

Farm diversifies for the future

By BRENNA WIEGAND

For the Capital Press

At Blue Line Farms near Salem, the Dettwyler family grows turf type tall fescue and perennial ryegrass seed, blueberries, hazelnuts and green beans.

About 70 percent of the 1,000 acres they farm is in grass seed. There's no disputing Oregon is the world's major producer of cool-season forage and turf grass seed and the center of expertise in seed production. Oregon grass seed grows on golf courses, football fields and landscapes all over the country and is used as a cover crop.

However, the lawn is often misunderstood by homeowners.

"There has been a big push in the urban areas to get rid of lawns because it takes up water," Karl Dettwyler said.



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press

From left, cousins Leland and Karl Dettwyler on the seed cleaner at Blue Line Farms. Karl owns the farm with his brother, uncle and father.

"There's one thing I think a lot of people are overlooking: There are new varieties out there that don't need as much water. Grass is also important in urban areas because it creates

oxygen, is a filter for surface water and has huge cooling power."

The Dettwylers see the blueberries and hazelnuts as crops for future generations.

"We are looking at the long-term future because this is our livelihood and we're looking for the family aspect of it," Karl said. "We're not a lot different from the small farmer or the huge farmer. We're all trying to take care of the land and preserve that livelihood for the next generation."

Blueberries cost \$15,000 to \$20,000 an acre to put in, he said. "We're just starting to plant hazelnuts and you don't get a return on those for several years."

That's what the family farm is all about, he said. "Uncle Bob took the farm over in 1964. My dad, Bernie, came back from Vietnam in 1973 and now it's my dad, Uncle Bob, my brother Jonathan, me and three employees."

Bob Dettwyler recalls driving tractors and working by

hand at 8-10 years old.

"When I graduated from high school my older brothers left for other work and Dad was pretty much alone," Bob said. "I was thinking of going to college but if I did maybe Dad would have to sell the farm so I decided to help him on the farm and in a few years I took it over."

As the family grows the farm must grow to support it. The Dettwyler family prefers not to add a lot more land. Instead, they are diversifying and growing more high-value crops.

However, each new crop requires a different agronomy perspective and requires research and working closely with an agronomist — and more industry meetings. Together the Dettwylers attended some 100 hours' worth of meet-

ings in January.

Meanwhile, complications ensue with ag's rapidly growing technology.

"You've got to be a specialist in everything where it used to be you weren't a specialist in anything and you learned enough about everything that you could take care of it," Bob said. "With the high-tech machinery coming out it's getting to where you can't work on your own equipment."

To be competitive in the global marketplace, the farm must increase efficiency wherever possible.

In recent years, Blue Line Farms installed driplines in the blueberries, transitioned to modern lighting in the shop, put variable speed drives on irrigation pumps, built its own seed cleaner and purchased a blueberry picker.

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