

## People &amp; Places

## Making harvests more efficient

J.J. Dagherret invents an easy-to-use mobile platform for tree fruit industry

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

MOSES LAKE, Wash. — J.J. Dagherret doesn't make detailed drawings. When he gets an idea he mulls it over in his mind.

"I get irritable. I need my concentration. I can be like a mad scientist," he says.

When he's ready, he tells his workers what he needs. What to cut. What to weld. What goes here. What goes there. How long that needs to be. No, it needs to go like that.

"It's all wrapped up in my head and I can see it. It takes me eight weeks to build a prototype. I like the nuts and bolts side of things," he says.

Dagherret, 41, is an innovator who is beginning to make his mark on the tree fruit industry. His self-propelled harvest assist platform, the Bandit Xpress, which he designed in 2012, has become a hot item for picking and thinning apples and pruning and training trees.

Automated Ag Systems, Dagherret's Moses Lake company, has built and sold about 450 Bandit Xpress platforms from 2013 through 2016.

Most of them went to growers in Washington, but others also went to Oregon, California, New York, Michigan, New Zealand, Australia, South America and South Africa.

About 70 of the 275 on order this year have already been built, and production capacity will double next year when the company gains full use of a 60,000-square-foot facility it bought in January.

Dagherret says he needs the space to keep up with demand.

"We have guys screaming for machines. It's hard to grow with demand," he said.

He sees no end in sight to the growth the next several years as more orchardists see that a \$63,000 Bandit Xpress is 35 percent more efficient, and safer, than picking apples with ladders, he said.

That's a savings as labor grows more scarce and expensive. Simplicity, quality and affordability are what growers want, Dagherret said.

### How it works

Up to four pickers are tethered to the Bandit Xpress platform, two fore and two aft, on areas that are adjustable in height and width. They pick



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Kelly and J.J. Dagherret, owners of Automated Ag Systems in Moses Lake, Wash., in front of the assembly line for Bandit Xpress harvest-assist platforms.

into conventional bags and gently dump apples from bags into a bin that is raised to the platform with a hydraulic scissor lift. Bins are set out by tractors in advance and removed when full.

The 22-foot long, 7-foot wide self-propelled platform is powered by a 24-horsepower Honda engine that can go eight hours on 3.5 to 4 gallons of gas.

Dagherret soon will offer the Bandit Xpress .5 that will be four feet shorter and a foot narrower to better fit 10-foot-wide alleys in V-trellis orchard systems.

### Companies ordering

Sales are growing mainly among larger tree fruit companies. Stemilt Ag Services in Wenatchee has bought 28 and has 37 more on order over the next few years, Dagherret said. This year, the company will try the Bandit Scout, designed for ground picking ahead of the Xpress. Stemilt will also try the air-cushioned Bin Bandit, which can move 400 to 500 apple-filled bins per day — two to four times the number a tractor can move, and more gently.

Yakima grower Bruce Allen has 14 Bandit Xpress platforms, Washington Fruit and Produce has six or seven, Zirkle Fruit has six, Kershaw Fruit will run 12 this year, Green Acre Farms has eight and McDougall & Sons has four, Dagherret said.

"I think we're changing the way things are done in the industry. I get calls during and before harvest asking were to go to see them and work on them," he said.

Of the 275 on order for this

year, 180 are for Washington customers, and the next largest amount is for California, where Dagherret believes sales are about to take off.

### What Stemilt says

Robin Graham, assistant general manager of Stemilt Ag Services, said he's tried other harvest-assist machines but likes the Bandit Xpress for its sturdiness, dependability and simplicity.

"We don't need complicated machines with electronic eyes, conveyor belts and bin fillers, and the Bandit is safer and more ergonomic than ladders," he said.

Pickers even do a better job color-picking apples at night with the Bandit's LED lights because they see color better than in daylight, Graham said. With multiple shifts, Stemilt runs the machines 24 hours a day, and pickers enjoy their stereo systems, he said. Stemilt gets 35 percent more efficiency, he said.

The platform works better for tree pruning in the snow than ladders, and Stemilt wants to go ladderless as much as possible, he said.

"I really think highly of J.J. From a service perspective, he's totally invested in the user. I don't know how he does it but he fields calls from our field guys and mechanics, brings a lot of knowledge and is down to earth," Graham said.

Dagherret has also said he is interested in teaming up with robotic apple picker developers. A robot could go on the Xpress without building a whole new machine, he said.

In 2014, the Bandit Xpress

was a Top 10 innovation displayed at the World Ag Expo in Tulare, Calif. This year, the company's Melon Wrangler, a harvest assist machine for melons and other vine-grown produce, was chosen.

He sells four different styles of Bin Bandits, two for moving apple bins, one for citrus and one for raisins and kiwi.

### Wife is right hand

Dagherret's wife, Kelly, 40, is the office manager and bookkeeper and does parts invoicing. They met in school in the small town of Corning, Calif., when she was in eighth grade and he was in ninth.

"I thought he was a pretty cool guy. He is pretty funny and his brain is always going," she said. "You know his brain is going when he's sitting on the couch chewing his fingernails."

The respect is mutual.

"She's a very patient person. That's what's made this work. When I was young, I was wild and she would grin and bear it. I'm a lucky guy," he said. "We have our little squabbles and stuff but we go home tired and know we did it for ourselves and not someone else. There's some value in that."

The Dagherret family is French Basque. His father raised sheep but when that market declined in the late 1980s he turned to growing and contract harvesting prunes and pistachios.

"I dodged the sheep thing and got into prune harvesting," said Dagherret. "I loved it. I loved building shakers and using them."

In high school, Dagherret



## Western Innovator

### J.J. Dagherret

**Occupation:** Owner, Automated Ag Systems LLC, Moses Lake, Wash.

**Age:** 41

**Born:** Chico, Calif., raised in Corning.

**Family:** Wife, Kelly, company office manager; son, J.P., 18, also works in the company.

**Education:** Graduate of Corning High School, 1994; welding certificate, Butte Community College, Chico, 1996.

**Work History:** Worked for Orchard Carriers, a produce bin carrier manufacturer in Corning, during and after high school; bought the company in 2000; sold the company in 2005; started Automated Ag Systems in Tampa, Fla., 2007; moved the company to Moses Lake, Wash., in 2011.

began working for Orchard Carriers, a small Corning company that makes produce bin carriers.

He bought the business in 2000 and a couple years later built one of the first dried-on-the-vine raisin harvesters.

A friend even asked him to build crates for pachyderms.

"I didn't know what a pachyderm was, so I said, 'Sure,'" he said.

He built two, 10-by-20-foot steel crates for transporting elephants that are still used by a leading elephant mover today.

Business was increasing for Orchard Carriers in 2005, but most of it was in the San Joaquin Valley. The Dagherrets sold to a company in the Modesto area and moved to Florida to join a venture building machines for citrus fruit. That failed, as did Dagherret's solo efforts selling a bell pepper and cucumber harvester he built.

"I carried it all over the damn country down there and just couldn't get it to go, so I went back to my roots and developed a high-density bin carrier for apples and marketed it in New York," he said.

That led to moving to Washington in 2011 to be in the country's largest apple-production region.

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## Correction

In a story on Page 11 of the April 14 Orchards, Nuts and Vines section, the haskap berry and the name of Shinji Kawai were misspelled.

The Capital Press regrets the error.

## Correction policy

Accuracy is important to Capital Press staff and to our readers.

If you see a misstatement, omission or factual error in a headline, story or photo caption, please call the Capital Press news department at 503-364-4431, or send email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.

## Calendar

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To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at www.capitalpress.com and click on "Submit an Event." Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301 or emailed to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

### Through Sunday, April 30

Wooden Shoe Tulip Fest 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm, 33814 S. Meridian Road, Woodburn, Ore. Stroll through 40 acres of stunning beauty, experience expansive views of vineyards, distant mountains and a few mud puddles. Fresh flowers, food and fun. Cost: \$5 per person or \$20 per car. Website: www.woodenshoe.com

### 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

### Saturday, April 22

Local Meat Marketing and USDA Processing Workshops, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Carnation Farms, Carnation, Wash. Workshops will focus on market demand for local meats, economics and processing options to help determine what is best for your livestock enterprise. Contact: Patrice Barrentine at King County Agriculture Program at Patrice.Barrentine@kingcounty.gov or

(206) 477-1556. Cost: Free. Website: https://goo.gl/forms/JENmH-1PAWkQfZDaH2

Map and Compass Workshop, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. University of Idaho Extension Office in Kootenai County, 1808 North Third St., Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The program features 2-3 hours indoors interpreting various natural resource maps, followed by field activities using magnetic compasses. Those wishing to participate should pre-register at the University of Idaho Extension office in Kootenai County. Cost: \$10. Website: www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/calendar

### Saturday-Tuesday

#### April 22-25

California FFA State Convention, Fresno Convention & Entertainment Center, 700 M St., Fresno, Calif. Website: www.calaged.org

### Monday, April 24

Passing it On: Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop, 5:30-8:30 p.m. OSU Extension Auditorium, 2050 NE Lafayette Ave., McMinnville, Ore. Two-thirds of Oregon's agricultural land will be changing hands in the next 20 years, but the vast majority of farmers and ranchers don't have succession plans. Want to hear about the trends in farm/ranch succession, access to land, and land use? Want to learn the steps for preparing a succession plan? Want to hear the stories of local farmers who have gone through the process? Learn about recent research by OSU, PSU and Rogue Farm Corps on agricultural land transition. Hear from attorney

Joe Hobson about the steps to passing your legacy to the next generation. Learn from a landowner panel who has been through the process. And hear about how conservation easements can be a tool to help you plan for succession and leave a legacy. RSVP to Heather Stoven: Heather.Stoven@oregonstate.edu, 503-434-8910.

Oregon Blueberry Commission. Noon. Chemeketa Events at Winema, 4001 Winema Place NE, Salem, Ore. A public hearing will be held on the commission's proposed budget for the next fiscal year. For information, call 503-364-2944.

### Thursday, April 27

Washington Association of Wheat Growers Wheat College, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 W. Grandridge Blvd., Kennewick, Wash. Topics will include controlling chemical drift, herbicide resistance trends in the region and strategies for variety selection and disease control. Pre-registration is appreciated. Pesticide credits will be available. Cost: Free.

Oregon Orchardgrass Seed Producers Commission meeting, 7:30-11 a.m. Elmer's restaurant, 2802 Santiam Highway SE, Albany, Ore.

Ranch Succession Planning Workshop, 6-8:30 p.m. Best Western Sunridge, 1 Sunridge Lane, Baker City, Ore. Come join us for a timely event on an important topic. Learn about recent research by OSU, PSU and Rogue Farm Corps on agricultural land transition. Hear

from La Grande attorney DeLon Lee about the steps to passing your legacy to the next generation. Learn from a landowner panel who has been through the process. And hear from Blue Mountain Conservancy about how working lands conservation easements can be a tool to help you plan for succession and leave a legacy. This event is sponsored by the Baker County Livestock Association as their April meeting. Event supporters are Rogue Farm Corps and the Baker Soil and Water Conservation District. Cost: Free. Website: https://www.facebook.com/events/1965305573690320/

Growing Forest Mushrooms workshop, 6:15-8:45 p.m. The workshop will cover techniques for growing a variety of edible forest mushrooms, including oyster and shiitake mushrooms. Kootenai County Fairgrounds, Building 2, 4056 N. Government Way, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Cost: \$15 by April 21. Website: http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry.

### Friday, April 28

Forest Edibles workshop, 1-5 p.m. This workshop will cover the range of edible non-timber products that can be harvested from forests. Kootenai County Fairgrounds, Building 2, 4056 N. Government Way, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Cost: \$15 by April 21. Website: http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry.

### Saturday-Sunday

#### April 29-30

Oregon Ag Fest, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. Ag

Country activities, a petting zoo, pony rides, toy tractor races, a craft and garden show and family entertainment make for a fun and informative day. A ranch breakfast is served on Saturday from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. Cost is \$6. Sunday Ag Fest hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Ag Fest cost: Free for 12 and under. \$9 for 13 and older. Free parking. http://loragfest.com/

### Monday, May 1

Soil and Water Conservation Commission meeting, Noon-4:30 p.m., 304 SE Nye Ave., Pendleton, Ore. Website: www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/naturalresources/Pages/meetings.aspx

### Tuesday, May 2

Fungicide presentation, 4-6 p.m. Bandon, Ore. Lindsay Well of Ocean Spray will speak. A field trip to a farm will be included. Cost: Free

### Thursday, May 4

Four-Part Farm/Ranch Succession Planning Workshop, 6-8:30 p.m. Canby High School, 721 SW Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. A free four-part workshop on succession planning with one-hour personal counseling sessions for your family after each workshop. Light dinner 6 to 6:30, workshop 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Course 2 on May 4 is Goal Setting for You and Your Family, Course 3 on May 18 is Getting Organized, and Course 4 on June 1 is Passing on Management Roles. RSVP is required. Organized by Clackamas Small Business Development Center and Rogue Farm Corps. Cost: Free. http://bit.ly/2opTHqO