

Small-scale farmer faces variety of challenges

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

With 140 acres near Salem, Ore., Don Mantie says his farm is one of the smallest around.

He and son, Kurt, grow wheat, grass seed, blueberries, pea seed and maintain old and new hazelnut orchards. It's a confusing time that calls for resourcefulness, he said.

"I don't know what's going to happen," Mantie said. "Blueberries have tanked due to low prices and higher labor. The 38-year-old hazelnut orchard has blight and I've been up cutting the blight out of it; it's a tedious and time-consuming job. You can spray all you want but it's still taking over. I suspect in another 5 to 7 years they'll be gone."

Mantie said he is looking forward to the fruits of a cold winter. Unlike the Portland area with lots of snow, which acts more like insulation for pests, his area had less than a half-inch of the white stuff.

"I'm glad we got a cold



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press
Don Mantie pays a morning visit to his 38-year-old hazelnut orchard. Mantie also grows blueberries and seed and row crops at Mantie Farms near Salem.

winter and I am looking forward to it killing some slugs and bugs," he said.

Mantie retired from Farm Credit Service in 2007, where he worked more than 30 years, spending the last 15 as a farm real estate appraiser.

"That was fun," he said. "I finally let my appraisal certificate go this year. I hated to because it's like getting a master's degree, or even more like a doctorate."

While working full-time Mantie farmed a couple hundred acres.

"I had a lot of nights on the tractor until 1 o'clock in the morning and then got up and went to work," Mantie said. "The best thing was when I got a tractor with a cab on it."

Mantie never met his grandparents; they both died in a flu epidemic when his father was 11. His great-grandparents started the farm and during that time donated the land for a local church cemetery. Deeds go clear back to the land claim.

Meanwhile, the small family farm is becoming outnumbered by larger operations.

"When I was a kid ev-

erybody used to have a few cows, pigs and chickens; we used to send milk to the creamery in Mount Angel," he said. "Farms have generally gotten bigger. ... I'm about as small as it gets. You've got to have enough acres to afford some of the specialized machinery; the only reason I do is because I was working and did not rely on the farm for a living."

Mantie strives to do everything he can with machinery; blueberry picking and pruning is a challenge due to labor costs.

"You try not to prune as heavy and not spend as much but sometimes that doesn't work," said Mantie, who plans to farm until he is no longer able.

"It's just part of me," he said. "A lot of people who retire end up sitting around; they don't last long. You've got to keep busy and there's

always something that needs to be done on the farm.

"It's not all muscle and brawn," he added. "If you want to get much done you've

got to be inventive and you've got to be efficient because there's not a lot of profit in a lot of things. You also hope the weather is with you."

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