

# Monsanto's vegetable seed lab makes end user its first priority

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

WOODLAND, Calif. — Scientists at Monsanto's vegetable seed research and development lab say everything they do is geared toward providing a pleasant experience for the consumer who buys the end product at the grocery store.

And consumer preferences vary from country to country and culture to culture, said John Purcell, the company's R&D and Hawaii business lead.

The company takes hundreds of thousands of different seeds found in nature and combines high-tech equipment with greenhouse know-how to breed seeds for more than 2,000 varieties of vegetables.

Its scientists plant the seeds in trial plots worldwide and conduct taste tests before introducing a new seed variety to the marketplace.

"Somebody has to walk into the grocery store and say, 'I want that onion,'" Purcell told reporters during a tour of his lab on March 28. "It's not about the technology. It's about technology that means something to somebody in the marketplace."

The focus on the end user makes the Woodland facility somewhat unique within Monsanto, whose other products are geared toward helping farmers sustain their operations, Purcell said. While corn and wheat production tends to focus on yields, the vegetable grower must meet customers' specific tastes and demands. And those vary widely, making it necessary to grow numerous varieties of a single vegetable.

Established in 1972, the more than 200-acre facility produces seeds for multiple varieties of tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, leafy greens, carrots and other vegetables. The lab employs more than 300 full-time workers as well as seasonal laborers in its farm fields, greenhouses, seed library and genetics lab.

While the lab's work centers around finding the right genetic markers for desirable traits such as disease resistance, flavor and appearance and breeding plants for those traits, none of the seeds are genetically modified, company officials said.

For one thing, trying to introduce GMO vegetables wouldn't be worth the cost, said Mark Oppenhuizen, who manages vegetable R&D strategy and operations at the lab. The



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Chow-Ming Lee, consumer sensory lead at Monsanto's research and development lab in Woodland, Calif., demonstrates to reporters how he conducts taste tests of tomatoes, onions and other produce grown with the company's seeds.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Melon breeder Jeff Mills discusses his work in the greenhouse at Monsanto's research and development lab in Woodland, Calif. The seed company gears everything toward providing a good experience for consumers who buy the product in grocery stores.

regulatory and development process for each new GMO variety would cost about \$100 million, and the vegetable division only generates about \$800 million in annual sales — a small portion of the company's roughly \$15 billion in returns.

There are about 3 million acres of vegetables grown worldwide, compared to about 90 million acres of corn, Oppenhuizen told the Capital Press.

Further, more than half of Monsanto's vegetable seed sales are in Europe, which heavily regulates GMO products, Purcell said.

Instead, the facility's greenhouses and genetic labs enable

Monsanto to rapidly accelerate the natural breeding process. For instance, the lab can grow three generations of melon plants in a year, and it sends its hybrid seeds to numerous field trials to mimic farms' unique conditions and characteristics.

"The environment makes all the difference," melon breeder Jeff Mills said.

As such, the target is always moving.

"There is no perfect melon," Mills said.

The day-long laboratory tour was the latest in Monsanto's stepped-up outreach efforts in recent years to counter negative public perceptions about the company, fueled by GMO



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Mark Oppenhuizen, who manages vegetable research and development strategy and operations at Monsanto's lab in Woodland, Calif., discusses different seed varieties at the lab's "seed library" on March 28.

controversies and the company's attempt to buy rival Syngenta.

Last year, journalists toured Monsanto's Chesterfield Village Research Facility outside St. Louis as part of a "Food, From Farm to Table" fellowship hosted by the National Press Foundation.

The efforts come as regulators in the U.S. and Europe are considering Monsanto's \$57 billion acquisition by Bayer, the German pharmaceutical company. Reviews of the acquisition are expected to take until the end of this year, Purcell said.

Purcell noted that the divide between farmers and consumers has widened, and he acknowledged that Monsanto hadn't spent much time talking to consumers before the outreach effort.

"We were talking to our customers. We were talking to people in ag," he said. "We have got to find a bridge. We have got to talk to people about where their food comes from."



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Lucien Gunderman, a farmer in Oregon's Yamhill County, speaks about a conservation easement that protects his land from development in perpetuity.

## Farmland protection fund criticized as unaffordable

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

SALEM — A proposed fund dedicated to protecting farmland from development in Oregon has come under fire from critics who say the state government can't afford it.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Fund would buy easements from farmers that limit their ability to develop property, thus preserving the land for agricultural production.

Organizations that "hold" easements by enforcing such constraints, such as land trusts, would also receive money and technical assistance from the fund, as would farmers who need help with succession planning.

Investment decisions would be made by a 12-person commission under House Bill 3249, which creates the fund without directing a specific amount of state dollars to it.

Kelley Beamer, executive director of the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, said the new fund is needed because roughly two-thirds of Oregon's farmland is expected to change ownership in the next decade, but about 80 percent of the landowners don't have a plan for the transition.

"We do see conversion and fragmentation as a real threat to those values we have as a state," she said during an April

4 legislative hearing.

However, critics argue that Oregon's projected \$1.6 billion budget deficit in the 2017-2019 biennium precludes a new program aimed at helping agriculture, which already receives much government support.

Farmers already benefit from property tax breaks, inheritance tax exemptions and other programs that will add up to about \$550 million in the next biennium, said Gerritt Rosenthal of Tax Fairness Oregon, a group that seeks to preserve government revenues from tax breaks.

"In this time of budget shortfall, it's not the time to create new programs that may cost significant amounts of money," he said.

The fund would primarily serve farming interests by spending public dollars, even though Oregon's protections for agricultural water quality are insufficient, said Jim Myron, a natural resources consultant testifying on behalf of several environmental groups.

"While there may be positive aspects to the bill, it isn't ready for prime time yet," Myron said.

Proponents of HB 3249 claim the fund is a wise investment because state dollars will be matched by contributions from the federal government, conservation groups and the farmers.

## \$785,000 added to judgment against Heinz

Bright Harvest Sweet Potato Co. entitled to attorney fees, judge rules

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

A federal judge has tacked on \$785,000 in attorney fees and costs to a \$1.2 million judgment against the H.J. Heinz Co. in a lawsuit over sweet potato processing.

The Bright Harvest Sweet Potato Co. filed a complaint in 2013 accusing Heinz of breaking a deal to buy sweet potato fries and instead producing them itself at a newly constructed facility in Ontario, Ore.

Heinz initially convinced a jury that it hadn't violated the contract with Bright Harvest, but U.S. District Judge Lynn Winnmill ordered a new trial after overturning the first verdict for not being supported by the evidence.

The second jury found in favor of Bright Harvest, awarding the company \$1.2 million in damages, which Winnmill upheld last year.

The judge has now decided that under Idaho law, which governs the contract, Bright Harvest is entitled to more than \$785,000 in attorney fees and costs because it's clearly the "prevailing party" in the dispute.

Even though Bright Harvest didn't recover the total amount sought in its lawsuit — the company asked for nearly \$11 million during settlement talks — the \$1.2 million judgment is "significant enough" to establish it as the prevailing party, Winnmill said.

The judge also ruled the attorney fees sought by Bright Harvest were reasonable for the most part, though he refused to include nearly \$11,000 in fees sought by one attorney who was a "possible fact witness" rather serving on the litigation team.

## Longtime Capital Press salesman retires after 29 years

McMorris sold door-to-door, at trade shows

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Wayne McMorris says he's a farm boy to the core.

"I've always been an agriculture guy," he said. "I didn't play sports in high school because I wanted to go home and be on the farm. I'm truly a farm boy."

He translated that love of farming into a part-time subscription sales job with the Capital Press that spanned nearly three decades and took him around the West. McMorris, 79, recently retired after 29 years of representing the Capital Press. At first he sold subscriptions door-to-door, then he represented the newspaper at agricultural shows.

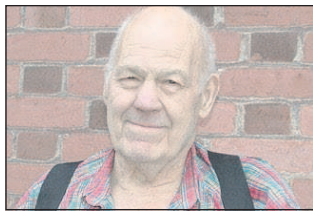
For many readers, he was the face of the Capital Press.

He grew up on a farm near Salem, Ore.

"My dad got the Capital Press when I was a kid," he said. "I've read the Capital Press since I was 10 or 12 years old."

Out of high school, McMorris began raising cherries. He moved to British Columbia from 1975 to 1985, then bought an orchard in Kettle Falls, Wash.

He started selling the Capital Press part-time in 1988,



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Wayne McMorris, retiring Capital Press salesman, stands outside the Sinto Senior Activity Center in Spokane on March 28. McMorris sold the agriculture newspaper part-time for 29 years throughout the West.

after renewing his subscription at a horticulture show in Wenatchee, Wash.

"A part-time job in the wintertime," McMorris said. "It worked out wonderful for me."

McMorris started selling door-to-door throughout Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho.

"I covered every back road everybody could think of," he said.

McMorris moved to Spokane in 2000 and shifted from selling door-to-door to trade shows. He estimates he sold the Capital Press at 47 different shows through the years — a total of roughly 800 days of shows.

At trade shows, McMorris would also give samples of the newspaper to all the other vendors.

"When I worked at Capital Press, I worked like I owned the company — that's what I would do if I owned the company," he said.

He also sold the newspaper at auctions around the region.

McMorris said he loved the chance to talk with farmers and see the scenery of

California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Nevada and Utah.

"I'm the type of guy that I don't remember sports scores, I remember the scenes," he said.

He decided to retire for health reasons. He will remain active in Spokane, as president of the Sinto Senior Activity Center board.

He will also spend time with his family, son Jeff, daughter Cathy — U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers — and seven grandchildren.

He said he will miss the people he looked forward to seeing each year. And he'll still read a certain agriculture newspaper.

"I loved selling it because it's a good product and I believed in it," he said.

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