caldwell Events Center, 2207 Blaine St., Caldwell, Idaho. <http://www.spectraproductions.com>

Tuesday-Thursday Jan. 24-26
Northwest Agricultural Show. Portland Expo Center, 2060 N. Marine Drive, Portland, Ore. The hours are 9 a.m.-6 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 a.m.-8 p.m. on Wednesday and 9 a.m.-3 p.m. on Thursday. www.nwagshow.com

Wednesday-Friday Jan. 25-27
FSPCA Preventive Controls for Human Food Course. Idaho Department of Labor, 600 N. Thornton St., Post Falls, Idaho. The new Food Safety Modernization Act regulation requires every processing facility to have a trained resource person or “Preventive Controls Qualified Individual” who has completed a specialized training course (such as this one) developed by the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance that is recognized by the FDA. This person will oversee the implementation of the facility’s food safety plan and other key tasks. <http://bit.ly/2f6cogT>

Wednesday-Saturday Jan. 25-28
American Sheep Industry Association Convention. Denver Marriott City Center, 1701 California St., Denver, Colo. www.sheepusa.org/About_Events_Convention

Wednesday, Feb. 1
California Prune Industry Summit. Orchard Creek Lodge, Lincoln, Calif. www.californiadriedplums.org

Tuesday, Feb. 7
Pesticide Short Course-IPM. 8 a.m.-4:10 p.m. Lane Community College, Center for Meeting and Learning, Bldg. 19, 4000 E. 30th Ave., Eugene, Ore. \$85 if registered by Jan. 23; \$95 after. <http://>

extension.oregonstae.edu/lanefarms

Tuesday-Thursday Feb. 7-9
Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum. Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., Spokane, Wash. Spokane Ag Expo is the largest farm machinery show in the Inland Northwest. <https://greaterspokane.org/ag-expo/>

Wednesday-Feb. 8
Oregon Clover Growers Annual Meeting. Noon-1 p.m. Holiday Inn, Wilsonville, Ore.

Wednesday-Thursday Feb. 8-9
The 8th Annual Organic Farming Conference. Canyon Crest Event Center, 330 Canyon Crest Drive, Twin Falls, Idaho. The event is organized by the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides. www.pesticide.org/events

Tuesday-Thursday Feb. 14-16
Practical Food Safety & HACCP. The Riverside Hotel, 2900 Chinden Blvd., Boise, Idaho. HACCP, or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points, is a preventive system for the control of health-threatening food hazards during food processing. The comprehensive three-day workshop is designed for individuals responsible for implementing and managing a HACCP system in a food processing facility. Participants who pass a final test will receive a certificate of completion. <http://bit.ly/2f2iJ9Q>

Thursday, Feb. 16
Keeping Your Family Business Communication on Track. 7:30 to 9 a.m. Hayden’s Lakefront Grill, 8187 SW Tualatin-Sherwood Road, Tualatin, Ore. This session will provide tools and techniques that attendees can use right away to cultivate better communication among family members, employees, and shareholders. Presented by: Mark Wickman, Family Business Counsel. \$40 per person. 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2fPK987>.

Wednesday, March 8
Taxes and Succession Planning. Noon-1 p.m. Join us for a free online webinar and an introduction to how planning ahead for estate and gift taxes can help address family and business needs and meet retirement goals for the current generation. Presented by: Carol Wachter and Heather Tomsick, Deloitte Tax LLP, and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University. 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2gW7KjQ>

Thursday, March 16
Building Family Business Value from the Inside Out. 7:30 to 9 a.m. BridgePort BrewPub, 1313 NW Marshall St., Portland. Much can be done to build the value of the business from inside the enterprise, and the earlier the process begins, the more sustainable the results will be. In addition to building value, most businesses become more efficient and profitable along the way. Presented by Francis Brown, Key Private Bank and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University. 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2gR3KC0>

Tuesday, April 11
Do Your Kids Want the Business? Planning for Yes or No. 7:30 to 9 a.m. Hayden’s Lakefront Grill, 8187 SW Tualatin-Sherwood Road, Tualatin, Ore. This session will deliver practical advice for family business owners regarding next generation succession. Presented by Steve Bennett, Farleigh Wada Witt and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University. 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2h3k8Ck>

Thursday, May 18
Family Business Charters. 7:30 to 9 a.m. BridgePort BrewPub, 1313 NW Marshall St., Portland. A family business charter sets forth the essential rules, obligations, and responsibilities relating to ownership and management of the business, as well as the family values that will help sustain the business for future generations. Presented by A. Jeffery Bird, Lane Powell PC and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University. \$40 per person. 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2gPuLYY>

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