

People & Places

Cooperative branches out

Pratum Co-op purchases Madras Service Center in Central Oregon

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Grain handling was initially the primary purpose of the Pratum Co-op, but the company's focus shifted and expanded in the seven decades since its founding.

The cooperative diversified into selling fertilizers, chemicals and fuel while developing an expertise in grass seed as farmers devoted more acreage to the crop in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Eventually, Pratum de-commissioned its iconic grain elevator at the company's headquarters near Salem, Ore., after its grain business was phased out.

This year, though, the cooperative has returned to grain storage and marketing with the purchase of the CHS cooperative's service center in Madras, Ore.

The move has less to do with nostalgia for the grain industry than a desire to branch out.

"We can spread our risk over a larger cropping system," said Troy Kuenzi, the cooperative's president.

Apart from grain handling, the Madras Service Center also has agronomy, seed processing and seed marketing divisions that correspond with several units of the Pratum Co-op.

"We aligned really well with Madras," said Kuenzi.

The acquisition marks an eastward leap across the Cascade Mountains, opening the cooperative to a new climate and crop portfolio.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Troy Kuenzi, left, president of the Pratum Co-op, stands with Doug Kuenzi, its agronomy division manager, at a company facility near Salem, Ore. The cooperative is expanding eastward to Central Oregon with the purchase of the Madras Service Center.

The Central Oregon region also specializes in seed crops that aren't widely grown in the U.S., so Pratum has expertise in serving such growers, said Doug Kuenzi, the cooperative's agronomy division manager and Troy's cousin.

"We understand niche crops, we understand how to service them," he said.

The acquisition

Pratum isn't disclosing the purchase price for the Madras Service Center, but the cooperative expects it will increase annual sales by \$14 million, for a total of about \$115 mil-

lion. The number of employees will also increase by 23, to 115 in total.

The acquisition, which closed in February, includes a 13-acre property, four lines of seed processing equipment, several delivery trucks, a warehouse and a fertilizer plant.

Pratum expects to break ground on replacing the fertilizer plant this autumn with an operation that has faster blending capacity and more storage space, said Troy Kuenzi.

"We feel it would be better to start over with a new, mod-

Western Innovator

Pratum Cooperative

Headquarters: Salem, Ore.

Established: 1946

Members: 315

Employees: 115

Annual revenues: \$115 million

Business units: Agronomy, petroleum, seed processing, seed marketing, seed research, grain handling



ern, state-of-the-art facility," he said.

Pratum has long shown a willingness to seize new opportunities in its 70-year history.

In reaction to the surge in grass seed production in the 1980s, the cooperative constructed its first seed cleaner for farmers in the region.

As the grass seed industry matured, Pratum assumed new roles in seed contracting and marketing with its Mountain View Seeds Division, which was launched in 1998.

Today, the cooperative contracts with farmers to grow grass seed on 28,000 acres.

The company has a private label business, packaging seed under other brand names for its clients, as well as its own "Top Choice" retail trademark.

Research added

As larger grass seed companies began buying research firms, Pratum took another step in its vertical integration by partnering with breeder Steve Johnson to start Peak Plant Genetics.

The company operates on 80 acres north of Albany, Ore., and has released and licensed 125 varieties of cool season grasses since it was established in 2008.

The venture's timing was

precarious: Peak Plant Genetics was created during the severe housing downturn that cratered demand for grass seed across the U.S.

Without its own research capabilities, however, Pratum realized that it would struggle for sources of high-end genetics, said Troy Kuenzi.

Over the past nine years, the cooperative has invested about \$3.5 million in research and breeding, with Peak Plant Genetics turning its first profit last year.

"We knew it was a long-term investment," Troy Kuenzi said.

Much of Oregon's early grass seed production was dedicated to perennial ryegrass, but tall fescue has recently been gaining a foothold in the turf market, he said.

Valued for its fine texture, dark green color and drought tolerance, tall fescue is making strong inroads in northern climates.

Aside from providing seed for lawns and golf courses, Pratum works with sod producers across the country to supply turf for sports venues, Troy Kuenzi said.

"It's evident athletes want to play on real turf. It's cooler and it's easier on the body," he said. "Artificial turf is hot and it's like a rug burn."

Calendar

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Sunday, March 19

Home Orchard Society 42nd Fruit Propagation Fair. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Clackamas County Fairgrounds Main Pavilion, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. Hundreds of varieties of free scions and cuttings. If you graft this is paradise, or you can choose custom grafting by experts for \$5. Free with your admission are hundreds of varieties of apple, pear, cherry, plum and persimmon scions; cuttings of grapes, kiwis, and figs to root; and experts to answer fruit growing questions. Cost: \$7 per person (family \$12) www.homeorchardsociety.org/events

Tuesday-Thursday

March 21-23

LEAP Logger Education. University of Idaho Extension Kootenai County Office, 1808 North Third St., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. LEAP, or Logger Education to Advance Professionalism, is a national extension program started at the request of loggers who wanted to improve their skills and market their services more effectively to forest owners and managers. The course features two days indoors and one day with field exercises on forest biology, forest ecology, silviculture and forest water quality. It is taught by University of Idaho faculty and Idaho Department of Lands personnel. Cost: \$75, or \$79 online registration. www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/calendar

Thursday, March 23

Small Farms and Community Food Systems Workshop Series. 6-8:30 p.m. University of Idaho Extension, 2200 Michigan Ave., Orofino, Idaho. This is the last of three Thursday evening workshops. Topic is marketing ag products in Northern Idaho featuring Iris Mayes, UI Extension. Please mail registrations with payment to UI Extension Workshop Fund, 2200 Michigan Ave., Orofino, ID 83544 prior to the workshop. Sign-in will begin at 5:30 each evening. Seating is limited to 25 people. Cost: \$5 per workshop or \$10 for all three.

Friday-Sunday

March 24-26

18th Annual Northwest Horse Fair and Expo. 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. Linn County Fair and Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road, Albany, Ore. Three days of clinics, seminars and performances for horse enthusiasts. Cost: Adults \$12 a day, children ages 6-12 \$6 a day. Parking \$4. www.equinepromotions.net

Friday-Monday

March 24-27

Oregon FFA State Convention. Deschutes Fair & Expo Center, 3800 S.E. Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. www.oregonffa.com

Saturday, March 25

Clackamas Tree School. 8:15 a.m.-5:15 p.m. Clackamas Community College, Clairmont Hall Room 117, 19600 S Molalla Ave., Oregon City, Ore. Tree School attendees can learn about basic forestry from "A to Z" — tree identification, woodland management, pest management, wildlife enhancement, chainsaw operations, safety and maintenance, truffle hunting and cultivation, among many other topics. Advanced sessions focus on business management, managing for timber, forest roads, wildlife and biodiversity. Cost is \$50 per person in Clackamas County, \$65 per person outside Clackamas County and \$25 for youths 13-18 with an adult. <http://bit.ly/1Txl8Lk>

Monday-Thursday

March 27-30

Outlook 2017 Agribusiness Conference. DoubleTree Hotel, 2233 Ventura St., Fresno, Calif. This is California's premiere agribusiness conference where key agricultural issues are addressed, commodity updates are provided and the highly regarded Trends in Agricultural Land and Lease Values publication is released. Appraisers, farm managers, consultants, lenders, accountants, real estate brokers, government employees, farmers and educators will benefit from the education, networking and the Trends publication. agprolink.asmfra.org

Wednesday, March 29

Exploring the Small Farm Dream. 5-8 p.m. OSU SOREC Research Building Library, 569 Haley Road, Central Point, Ore. This three-session course provides an excellent framework to help new farmers assess their skills and interests, learn the realities of farm business ownership, and become connected to local resources. The

aim is to help those thinking about small-scale commercial farming learn what it will take to start and manage a farm business, and decide whether that is something they really want to pursue. \$50 per person, \$75 for two from the same farm. Website: <http://bit.ly/Jackson-SmallFarmDream>

Wednesday-Thursday

March 29-30

International Mass Timber Conference. Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr Blvd., Portland, Ore. Explores the entire supply chain for cross-laminated timber, nail-laminated timber, glulam panels, laminated veneer lumber and other mass timber; and the opportunities and obstacles for mass timber building in global construction. Benefit from 80 speakers, four focused educational tracks, 60 exhibits in the exhibit hall, multiple networking receptions, and one of the largest gatherings of CLT and mass timber experts in the world. www.mass timberconference.com

Friday-Saturday

March 31-April 1

High Desert Stampede. 6-10 p.m. Bank of the Cascades Center, 3800 SW Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. High Desert Stampede, in concert with the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, will be presenting a full rodeo performance lineup complete with bull, bareback and saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, team roping, calf roping and barrel racing. www.highdesertstampede.com

Saturday-Sunday

April 1-2

Spring Farming Days. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Eastern Washington Agricultural Museum, 99 Fairground Road, Pomeroy, Wash. Old-time horse and mule farming on 13 acres, plus static and active equipment and vehicle displays and artisan displays. RV and camping available and hot lunch available both days. Cost: Free. www.co.garfield.wa.us/museum

Wednesday, April 5

Exploring the Small Farm Dream. 5-8 p.m. OSU SOREC Research Building Library, 569 Haley Road, Central Point, Ore. This three-session course provides an excellent framework to help new farmers assess their skills and interests, learn the realities of farm business ownership, and become connected to local resources. The aim is to help those thinking about small-scale commercial farming

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Wednesday-Saturday

April 5-8

86th Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference. College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls. www.idahoffa.org/conferences-conventions/

Saturday, April 8

Goat Seminar. 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. 7211 40th Ct. NE, Olympia, Wash. Learn about goat healthcare and nutrition, along with a short session about packgoats. Cost: \$25 public; \$7.50 4H/FFA. Website: <http://edelweissacresobers.com/>

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. Presented by Steve Bennett, Farleigh Wada Witt and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University, 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2h3k8Ck>

Wednesday, April 12

Exploring the Small Farm Dream. 5-8 p.m. OSU SOREC Research Building Library, 569 Haley Road, Central Point, Ore. This three-session course provides an excellent framework to help new farmers assess their skills and interests, learn the realities of farm business ownership, and become connected to local resources. The aim is to help those thinking about small-scale commercial farming learn what it will take to start and manage a farm business, and decide whether that is something they really want to pursue. \$50 per person, \$75 for two from the same farm. Website: <http://bit.ly/Jackson-SmallFarmDream>

Saturday, April 15

Oregon Women for Agriculture 30th annual auction and dinner. 5-9 p.m. Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. Website: owaonline.org

Friday-Saturday

April 21-22

Second Annual Horsedrawn Vehicle and Equipment Auction, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Yamhill County Fairgrounds, 2070 NE Lafayette Ave., McMinnville, Ore. Preview starts at 8 a.m. both days. Auction benefits the Youth Educational Scholarship Foundation. www.pacificoverland-expo.com

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