

Workshops promote horse power

By ALIYA HALL
Capital Press

DORENA, Ore. — While most farmers rely on tractors for help in the field, Walt Bernard of Ruby and Amber's Farm trains draft horses to work for him.

The certified organic and biodynamic farm is named after Bernard's first crew of workhorses, and he said that using workhorses on the farm is a further example of sustainable practices.

"We farm with them because they're low-petroleum impact on the soil," Bernard said. "Horses are a live power source, and you apply that the same way you'd apply a tractor to a business model, and you make that work within your system."

Now, he has eight draft horses working his land.

Bernard and his wife, Kris, established the farm in 1999, and in 2001, after receiving multiple requests, Bernard began teaching workshops on training horses and the people who want to drive them.



Aliya Hall/For the Capital Press

Walt Bernard and his intern, Anne Peterson, with draft horses they're training for a client in California. In addition to training horses, Bernard offers workshops to train people to use workhorses on the farm.

Bernard considers four variables when training:

- Do the teamsters have the skill set for what they want to do?
- Do the horses have the ability to do what the teamster wants them to do?
- Does the teamster have the right equipment?
- How will the horse and teamster handle the uncontrollable things such as crowds,

lightning strikes and hailstorms?

"The process is basically student-directed and student-driven," Bernard said. "I start with the basics. I don't make any assumptions. A lot of people come here with some horse experience and I treat them like they have none. We train with two goals in mind: keeping (teamsters) safe and teaching failsafe, secure things that are systems they can operate in and be successful."

The workshops are \$350 a person, with a six-person limit. Bernard said that he's seeing more interest this year than last.



Aliya Hall/For the Capital Press

Walt Bernard has eight draft horses that help him on the farm. He also trains the horses — and people who want to farm with them.

He attributes that to the sustainability culture and high fuel prices.

Bernard starts students with well-broke horses, and he teaches them how to handle a horse safely, as well as recognizing the behavior and mental state of the animal. These skills will help the students connect

with the horse and communicate with them by understanding what the equines are saying.

The horse's training is similar to the driver's in regards to basic consistency. After being trained with cues, harness and reins, the trainee horses will work with the well-broke horses. Over time, the trainee horses will be worked together.

"Each new task you have to take it easy at the start," Bernard said. "If (the horses are) fearful, you have to go back and break it down more."

He describes the workshop as working on a bell curve, building up the level of stress before easing back. He said it's important to build success.

"I have a 90 percent rule," Bernard said. "Unless I'm 90 percent sure they can do it, then I won't let them try it. It keeps everyone feeling successful. You don't want a loss of confidence for the humans and the horses. Horses are really sensitive to that. If you give them something too hard, they lose

confidence. You have to break it down to more steps."

Bernard said he loves to train both horses and people.

"There was very little mentorship when I started and very little training opportunities," he said. "Mentorship is the number one thing people can do to be successful."

His philosophy varies from older teamsters'. He said there wasn't as big a focus on safety considerations in the past, and in this society teachers can't afford to risk that.

"They used to say the primary thing is the horse. I look at it differently," Bernard said. "The priority is human life and human safety, then the horse; it's very close, but it's second."

The core values of his philosophy include: patience, honesty, clear communication, present moment interaction, cooperation, graduated success takes priority over goals or time, safety, positive reward-based training, progressive desensitization and principles of advance and retreat.

"Complex problems can be reduced to simple steps for a positive solution" and "the horses' perspective should be your perspective" are both mottos he includes on his website.

Bernard said his philosophy comes from feedback, mentors and updating harsh old-school philosophies to make them humane.

"There's nothing wrong with discipline, but it has to be something the horse understands," he said. "It all comes ultimately from what the horse needs."

The most rewarding aspect for Bernard is having everyone feel confident.

"For the horse, it's doing the task. For the people we train, it's seeing them going out and doing that, feeling successful," he said. "It's probably what makes me feel best. I think about it a lot, how can I make this person feel good and keep wanting to do it."



WORKHORSE



WORKSHOPS

Equine based farm learning program

DORENA, OREGON



Want to learn to drive a hitch of draft horses?
Workshops • Teamster Training • Farm School

workhorseworkshops.com

Walt Bernard • 541-510-2359
walt@workhouseworkshops.com



~ **Complete equestrian facility!** 34 acres w/18 irrig. 60 x 200 indoor arena w/ lighting, great stalls with runs, several grooming stations, washer & dryer rm. Roomy office w/bath located above the arena. Several turn out pastures, 90 x 300 outdoor arena. Two hay/equipment barns, standard barn w/ stalls and pole barn. Older manufactured 3 bdrm 2 ba home. Zoned EFU. \$750,000.

~ **79+ acre ranch, 50.1 acres flood irrigated.** Zoned EFU. Home, shop and arena sit on a knoll overlooking the valley. Gated entry, bass pond, 3796 sqft, 4 bedroom, 3 full and 2 half bath home. Covered arena, 2 tack rooms and a viewing area, fully insulated shop with 3162 sqft, 5 roll-up doors, compressed air & dust collector, wine room that is temperature & climate controlled. Completely fenced and has great hay pastures, riding trails, two ponds, seasonal creek. \$1,590,000.

HARCOURTS OREGON OPPORTUNITIES

www.HarcourtsOROP.com (800) 772-7284

L17-3/100

