

People & Places

Pollen as a cash crop

Pollen Collection and Sales helps farmers, chefs with their unique needs

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**
For the Capital Press

VISALIA, Calif. — In the 1930s, Washington state native Mina Firman came up with the revolutionary idea of collecting tree pollen.

"I am sure everyone thought she was crazy," said Gary Woolley, general manager of Pollen Collection and Sales. "She was the grandmother of the company's founder, Rebb Firman, and worked with a science professor on this innovation."

Today the company collects and sells various types of fruit and nut tree pollen to help farmers achieve maximum production in their orchards and groves. In addition, a sister company, Pollen Ranch, is the only company in the U.S. that processes the fennel pollen used in restaurants worldwide, Woolley said.

In the beginning, collecting and extracting pollen from tree flowers was labor-intensive. It still is, but today the company has refined the process with more automation.

The company began in the Yakima, Wash., area with supplying pollen to cherry growers. It has since expanded to supply pollen to growers of such trees as almond, avocado, pistachio, kiwi, plum and others.



Courtesy of Gary Woolley

Gary Woolley, general manager of Pollen Collection and Sales, has carved out a special niche. The innovative California company collects and sells pollen.

"There are two divisions of the company: the Collection and Sales is the agricultural part and the fennel encompasses the Pollen Ranch spice division," Woolley said.

Most pollen does not taste like much, but fennel pollen is a notable exception. The fennel plant itself is prized for the licorice flavor of its leaves and seeds. That flavor carries over to its pollen with a butterscotch, sweet richness.

The pollination season for the spice begins in February and extends to the end of April, Woolley said.

Pollen Ranch collects the fennel pollen from fields in Northern California. One field on Mare Island in the Delta has 50 acres of fennel. The fennel is collected by hand, cleaned of debris and dried and put into containers at the company's nearby Lemon Cove plant.

"The pollen collection division of the company is quite different," Woolley said. "We have arrangements with growers (50-75 in the state) to have access to their cherry, pistachio, almond and other orchards."

The pollination season takes place during the "popcorn stage" when the petals are closed around the pollen anther. Large crews hand-pick the petals and take them to the processing facility in Goshen, near Visalia.

"Workers put the petals into a machine that we developed," Woolley said. "The petals are removed and pollen anthers fall into a screen."

After sorting, the pollen is put in a controlled drying facility. From start to finish, the process takes two to three days, he said.



Western Innovator

Gary Woolley
Residence: Exeter, Calif.

Occupation: General manager, Pollen Collection and Sales and Pollen Ranch

Quote: "We really think about the customer and deliver high quality and value."

"The process does not harm the orchards, it increases the pollen yield," Woolley said. "We go through the fields once. There are tons of flowers in an orchard."

"Controlled pollination with almond, pistachio and other crops is helping the bees along," said Duncan Smith, who has farmland in Sacramento County. "It's becoming more and more acceptable. ... We are losing farmland. Gary's process helps increase yields."

The clean pollen is stored in plastic freezer bags. Growers can call and request additional pollen when necessary. The procedure typically increases pollination by 10-20 percent.

"The biggest challenge we face is not drought but being able to get enough pollen to fill the orders," Woolley said.

European court sides with Italian farmer on GMOs

By **VANESSA GERA**
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union court has ruled in favor of an Italian activist farmer who has defied his nation's laws by planting genetically modified corn.

Italy has prosecuted Giorgio Fidenato for cultivating the corn on his land, citing concerns the crops could endanger human health.

But the European Court of Justice ruled Sept. 13 that a member state such as Italy does not have the right to ban GM crops given that there is no scientific reason for doing so. It noted the European Commission in 1998 authorized the use of the specific maize seeds Fidenato planted, finding "no reason to believe



Paolo Giovannini/Associated Press

In this 2010 photo, Giorgio Fidenato holds a raw ear of genetically modified yellow corn at his office in Pordenone, Italy. The European Union Court of Justice has ruled in favor of Fidenato, saying Italy had no right to ban GMO crops given that there is no scientific evidence they are hazardous.

that that product would have any adverse effects on human health or the environment," Fidenato, whose fields lie

in Pordenone, northeastern Italy, became persuaded of the benefits of genetically altered crops during a visit to the United States in the 1990s, seeing that they require fewer chemicals than traditional crops and produce higher yields and profits.

But he has faced huge opposition in Italy, where many are fearful that genetically altered foods are less natural than traditional crops and could be dangerous. He has faced both fines from the government and the wrath of anti-GM activists who have destroyed his crops.

The current case dates to 2013, when Italy asked the European Commission to adopt emergency measures prohibiting the planting of the seeds, which are produced by

U.S. company Monsanto, on the basis of Italian scientific studies.

But the Commission disputed the Italian studies, citing a scientific opinion by the European Food Safety Authority that there was "no new science-based evidence" that the seeds could be dangerous.

The Italian government nonetheless went ahead with a decree prohibiting the cultivation of the corn, and prosecuted Fidenato and other farmers who planted their fields with the corn in defiance.

After the ruling Fidenato expressed satisfaction with the decision, saying he and the other farmers involved in the suit finally feel as if "justice is on our side."

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, Sept. 24

Washington State Fair. 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Fairground in Puyallup, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. The Washington State Fair, commonly referred to as the Puyallup Fair, is the largest single attraction held annually in Washington. Website: www.thefair.com/

Saturday, Sept. 23

15th Annual Yamhill-Carlton FFA Alumni Benefit Dinner and Auction. 5-9 p.m. Carlton Legion Hall, 158 East Main St., Carlton, Ore. Social hour and silent auction start at 5 p.m. Dinner and live auction are at 7 p.m. Tables for eight may be reserved for \$100 and individual tickets may be purchased the night of the event for \$15. All proceeds from this event directly benefit the Yamhill Carlton FFA Chapter through the funding of scholarships, student leadership training, travel to events and more. To reserve tables contact Doreen Van De Grift at 503-319-1948. For more information contact us at ycffa.alumni@gmail.com

Goat Education Day. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. OSU Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center

Auditorium, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Choose four classes from a selection of 11, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, for \$35. Or choose two morning classes and cheesemaking in the afternoon for \$50. Class topics are geared to both beginner and advanced goat owners from Getting Ready for Kidding Season and Holistic Goat Care to the foundations of Nutrition and Feed and the Making of Goat Milk Soaps and Lotions. Presenters include Dr. Charles Estill, OSU veterinarian; Gianacis Caldwell, author; and Christina Strickland and others from the Rogue Valley Dairy Goat Association. Register online at <http://bit.ly/JacksonGoatEdDay2017> or call 541-776-7371. Ask about a youth discount. Cost: \$35 to \$50. Website: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/SF-classes>

Beef Quality Workshop. 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Sierra Foothills Research and Extension Center, 8279 Scott Forbes Road, Browns Valley, Calif. General beef quality assurance, transporting cattle, rangeland-pasture water quality self-assessment and handling cattle in the corral are on the agenda. Cost: \$15 person, \$20 per ranch. Website: <http://ucanr.edu/bqasurvey>

Youth ATV Certification Classes. 10 a.m.-noon. Oregon ATV Safety is a youth rider endorsement program, started in response to the rising number of ATV-related injuries and deaths. Oregon state law requires youth, 15 years of age and

younger, to receive a hands-on endorsement of their ATV riding skills. They must possess an endorsed All-Terrain Safety Education Card to ride on public lands. Before registering the child must take an online class to get their OPRD ATV Safety Education Card. The course is found at: rideATVoregon.org. For more information contact instructor Robin Galloway, Linn County 4-H faculty, at 541-730-3469, or robin.galloway@oregonstate.edu. Lebanon, Ore. Cost: \$25. Website: http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/ATV/pages/hands_on_training.aspx

Sunday, Sept. 24

Summer Farm Day. Noon-4 p.m. Ruby & Amber's Farm, Dorena, Ore. Sponsored by the Willamette Farm & Food Coalition. Website: willamettefarmandfood.org

Wednesday, Sept. 27

Sustainable Community Stewards Volunteer Training. 6-9:15 p.m. McCollum Park, 600 128th St. SE, Everett, Wash. Cost: \$30 Website: <http://extension.wsu.edu/snohomish/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/11/2017-SCS-Application-form.doc>

Thursday, Sept. 28

Willamette Valley Oilseed Producers Association Annual Meeting. 7:30-10 a.m. Roth's West Salem, 1130 Wallace Road NW, Salem, Ore. Join us for our annual meeting and learn about canola production in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. A complimentary breakfast will be provided beginning at 7:30 a.m.

RSVP to Kathy Hadley at 503-559-5901 or kathyfree17@aol.com.

14th annual Oregon Farm Bureau Classic Golf Tournament. 12:30-6 p.m. Stone Creek Golf Club, 14603 S. Stoneridge Drive, Oregon City, Ore. A fundraiser for the Oregon Farm Bureau PAC. Website: <http://oregonfb.org/events-2/>

Friday, Sept. 29

Fall Forestry Educational Seminar. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Cowlitz Regional Conference Center, 1900 Seventh Ave. SW, Longview, Wash. Sponsored by the Washington Tree Farm Program, this seminar includes information on managing and maintaining tree farms. ATFS certified tree Farmers are \$70 (\$105 with spouse), others are \$80 (\$120 with spouse). Register by Sept. 8. Website: watreefarm.org

Tuesday-Wednesday Oct. 3-4

Drone World Expo 2017. San Jose Convention Center, 150 W. San Carlos St., San Jose, Calif. The Expo will feature a robust exhibit floor, visionary keynote speakers, timely and industry-leading educational programs and networking events. The business-to-business event attracts over 3,000 professional attendees from a variety of industries from agriculture to law enforcement. Website: www.drone-worldexpo.com

Wednesday, Oct. 4

Sustainable Community Stew-

ards Volunteer Training. 6-9:15 p.m. McCollum Park, 600 128th St. SE, Everett, Wash. Cost: \$30 Website: <http://extension.wsu.edu/snohomish/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/11/2017-SCS-Application-form.doc>

Friday, Oct. 6

Goat workshop. 5:30-8:30 p.m. Creswell Community Center, 99 S. First St., Creswell, Ore. Basic health topics such as diseases to be aware of, vaccinations and hoof health. Nutritive values of feeds including browse, hay, grains, and protein and mineral supplements. Poisonous plants for goats and methods for weed management. The presenters will be Dr. Charles Estill, Shelby Filley, OSU Extension Service Livestock and Forage Specialist and Melissa Fery, OSU Extension Service small farms agent. Website: <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/south-valley/events>

Saturday, Oct. 7

Hoop House Production Workshop. 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Western Nevada College Fallon Campus, 160 Campus Way, Fallon, Nev. Taught by a seasoned professional with a background in research and commercial production, the workshop is ideal for intermediate or advanced growers. Attendees will learn about best practices that apply to all hoop house production, the eight most profitable crops, best practices for vining, fruiting and leafy crops and advanced practices and techniques for hoop house production. Website: www.wnc.edu/specialty-crop-institute

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Correction

A story published in the Sept. 15 editions of the Capital Press understated the amount of grass straw exported each year from the Willamette Valley of Oregon. More than 600,000 tons of straw is exported each year.

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