

‘A great way to teach people about where their food comes from’

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to ask patrons what they enjoy about the menu and atmosphere, in preparation for another episode about apples.

They and show host Kristi Gorenson will return later to speak with the restaurant’s chef about the apple dishes he prepares.

After a quick lunch, they’re off to Mabton, Wash., to interview farmer Hilario Alvarez, who raises peppers, eggplants, corn, potatoes, peanuts and okra.

“Washington Grown,” now in its fifth season, is funded by nine state agricultural groups and organizations. Their goal is to promote the many crops grown across the state and educate consumers about the connection between the food they eat and the farmers who grow it.

As director of photography Ryan Rowe films, Guzman and den Hoed walk along the rows of grape vines, talking about the difference between raising grapes for juice and grapes for wine. Later, Rowe uses a drone to record video footage from the air of den Hoed’s vineyard.

Den Hoed most wanted to tell viewers about the healthful qualities of concord grape juice.

The 22-minute TV show, he said, gives people more knowledge about the crop and how it is raised.

And it’s reaching its biggest audience yet.

Where to watch

“Washington Grown” used to air on Northwest Cable News in Idaho, Oregon and Washington and on PBS in Eastern Washington. After the program won a regional Emmy award for an Interview-Discussion Program, Seattle TV station KOMO expressed interest in airing it.

Viewership has more than quadrupled since the move in January, said Chris Voigt, executive director of the Washington State Potato Commission, which helps produce the show. The number of viewers used to average 5,000 households per week, he said.

“Now with KOMO, we’re up anywhere between 20,000 and 30,000,” he said.

Ag in disguise

“It’s an ag show disguised as a food show,” Voigt said. “There’s a real desire to learn about farming and reconnect with food. To understand you’re not just getting food in a restaurant or a grocery store



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

“Washington Grown” director of photography Ryan Rowe films Sunnyside, Wash., farmer Art den Hoed with host Tomas Guzman while shooting a segment in his vineyard.

— there’s actually a whole big story behind it.”

Viewers tune in to see a chef talk about preparing a potato dish, “and then you hear the story about how the potatoes got there,” Voigt said.

Farmers also talk about their efforts to conserve water, control weeds or deal with labor problems.

The show may cover processing or the transportation system, showing viewers a refrigerated rail car that will take Washington french fries to New York.

Host Kristi Gorenson, a Spokane news radio anchor and producer, grew up in Puyallup, which is known for its fields of berries and daffodils. Her first jobs were picking blueberries and daffodils for two local farms, she said.

“I thought the idea for the show was a great way to teach people about where their food comes from,” Gorenson said. “I’ve learned so much about how crops are grown, harvested and processed. And I’ve learned some pretty great recipes from awesome chefs, too.”

Because PBS stations don’t have commercials, the show must shoot an additional five to six minutes for those outlets. The segments feature a chef who teaches viewers how to prepare a dish at home, or an expert who talks about a crop’s nutritional value.

The new season will include a produce manager offering tips on how to store fruits and veg-

etables.

Ideas for the show come from a brainstorming session involving different agricultural groups. They select commodities and crops, and consider which growers or restaurants to highlight.

“We don’t always use restaurants in downtown Seattle,” Voigt said. “It may be some little mom and pop in Walla Walla or Dayton.”

The list of possible topics is virtually endless, Voigt said. The state’s farmers grow more than 300 different crops each year. Anything is fair game, including controversial subjects.

“This show is all about transparency, laying it out there and showing the public what it really looks like to farm or ranch,” Voigt said.

The Emmy award-winning episode featured GMO sweet corn.

“Someone said, ‘Man, do we even tell consumers that?’ and we were like, ‘Heck yeah, we’re going to tell consumers that! It’s an amazing trait that’s really done great things for the sweet corn folks,’” Voigt said. “People want to hear it. Lots of times, they’ll hear the activist’s side or the environmentalist’s side, but what about the farm side? When you can arm a consumer with both sides of the story, they’re better able to make a judgment call.”

Future funding

The potato commission, Washington Association of

The on-air faces of ‘Washington Grown’



Host Kristi Gorenson is a Spokane news anchor and producer for Newsradio 920 KXLY.



Host and director of photography Tomas Guzman grew up surrounded by agriculture in the Yakima Valley.



Co-host Val Thomas-Matson is a Seattle television producer and has appeared on many public affair programs.

“Washington Grown” airs on KOMO-TV at 3:30 p.m. Sundays, with other showings; on KSPS in Eastern Washington at 4:30 p.m. on Sundays and at 7 p.m. on Mondays; and on KIMA and KEPR in in Yakima and Pasco at 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Times are subject to change.

ONLINE: <http://www.wagrown.com/>

Wheat Growers, Washington State Seed Potato Commission and Washington Friends of Farms and Forests created the TV show in 2013.

The potato commission took over production the third season. It has received USDA specialty crop block grants administered by the state Department of Agriculture — \$300,000 for the fifth season and \$250,000 for the sixth season.

Each 13-episode season costs \$375,000 to produce.

The commission must find \$75,000 in addition to the grant for season five, and \$125,000 for the sixth season, Voigt said.

Voigt said he is confident funding will come together for the sixth season.

Whether the show continues from there depends on the level of funding, he said.

“We’re kind of at the point now where we really have to find some other agricultural groups to help support this,” he said.

Once a farm or commodity group has contributed to the program, the show makes footage available to the group for marketing.

“We have no ownership issues,” Voigt said. “We want this to go everywhere, as far as it will reach. It’s all about telling the story of farming and food.”

Show's potential

Kara Rowe, the former outreach and affairs director for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, now works for North by Northwest, a Spokane company, as executive producer of “Washington Grown.”

In the beginning, “...it was that idea of ‘Let’s try to get ag

all together to do something,” she said. “We knew that individually, there’s only so much you can do, but as a group, we can move mountains.”

Rowe is gratified to see so many commodities unite to develop the show. Fifth season sponsors are the potato commission, Washington Apple Commission, Washington Red Raspberry Commission, Washington State Conservation Commission, Washington Wine Commission, Washington State Mint Commission, PCC Farmland Trust, the Washington State Grape Society and Washington Hospitality Association.

“To see this effort that has now gone from wheat and potatoes to potatoes, wine, beef, dairy, grape juice growers — the whole spectrum of specialty crops — we’ve always talked about how Washington is a melting pot of agriculture, but we get to see it first-hand,” she said.

The best part, Rowe said, is hearing people in Seattle say how much they love the show, and that they are learning about food and farming.

“To see the consumers on the other end, those soccer moms and food-buying decision-makers, actually influenced by this little thing we concocted a few years ago is pretty amazing,” she said. “It’s made the impact we hoped it would.”

Most popular

The most popular segment of “Washington Grown” is about L&L onion farm near Pasco. The episode, from the first season, is on the YouTube

website and has received more than 41,400 views, said Karla Salp, communications and outreach specialist for the state Department of Agriculture.

The farming segments appear to be most popular, she said.

Salp said she’s not surprised by the level of enthusiasm for the show’s message.

“To them, farming is unique and a little bit weird and ‘Who does that any more? Not too many people, right?’” she said.

That lack of a shared background makes it difficult for farmers and consumers to connect, Salp said.

“When you explain to people how it really works, most people are just really open to learning about that and change those (preconceived) beliefs, especially when you hear it from a farmer who’s actually doing it ... and shows them the truth about how things are grown,” she said.

Den Hoed, the grape farmer, said he enjoys watching the show. He knows a lot about his crop, but the show offers a chance to learn more about the kinds of agriculture with which he has less experience.

“There’s a lot of different things that are important ... that we know very little about on the crops that we don’t raise,” he said.

After filming, den Hoed’s enthusiasm was evident. He shook hands with each member of the “Washington Grown” production team.

“If it didn’t turn out, come again,” he told them. “It was kind of fun.”

Critics: Oregon’s publicly managed forests are primed for disastrous fires

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scads of tourists. The chair of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners mourned the damage to what she called “our playground.”

The Eagle Creek Fire lit up the Gorge like a vision from hell. It began Sept. 2, jumped to 10,000 acres by mid-week and merged with the Indian Creek Fire to cover 20,000 acres.

It filled Portland with dense smoke that obliterated all scenic views. It dusted cars and porches with tiny bits of ash, forced evacuations, closed I-84 from Troutdale east to Hood River and threatened the 92-year-old lodge at Multnomah Falls, the state’s most popular natural site with 2.5 million annual visitors.

Oregon State Police said fireworks started the fire. They’ve interviewed a 15-year-old Vancouver, Wash., boy and described

him as a “suspect.”

Pushed by hot, boisterous east winds, the Eagle Creek Fire hurled flaming debris up to three-quarters of a mile and even jumped the Columbia to start a fire on the Washington side. About 150 hikers on the Eagle Creek trail system had to retreat, stop in place overnight or hike out to Wautum Lake, but were successfully evacuated.

Citing smoke and heat, Portland public schools sent students home two hours early Sept. 5 and canceled soccer games and sports practices. Many of the city’s hardcore bicycle commuters wore handkerchiefs to cover their noses and mouths. The sun and moon took turns glowing orange in the smoke filled sky. The Oregon Department of Agriculture expressed concern that farmworkers might be breathing smoke while working outside in orchards and vineyards.

If Portlanders were stunned



Don Ryan/Associated Press

The downtown skyline is visible through hazy smoke from wildfires in Portland, Ore., Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2017. The dozens of fires burning across the Western United States and Canada have blanketed the air with choking smoke from Oregon to Colorado, where health officials issued an air quality advisory alert.

by the wildfire’s leaping fury, many rural Oregonians and people who work in natural resource industries said the state, and much of the West, is paying the price of paralyzed forest management policy.

Critics say the state’s publicly managed forests are

primed for disastrous fires. They believe timberland agencies, especially the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service, are shackled by decades of lawsuits and continued argument over endangered species, wildlife habitat, logging roads and water quality.

A stark statistic illustrates the state of affairs: Federal agencies manage 60 percent of Oregon’s forestland, nearly 18 million acres, but that land accounts for just 15 percent of the annual timber harvest, according to the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

The institute was created by the Oregon Legislature to enhance collaboration and to provide information about responsible forest management. One of its more recent reports estimated more than 350 million individual trees are standing dead on national forestland, providing ready fuel for catastrophic fires.

Nick Smith, executive director of a group called Healthy Forests Healthy Communities, said many urban and suburban residents in Portland, Seattle and elsewhere “don’t understand the grave conditions on the ground in our federally-owned forests.” Much of the forested landscape is at risk to

fire, disease and insects due to dense and overgrown conditions, he said.

“What we’re seeing right now is just how outdated and unresponsive our current federal management policies are to conditions on the ground,” Smith said.

His group and others believe federal forest agencies lack the funding and legal and policy tools to increase logging and thinning. In particular, they believe fire suppression costs should be treated as other forms of disaster relief, like hurricanes. The Forest Service spends half its budget on wild-fire suppression, Smith said.

Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden agree, but haven’t been able to bring about change. In a statement issued Sept. 6, Merkley said the fires “reinforce how important it is to get a long-term fix that would fund fighting huge wildfires the way that we fund other natural disasters.”

Using CRISPR to alter genes doesn’t fall under USDA’s regulatory purview

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other genes that improve yield, potentially making camelina more economically attractive, she said.

However, the company’s main goal is to apply what it learns from the gene-edited camelina to increase the oil content of canola or soybeans, Snell said.

Those crops are tougher to edit with CRISPR technology, whereas the process can be studied more

readily in camelina.

“It’s very easy to work with. We can gather a lot of data quickly with camelina,” she said.

Because the gene-edited cultivar isn’t regulated by USDA, the company can move seeds across state lines and conduct field trials without obtaining a permit, Snell said.

“It really helps shorten the timeline and the cost,” she said.

Yield10 doesn’t aim to become a seed producer, so it

would likely license the trait to another company for commercialization, Snell said.

Using CRISPR to alter genes doesn’t fall under USDA’s regulatory purview, but the views of trading partners, such as the European Union, are still evolving, said Snell.

“The jury is still out in these foreign countries,” she said.

The reaction of export markets to gene-edited crops will become apparent once they’re grown on a commercial scale, said Mary Boote, executive

director of the Global Farmer Network, which advocates for biotechnology and trade.

“There’s no decision yet because there’s nothing available,” she said.

Unlike most biotech crops that are widely grown, those edited with CRISPR don’t incorporate genes from other organisms, Boote said.

That distinction may eliminate the “yuck factor” that has complicated public acceptance of biotechnology in agriculture, she said.

“It should theoretically not be an issue because it’s altering a gene that’s already in the plant,” Boote said. “I think it’s going to be looked at differently than other technologies.”

The Center for Food Safety, a nonprofit that’s critical of USDA, is concerned that USDA didn’t study the gene-edited cultivar’s potential to cross-pollinate with conventional camelina, which may hinder exports.

“I don’t think that even

entered into consideration,” said Bill Freese, the group’s science policy analyst. “You really need to look at those things.”

Freese said that crops edited with CRISPR will also be met with resistance, even though the biotech industry claims they’re more acceptable because they lack foreign genes.

“That’s not the case. People are concerned about the gene-mutating methods that are used,” he said.