

Oregon

Chinese trade mission gets taste of Northwest

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PORTLAND – Time will tell, but Oregon and Washington producers of specialty snacks and drinks hope they made a tasteful impression on a visiting trade mission team from China.

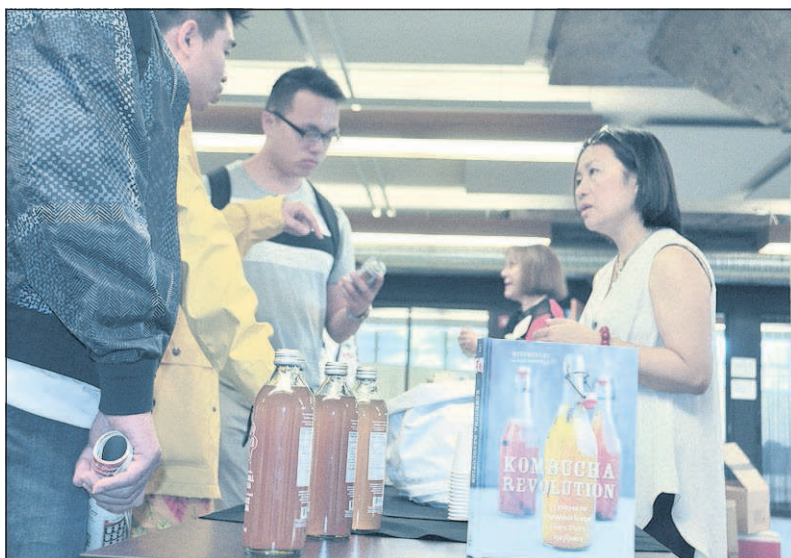
Makers of cider, wine, mead and beer and vendors of various nut, seed and fruit snacks set up display tables two consecutive days at an event organized June 21-22 by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

The China trade group was on its way back from a Fancy Food Show in New York, and the Portland visit was its only other stop.

Trade mission members sampled products as they moved from table to table.

“There’s been some interest,” said Doug Furlong, who described himself as the “boss nut” of Doug’s Nuts, based in Eugene. He sells nut mix snacks in a variety of flavors and combinations.

He said Chinese buyers appeared to be looking for upscale



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Paula Phillips, right, president of Portland-based Pure Steeps, extols the virtues of the company’s Wonder Drink Kombucha, a fermented tea, to members of a Chinese trade mission during a June 22 event in Portland. Phillips grew up in Taiwan and speaks Chinese, an advantage in international trade.

products and “Everybody likes the packaging.”

Paula Phillips, president of Pure Steeps in Portland, offered visitors

tastes of the company’s Wonder Drink Kombucha, a fermented tea. One trade mission member took a sip and said it reminded him fondly of

a drink served at home in his childhood.

Phillips and company marketing representative Linda Shively said Pure Steeps sells in Hong Kong, but is not yet in mainland China. Their kombucha is organic and shelf stable, and appeals to the Chinese desire for healthful beverages.

Phillips grew up in Taiwan and conversed easily with trade mission members.

“She can tell you about kombucha in two languages,” Shively said.

Holly Witte, of A Blooming Hill vineyard and winery in Cornelius, west of Portland, offered samples of her Pinot noir, Riesling and blush wines.

Witte said she’d been researching the Chinese market and “I knew they would love our label.”

She said the company has exported a bit to China in the past.

“What does it take? It takes exposure – and a great product,” Witte said.

Corrine Konell, of Sandy, Ore., displayed her protein bars made with

goats’ milk dairy products. Konell said she is not quite ready to scale up production enough to sell in China, and most likely would look into Canada and Europe first. But she was interested in gauging reactions to her chewy bars, and was gratified by the buyers’ interest.

Adam Carlson, of Seattle Cider Co., joked he was “crashing the party” of Oregon producers. The company sells hard cider in Japan, Canada and the United Kingdom, and he said China is a promising future market.

“You look at how fast the Chinese middle class is growing, and the rise of discretionary income,” Carlson said.

China is Oregon agriculture’s fourth largest export market, behind Japan, Canada and South Korea.

A minimum of \$240 million worth of Oregon ag products is shipped to China annually.

The figure is incomplete because some Oregon-grown or manufactured goods are shipped from ports in Washington or California, and aren’t counted toward the total.

Field day offers tips for potato growers

Potato research discussed during HAREC field day

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

HERMISTON, Ore. — Potato lovers rejoice. Two new spud varieties are coming soon to the Pacific Northwest.

Echo Russet and Castle Russet — developed by the Tri-State Potato Breeding Program that includes Oregon, Washington and Idaho — are about ready to be released commercially, according to Sagar Sathuvalli with Oregon State University.

Sathuvalli, a potato breeder at OSU’s Hermiston Agricultural Research and Experiment Center, discussed the traits of each variety with local growers during the station’s annual potato field day June 21. Both varieties boast high yields and good cooking quality, and can be used either for french fries or fresh market.

Getting to this point is no small feat, Sathuvalli explained. From the time breeding begins to when the potatoes are approved for release, it usually takes 12-15 years of rigorous field trials.

Echo Russet — named for the nearby town — and Castle Russet are about to cross that finish line.

The Potato Variety Management Institute, which handles licensing and royalties for Tri-State varieties, has decided to release the latest creations in December.

“We should have approval very soon,” Sathuvalli said.

Potato field day also featured updates on research



George Plaven/EO Media Group

Ryan Graebner, with Oregon State University, passes around potato samples affected by nematodes during field day at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

projects to help farmers control pesky Lygus bugs, manage various diseases and thwart parasitic nematodes.

Sapinder Bali, who works with Sathuvalli in the potato breeding program, said they are still working to pin down the specific genes in potatoes responsible for nematode resistance.

Nematodes are microscopic parasites that infect potato roots and suck out the plant’s nutrients, causing both internal and external defects that can make the crop unmarketable. Once the genes are identified, breeders like Sathuvalli can use them to boost the resistance of new varieties in the next decade.

“Probably next year, I will have some exciting findings to share with you all,” Bali said.

Josephine Antwi, a

postdoctoral researcher at HAREC, later transitioned into talking about Lygus bugs and how the insects may affect potato yields.

There are two species of Lygus bugs in the area that are widely distributed and should not be confused with aphids, Antwi said. What Antwi is still trying to figure out is whether the bugs are capable of transmitting harmful purple top virus, and how many insects are too many for potatoes to handle.

“We are trying to relate the presence of Lygus bugs to yield,” Antwi said.

The event marked the first potato field day for Ruijin Qin, the station agronomist who was hired last year to replace Don Horneck. Qin recently started field trials with Sathuvalli looking into the best nutrient management

practices for Echo Russet and Castle Russet potatoes, so farmers will know what to do and what to expect if they decide to plant the new varieties in their fields.

Ken Frost, plant pathologist at HAREC, wrapped things up by delving into disease concerns this year. Late blight has an especially high probability of turning up around Hermiston given the region’s cool, wet spring.

“We’re going to see it sometime this year,” Frost said. “The problem is we don’t know when or where.”

HAREC station manager Phil Hamm said field day is an opportunity for growers to see (and touch) for themselves how the facility’s research can help them improve their success.

“This station is about you,” Hamm told them.

Oregon company sees bright future in tall wooden buildings

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Freres Lumber Co. of Lyons, Ore., has received a \$250,000 U.S. Forest Service grant that will help it gear up for what the company sees as an emerging market: Using wood products in tall building construction.

The company will apply the money to buying and installing a computer numeric code — CNC — milling machine for its \$23 million Mass Plywood Panel plant that is under construction in Linn County.

Mass plywood panels, like cross-laminated timbers, show strong potential for use in tall wooden buildings. Engineered timber panels can be used for walls and floors, beams and more, and are touted as a carbon-neutral replacement for concrete and steel. Tall wooden buildings are under construction in Portland, and Oregon State University’s forestry and engineering programs recently teamed with the University of Oregon’s architecture program to form the TallWood Design Institute at the OSU campus. It’s the nation’s first research partnership to focus on the advance of structural wood products.

The Freres company’s Mass Plywood Plant, set to open in January, will be capable of producing panels that are up to 24 inches thick, 12 feet wide and 48 feet long. The CNC machine uses computer-aided design and machining technology to saw door and window spaces in

the panels, which are made from layers of veneer.

Rob Freres, executive vice president, believes his company’s product is a better option than Cross Laminated Timbers, which are made from joined pieces of lumber.

Mass plywood panels require less wood fiber, weigh less and are more versatile, he said.

“It does have great promise,” Freres said.

He said veneer for the panels can be produced from small trees, the “suppressed understory” that can be harvested from public forests without the controversy that accompanies old-growth logging.

The panel plant, under construction halfway between Lyons and Mill City, also provides a way to revitalize rural Oregon, Freres said. It will use “cranes and robots” to move the large panels, but will employ 20 people per shift, he said.

“It is exciting,” he said. “We’re part of a cyclical business, and as such we’ve been very conservative financially. We’ve internally financed this so we don’t have bankers keeping us awake at night.”

While confident about the company’s move, Freres said the timber industry as a whole won’t recover until changes are made in the management of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management timber.

The process needs to make use of what’s available and to stay competitive, he said.

“All of this takes forest management and the harvest of trees,” Freres said.

In brief

Mills chosen for leadership program

EO Media Group

HERMISTON, Ore. — Mackenzie Mills, who works in sales and account management for River Point Farms, has been accepted in the 2017-18 United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program.

Mills was one of 15 candidates from across the country selected for the program, sponsored by a grant from DuPont Crop Protection. During the year-long fellowship, participants will meet and train with top industry experts.

“River Point Farms is very excited for Mackenzie,” said Bob Hale, company president and CEO. “From the many applicants, the 15 people accepted into the program represent the top talent from the top companies in the produce industry. This is a huge honor for her, and an indication of her high talent level.”

The United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program has graduated more than 200 people since it launched in 1995. For more information, visit www.unitedfresh.org.

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