

'My goal is to get every kid and mom and dad on the farm'

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When an American is hit, he goes back to the bottom of the hill and starts over. When a German is hit, he's out.

The action doesn't stop until the hill is taken, no matter how long it takes.

For the battle, Smith, 55, ordered a custom-built, fully automatic World War II-era German replica paint ball machine gun. It can shoot 300 rounds a minute.

The battle rages for hours, and about 60,000 paint balls are fired before the hill is taken, said Smith, whose father fought on Utah Beach during the historic assault.

"They have to take the flag. There's no backing down," he said. "The war will not end until the battle's over."

That experience gives participants a small appreciation for what American troops endured during the D-Day landings, he said.

"We will never again experience ... the horror and terror that those great men experienced, what kind of courage it took to keep running into those bullets," he said. "After getting shot for four hours by a paint ball gun, you're going to survive but, holy smokes, do you have an appreciation for (what those men went through)."

"At the same time, we have a frickin' blast," he added.

Teaching about ag

Visitors can see most of southwestern Idaho's Treasure Valley from the highest spot on Twin Oaks Farms.

Smith also believes he has a responsibility to use his farm to teach urban residents of the valley about agriculture and the value of hard work.

Originally from Ohio, Smith, who lives on the farm with his wife, Toni, came to Idaho when he was 19 and has been involved in farming his entire life. He grew up knowing the value of hard work and how important farming is to society but fears most Americans have now lost touch with those concepts.

He tries to reach people at an early age and employs a couple dozen youngsters on his farm each year.

He starts by teaching them how to plant pumpkins in a straight line with no machinery, so they appreciate modern farm equipment.

The oldest kid drills a hole with a stick, the next one drops the seed into the hole and "the next one, usually the



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Jeff Smith stands against one of the ancient, dead trees on his farm that were used to create "Loghenge," a play on the famous Stonehenge landmark in England. The logs and thousands of other trees he planted on his 200-acre farm are designed to benefit wildlife.

(youngest) because he's closest to the ground, pats the seed into the ground."

He said that whether or not they go into farming, "if nothing else, (they'll) appreciate production agriculture."

The kids get paid depending on how much they produce.

"The problem in America is that we're teaching our kids how to be collectors, and that doesn't work," he said. "You always have to be a producer. Once they figure out that they get paid more based on how much they produce, they are on their way to being producers and it will never end from there."

He also introduces the youngsters to some of the many advanced career opportunities involved with farming and reminds them, "(J.R.) Simplot was our first billionaire in the state and he was all agriculture."

Races and festivals

Smith holds annual events such as the Tater Dash Mud

Run, which takes participants on a zig-zag course around the entire farm, and Halloween Land, a corn maze and harvest festival to attract as many people as he can to his farm and give them a taste of agriculture.

"My goal is to get every kid and mom and dad on the farm. At least to touch it, smell and taste it," Smith said. "That means they're not sitting in front of a television or texting. They're out being real humans."

The Halloween Land event includes a "bunny hill" that involves a large mound of dirt covered with straw and 50 bunnies being chased by dozens of excited youngsters.

Wendell Livengood, 74, a retired farmer, lives in a trailer on Smith's property and takes care of a lot of Twin Oaks' farming-related tasks in the same 1946 tractor that he bought when he was 12 years old.

He said it's the best retirement he could ever dream of,

and he appreciates Smith's emphasis on teaching people about agriculture and old-fashioned hard work.

"Everything we do out here I feel is part of the United States growing up," he said. "We need to bring back some of the old into the new generation."

Setting records

Several years ago, while organizing the annual Tater Dash footrace, Smith learned from one of his employees that the Guinness world records for the largest serving of french fries, mashed potatoes and baked potatoes were all held by groups in other countries.

Idaho is the potato state and those records belong here, he told his employees, and they set about researching how they could bring the records to Idaho.

They used the Tater Dash, which attracts about 1,300 people, as the setting for attempting the world records.

In 2014 they set the french

fry world record and just missed setting the mashed potato record in 2015.

A plaque from Guinness recognizing the french fry record hangs in his office. The record was 1,003 pounds of french fries made from 1,256 pounds of raw potatoes cooked in 110 gallons of cooking oil.

"We're going to train harder and try (for the mashed potato record) again next year," Smith said. "The following year, we'll go after baked potatoes."

"That's great," Idaho Potato Commission member Randy Hardy said of Smith's potato world record efforts. "Idaho is the potato king around the world and it's only right that we should have those records."

The commission donates potato sack bags, potato pins and potato recipe handouts for the event and hands out Tater Dash promotion material during the IPC's annual Famous Idaho Potato Marathon.

Wildlife first

For all his focus on teaching about farming, Smith said wildlife come first on his farm and every inch of it is designed to benefit them.

For example, he'll mow only one strip of hay at a time so the remaining crop provides cover for ground-dwelling birds during nesting season.

He also created "Loghenge," a play on the famous English Stonehenge landmark, by placing ancient, dead trees in the same layout. Each tree also provides dens for wildlife.

He has also planted thousands of trees as habitat for wildlife.

As a result of his efforts to make his farm wildlife friendly, it is a home to mule deer, elk, coyotes, foxes, weasels, badgers, skunks, water fowl and other birds.

"The entire agricultural portion of (the farm) is designed for wildlife habitat," Smith said. "The two can absolutely be done together."

'They have no idea the map is not right'

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One is aimed specifically at Bounds' situation, while the other seeks to dispel the broader confusion over which properties fall under DSL's wetland jurisdiction.

House Bill 2785 takes the narrow approach, by exempting the replacement of a farm building "destroyed by fire or other act of God" from state fill-removal laws.

House Bill 2786 is more expansive, creating an exemption for any property that's not designated as a wetland under the State Wetland Inventory.

Much of the discussion during a Feb. 21 hearing before the House Agriculture Committee focused on the latter bill.

Proponents argue that landowners may believe their property isn't subject to fill-removal laws — based on the State Wetland Inventory — without realizing that DSL can nonetheless arrive at a different conclusion.

"They have no idea the map is not right," said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Landowners such as Bounds, who think they've followed all the applicable laws, may never hear from DSL unless a neighbor makes a complaint, said Dave Hunnicutt, executive director of the Oregonians in Action property rights group.

"Unfortunately, that's the way that DSL exercises its jurisdiction," Hunnicutt said.

While a housing developer may be able to afford wetland mitigation credits, that option is often too costly for farmers, he said.

Such credits, which effectively pay for the creation of wetlands elsewhere, cost about \$77,000 to \$81,000 per acre, according to DSL.

"Someone in Mr. Bounds' position, it puts him out of business," said Hunnicutt.

Opponents of HB 2786 claim the bill would jeopardize wetlands across Oregon because many aren't included in the State Wetland Inventory.

The State Wetland Inventory only includes a "small subset" of wetlands that are under both state and federal jurisdiction, said Tom Wolf, executive director of the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited, a group that advocates for fish habitat.

"It's too broad a bill," Wolf said. The League of Women Voters of Oregon believes the wetland designation process should be made clearer but worries HB 2786 sets a definition that's too limited, said Peggy Lynch, the group's natural resources coordinator.

"We need to have something more than the State Wetland Inventory to consider," she said.

Several members of the House Agriculture Committee said they sympathized with Bounds' predicament and the need to clarify wetland designations, including Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, the committee's chair.

Clem said he favored a simpler alternative to the current system of identifying wetlands, under which parcels are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

"That to me sounds horribly tiresome and painful," he said.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Gregory Jones, a Southern Oregon University research climatologist, said the state's wine grape industry can expect weather that is closer to normal this year.

Oregon will be removed from drought designation

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early June heat spike that broke records with temperatures over 100. Overall, Oregon's temperature was 2 to 3 degrees higher than normal during the grape growing season, he said.

The warm weather resulted in a bud break that was two to four weeks early, but the June spike compressed the flowering period. With growth stages advanced, Oregon may have seen the earliest start and earliest finish to harvest on record, Jones said. The stretch included an "amazingly long" frost-free period that ranged from 225 to 325 days in

various regions of the state.

The effect on wine quality will become clear with time. Jones said brix readings were slightly above average, pH readings were average and yields were up 2 to 4 percent over the previous year.

This year is shaping up as cooler and a return to normal, but a revived El Nino pattern later in the year could lead to another warm winter. Jones said the western U.S. is prone to weather variability. "We really should be expecting it," he said.

The best news is that all of Oregon will be removed from drought designation this year, Jones said,

and the snowpack holds sufficient water to carry the state through the growing season. Although California has been pummeled by rain and flooding, "It needs three more winters like this to come out of the drought they experienced," Jones said. "Maybe four or five."

Statistically, the frequency of Western droughts is shifting, he said. What used to be a once in 20 years event could become a once in 10 years event, Jones said. "We do have a tendency in the West to come in and go out of droughts more abruptly," he said. "Climate science is starting to look at that."