

People & Places

Improving crops, waterfowl habitat

Marc Staunton rotates between growing crops and seasonal wetlands

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

TULELAKE, Calif. — Fourth-generation farmer Marc Staunton employs one of the most innovative crop rotations in the country.

On different segments of a 3,500-acre plot within the Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Staunton makes rotations based on a four-year cycle. He plants grains, then potatoes and then returns to grains, and in the fourth year he follows the field and floods it to create seasonal wetlands.

About 20 years ago, his family's Staunton Farms helped spearhead a project called Walking Wetlands, in which growers with co-op contracts or leases to farm within the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges are bringing wetlands back to an area that was once a massive lake.

Soil improves

The approach has resulted in higher yields and overall quality of the crops while enhancing the habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, Staunton said. He and others argue the project also improves water quality as it drains into the Klamath River.

"The basic principle is that when you restore water ... it instantly revitalizes the soil," Staunton, 32, told about 50 community members during a recent tour of area farms.

He said the farmers have been able to reduce nematode and disease pressure without using pesticides.

"Increasing your yield because the ground is healthy is a good thing," Staunton said, adding that growers have also seen an increased population of waterfowl.

Staunton has had so much success with the practice that he's initiated it on about 500 acres of private ground, rotating in seasonal wetlands under the guidance of the local water district and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Overall, the family farms about 7,000 acres in the Klamath Basin, which straddles the Oregon-California state line.

"I think we somewhat have a niche here because of our ecosystem," Staunton said in an interview. "It's not difficult to return to that nat-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Fourth-generation farmer Marc Staunton stands near wetlands on the Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Northern California. He and others do rotational cropping on the refuge, which he says replenishes the soil and provides a healthy habitat for migrating birds.

ural ecosystem. We put water on a field and all of the sudden we're back to seeing the native plants and species that were here 100 years ago."

Founded in 1927

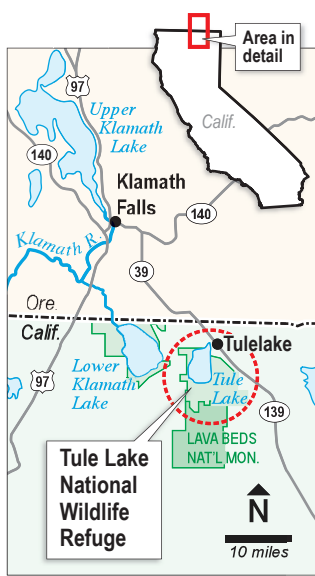
Staunton Farms was founded in 1927 by Marc's great-grandfather, a World War I veteran who homesteaded the land and began raising sheep. The family later began growing potatoes, and now potatoes and onions are the main focus, Staunton said. The business is in its 13th year of growing organic crops on some of its acreage, he said.

Initiated in 1905, the Klamath Reclamation Project drained the historic lakes and marshes of the Upper Klamath Basin to create dry land for farming. In the midst of the project's development, the Lower Klamath and Tule Lake wildlife refuges were set aside by executive orders in 1908 and 1928, respectively, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1964 Kuchel Act

Farms can enter leases or cooperatives with the federal government to grow row crops within the refuges as a result of the 1964 Kuchel Act, which allows them as long as they're conducive to proper waterfowl management.

Amid growing pressure from environmental groups to convert the refuges back



Capital Press graphic

to natural habitat, farmers began to collaborate in seeking ways to improve waterfowl habitat while maintaining food production, Staunton said.

The result was the Walking Wetlands project, for which growers now flood about 1,100 acres in the Tule Lake refuge and another 1,100 acres in the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge each year, he said.

"We started in 1998 blocking out farmland so it can be rotated to seasonal wetlands," Staunton said. "It was a grassroots effort. We said, 'Why kick us off of there? Why not work together to develop that system that recognizes your need of increasing waterfowl habitat, of increasing their food sources and healthy

marsh land, but then also still being able to farm it?' In turn we're using less pesticides and less inputs and creating a healthier net environment for both sides."

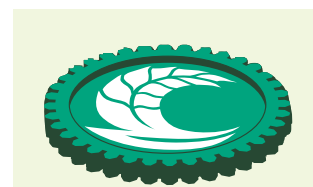
The project enabled Staunton Farms to develop a "more sustainable" way to grow potatoes by increasing the fertility of the soil through natural nematode and disease suppression, he said. The standing water, decomposing plants and bird droppings all make the soil more fertile when it's put back into production, Staunton and other project participants said.

"It kind of worked out better than we could have imagined," he said. "It developed into something we use more widely than just with organic production. It can be used for organic and conventional."

Lawsuit filed

Environmental groups aren't sold on the concept, however. WaterWatch, Oregon Wild and the Audubon Society of Portland filed suit earlier this year in U.S. District Court in Medford, Ore., to force the refuge managers to phase out farming in their 15-year conservation plan so more water could be reserved for wildlife.

Current management practices in the refuges have "reduced wetland habitat for important bird migrations on the Pacific Flyway, increased disease, and increased the



Western Innovator

Marc Staunton

Age: 32

Residence: Tulelake, Calif.

Occupation: Part-owner, Staunton Farms

Family: Wife, Ami; children Parker, 8, Graham, 5, Marley, 3, and Elliott, 1

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Correction

In a story on page 5 of last week's editions about promoting the dairy industry, the name of the Smoky Mountain Pizzeria Grill was incorrect. 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.

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.

Saturday-Sunday Oct. 21-22

Home Orchard Society's All About Fruit Show. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Clackamas County Fairplex, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. Taste hundreds of varieties of apples, pears, kiwi and grapes. If you find a variety of fruit that you'd like to grow, you can place an order for a custom-grafted fruit tree. Bring your unknown apples for sleuthing by the Apple ID team. Local experts will present on a variety of fruit-growing topics both days of the event. Admission is \$7 per person or \$12 per family (members pay \$5 each or \$10 for families). Website: http://www.homeorchardsociety.org/events/

Wednesday, Oct. 25

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

Wednesday-Saturday Oct. 25-28

90th National FFA Convention and Expo. Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, Ind. Website: https://www.ffa.org/

Thursday, Oct. 26

UI Cover Crop Field Day. 1:30-5 p.m. USDA-NRCS Gooding office, 820 Main St., Gooding, Idaho. Incorporating cover crops into cropping systems. Cost: Free

Thursday-Saturday Oct. 26-28

Washington State Sheep Producers Annual meeting and convention. Hilltop Inn, 928 NW Olsen St., Pullman, Wash. Among the many events on the agenda are presentations by the Washington State University Department of Animal Sciences, the University of Idaho Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences and by Dr. Brian Joseph, Washington State Veterinarian. Website: www.wssp.org

Wednesday, Nov. 1

Sustainable Community Stewards Volunteer Training. 6-9:15 p.m. McCollum Park, 600 128th St. SE, Everett, Wash. Cost: \$30 Website: http://bit.ly/2hjyXC4

Wednesday-Friday Nov. 1-3

Weed Conference. Wenatchee Convention Center, 121 N Wenatchee Ave., Wenatchee, Wash. The conference will feature more than 40 topics and speakers, trade shows, state license and certified crop adviser credits. Website: info@weedconference.org

Thursday, Nov. 2

Four-Part Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop 6-8:30 p.m. Online or Clackamas Community College Harmony Campus, 7738 SE Harmon Road, Milwaukie, Ore. Learn from an attorney, an accountant, an appraiser, a banker, the di-

rector of Oregon State University's Austin Family Business Program and farmers who've been through the process. Receive free one-on-one succession counseling sessions between each event. Part one of four parts. Cost: Free. Website: http://bit.ly/2elYcPx

Monday-Tuesday Nov. 6-7

Washington Dairy Conference & Trade Show. Yakima Convention Center, 10 N. Eighth St., Yakima, Wash. Annual meeting activities, plus time to catch up with fellow producers, sponsors and exhibitors. The Dairy Women will host their scholarship auction. Both the Dairy Federation and the Dairy Women will hold annual membership meetings. The Dairy Farmers of Washington will hold their board meeting. Website: http://wastatedairy.com/

Wednesday, Nov. 8

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

Wednesday-Thursday Nov. 8-9

United Dairywomen of Idaho-Dairy West Annual Meeting. Boise Center, 850 W. Front St., Boise, Idaho. This year's theme is "Pioneers by Nature" and includes an expo, Milk Quality Awards banquet, presentations and the Dairy Hall of Fame banquet. Website: http://idahodairy.com/annual-meeting/

Friday, Nov. 10

Central Oregon Ag Seminar. 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Pronghorn

Resort, 65600 Pronghorn Club Drive, Bend, Ore. Join friends and colleagues in Central Oregon at the annual ag seminar in the Bend area presented by Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt; Harvest Capital; and Geffen Mesher. Topics Include Organizing Your Agri-Business; Organizing Your Finances and Financial Statements; Water Rights; Knowing What You Have and Making the Most of Them; Organizing Your Affairs; Estate Planning for Farms and Ranches; and Organizing for Tax Effects: Entity Selection and Dissolution. Website: RSVP at http://bit.ly/2y92rtc

Saturday-Sunday Nov. 11-12

OFB Young Farmers & Ranchers Leadership Conference. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Oregon Farm Bureau office, 1320 Capitol St. NE, Salem. Keynote speakers will be Kim Bremmer of Ag Inspirations, a nationally recognized motivational speaker who will discuss communication and advocacy in agriculture, and Derek Pangelinan of Derek Rey Consulting, the developer of "The 6 Perspectives of Leadership," a model for teaching leadership skills. Speakers include Mary Anne Cooper, OFB Public Policy Counsel; Jenny Dresler, OFB Director of State Public Policy; Doug Hoffman, Wilco president and CEO; Joanne Humphrey of Aldrich CPAs and Advisors; Sarah Brown of Oregon Till; Andrea Kraemer of Northwest Farm Credit Services; John Williams of Oregon State University Extension, Wallawa County; Jana Peterson of the Oregon Department of Forestry; and Stacy Davies, Country Natural Beef and Roaring Springs Ranch. Cost: \$40 for Farm Bureau members age 16-35. Website: http://oregonfb.org/yfconference

Tuesday-Wednesday Nov. 14-15

Washington Farm Bureau Annual Meeting. Yakima Convention Center, 10 N. Eighth St., Yakima, Wash. Website: www.wsfb.com

Tuesday-Thursday Nov. 14-16

Willamette Valley Ag Expo, Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. The expo is over 250,000 square feet of exhibitors, equipment, seminars, classes, food and fun. The Ag expo is put on each year by the Willamette Valley Ag Association. The WVAA is a nonprofit and proceeds from the Ag Expo go toward the association's college scholarships. Hours are 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Wednesday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday. Website: www.wvaexpo.com

Thursday, Nov. 16

Four-Part Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop 6-8:30 p.m. Online or Clackamas Community College Harmony Campus, 7738 SE Harmon Road, Milwaukie, Ore. Learn from an attorney, an accountant, an appraiser, a banker, the director of Oregon State University's Austin Family Business Program and farmers who've been through the process. Receive free one-on-one succession counseling sessions between each event. Part two of four parts. Cost: Free. Website: http://bit.ly/2elYcPx

Friday, Nov. 17

Denim and Diamonds Dinner Auction. 5-9 p.m. Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland. This is the premier fundraiser for Oregon Aglink. Website: aglink.org