

People & Places

Local seed movement takes root

Casey O'Leary
founds cooperative
that produces local
seed for growers

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Casey O'Leary is the brains behind an effort to take the local food movement one step further and ensure that people in Idaho and the Intermountain West have locally grown seed to grow that food.

O'Leary, who owns a small urban farm in Boise, is also the founder and manager of the Snake River Seed Co-operative. This group of 27 small farmers from around the region produces local seeds that are put in garden packets and sold at retail nurseries around the state.

Most of the seeds are sold to backyard gardeners while some are purchased by small-scale farmers.

"It isn't truly local food if it's grown from a seed that has to be brought in from somewhere else," said O'Leary, "We're trying to make the local seed piece come together. We're trying to connect the concept of local food grown from local seeds."

O'Leary started the cooperative four years ago. Members currently grow about 300 varieties of vegetable,



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Boise farmer Casey O'Leary talks about heirloom corn seed Jan. 20 during an organic conference in Boise. O'Leary founded and manages the Snake River Seed Cooperative, a group of 27 small farmers who grow local seeds for backyard gardeners and small-scale farmers in Idaho.

herb and flower seeds. The co-op sold about 30,000 seed packets last year.

"So we're not huge but we're growing," O'Leary said. "We want to create a robust, regional seed shed."

While the co-op has grown to include 27 farmers, "(O'Leary) is the master orchestrator behind the co-op and convincing farmers to grow more seed," said SRSC member and Middleton farmer Mike Sommer.

Sommer said his involvement in the co-op has led him to start growing more of his own seed.

"We spend thousands of dollars a year on seed and I'm sure other farmers do as well," he said. "It could save us a lot of money."

O'Leary said seed grown locally will adapt to local conditions better than seed grown in a different region.

"The longer you grow seeds in a certain location, the more they adapt to your environment, so the seeds you grow here do better here," she said. "When you buy a seed packet off the shelf, there's literally no transparency in where those

seeds have been grown."

She said the group is trying to create a culture around local seeds.

"They're not just a faceless thing you start with to grow your vegetables," she said. "They have a huge cultural history and a huge economic value, and local gardens that use local seed do better."

O'Leary said local seeds are the next frontier in the local food movement.

"So many people have made that connection between local food and how it impacts local communities and local



Western Innovator

Casey O'Leary

Age: 38

Occupation: Owner, Earthly Delights Farms, founder Snake River Seed Co-op

Hometown: Boise, Idaho

Education: Bachelor's degree in horticulture, Boise State University

Family: Husband, Brent, and dog, Ron

economies," she said. "Now we need to take it that step further and talk about the seeds that are growing the 'local' food."

She said the plan is to create a robust, regional seed shed that includes parts of Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming and Montana.

Born and raised in Boise, O'Leary turned to farming 15 years ago, partly through her experience with environmental activism and "also through getting fired from a lot of customer service jobs. I decided I should maybe work with plants instead of people."

Sprinklers give more control over irrigation

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS
For the Capital Press

Travis Youngberg grew up on a farm between Payette and Weiser, Idaho, farming with his father. He now rents some of his father's fields and an adjacent field. He has farmed this rented piece for 6 years, raising dairy alfalfa hay with wheat as a rotation.

"This particular field has a bit of slope. Flood irrigating wasn't efficient, especially with all the gopher holes," said Youngberg.

The irrigation headgate was also leaking, ready to wash out. Part of the field is lower, and the previous renter jury-rigged some old sprinkler pipe through the ditch bank to drop water down to that piece in a lower ditch, irrigating it with tail water.

"It was difficult to water that part because it was hard to adjust, and only received tail water from the other portion. I never knew when it was going



Travis Youngberg

to get there," he said.

A 40-foot bank along one side was another challenge. If a gopher made a hole in the tail ditch, the bank would erode. He needed a better way to irrigate the field and thwart erosion.

After the first year of trying to irrigate that field he talked to the landowner about using a government program through the Natural Resources Conservation Service to improve it.

"I got some cost estimates, and my landlord liked the sound of it, realizing it would help the field," said Youngberg.

The cost-share program made it feasible.

"I applied for the program and agreed to do some water management- and nutrient management-related practices, to help with funding opportunities," he said. For three years after putting in the sprinkler



NRCS

Engineers at the Natural Resources Conservation Service helped design Travis Youngberg's irrigation system.

system he did water and nutrient management.

Engineers at NRCS helped design the irrigation system and checked it out after it was installed. Crop yields have increased.

Before, with flood irrigation, there was no way to water the field evenly, especially with the gopher problem.

"Parts of the field I just couldn't get wet, and I also had to be careful on the edges so I didn't get too close to the bank and wash it out —

and the landlord's road," said Youngberg.

He kept the water quite a ways away from the edge and sacrificed a lot of that area for crops. The middle of the field also had dry areas because of gophers. He tried trapping them but more came back.

After he switched to sprinklers he could water the crop right to the edge, and manage the irrigation better.

"With flood irrigation you have to wait longer to get the water all the way to the bot-

tom of the field. By the time you get it there, you've really soaked the top; you can't give it a light irrigation. When cutting alfalfa every 28 days, I want to get the water across quickly and get it off so the ground will be dry enough."

With flood irrigation some of the top would still be wet.

"The crop might need a little more water at the bottom, but I couldn't do that because it took too long to get across the field — and by the time I was ready to cut it, it was too late. Timing on dairy hay is very critical, so I had to let it run a little bit out of water. I was stressing the crop because I didn't have enough time to get across it, and lost some tonnage," Youngberg said.

"Now with the sprinklers I can run a 12-hour set and just do a light irrigation if I need to, and adjust it to however many hours it needs," he said.

The field now yields much better than any of his flood-irrigated fields, while using less water.

Calendar

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Through Saturday Feb. 3

Agri-Action 2018. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. College of Southern Idaho Expo Center, 315 Falls Ave., Twin Falls, Idaho. Southern Idaho's largest agricultural show. Website: <http://www.kmvt.com/features/agriaction/>

Tuesday, Feb. 6

Developing or Expanding Your Farm Stand or Agritourism Operation, Part 2. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. OSU Extension, Auditorium, SOREX, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Are you interested in developing or expanding a farm stand or agritourism operation? Feb. 6 is Starting a Farm Stand/Agritourism Operation. Website: <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms>

Tuesday-Thursday Feb. 6-8

Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum. 9 a.m. Spokane Convention Center, 334 W Spokane Falls Blvd., Spokane, Presentations on the weather, ag economy and a listening session on the farm bill will be featured in addition to a full slate of workshops and the large display of equipment and services. An FFA presentation and career fair will also be offered. Website: www.agshow.org

Friday, Feb. 9

University of Idaho Cropping School. 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Best Western Plus Caldwell Inn and Suites, 908 Specht Ave., Caldwell, Idaho. Included will be updates on corn research in Idaho, high biomass sorghum, drip irrigation, soil health, small acreage farming, disease diagnostics, spore sampling and drone research. Cost: \$20. Lunch is provided. Information: Olga Walsh, owalsh@uidaho.edu, 208-722-6701

Saturday, Feb. 10

Field-to-Market Workshop. 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Miley Road, Aurora, Ore. How to produce value-added food products, and where to start. Cost: \$25 person or \$40 per couple. <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/field-market>

Friday, Feb. 16

Pesticide-free Strategies for the Landscape Professional. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Oregon City Pioneer Community Center, 615 Fifth St., Oregon City, Ore. Field session March 14. Cost: \$50 http://www.pesticide.org/healthy_landscapes_workshop

Monday, Feb. 19

Oregon Blueberry Conference. 8 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem. Program includes a blueberry production summary and trends, industry speakers and research updates, trade show and reception. Website: oregonblueberry.com

Thursday, Feb. 22

Part 1: Farm & Ranch Succession Planning Workshop. 6-8:30 p.m.

Clackamas Small Business Development Center, 7726 SE Harmony Road, Milwaukie, Ore. Register now for the four-part Farm and Ranch Succession Planning Workshop Series. No need to attend in person. You can take this workshop remotely from anywhere in the state. This program is offered and taught by the Clackamas Small Business Development Center, along with guest presenters such as attorneys and CPAs. In addition to informative topics and experienced ag professionals, courses include confidential, one-on-one business counseling. A complimentary light dinner will start each evening at 6 p.m. To register, call 503-594-0738. Cost: Free. Website: <http://bit.ly/2CX1jvl>

Thursday-Friday Feb. 22-23

Logging, Construction, Trucking & Heavy Equipment Expo. Lane County Fairgrounds and Convention Center, 796 W 13th Ave., Eugene, Ore. The exhibits, demonstrations and log-loading competition are sponsored by the Oregon Logging Conference, which is celebrating its 80th year. Included is the Oregon Women In Timber annual dinner and auction. Website: www.oregonloggingconference.com

Family Farm Alliance Annual Conference, Eldorado Resort Casino, 345 N. Virginia St., Reno, Nev. The theme of this year's conference is "One year in: What's changed and where are we going in Western water?" Website: <http://bit.ly/2hGieJU>

Friday, Feb. 23

Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training. Ontario, Ore. Growers and

others interested in learning about produce safety, the Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule, Good Agricultural Practices and co-management of natural resources and food safety. The course is one way to satisfy the FSMA Produce Safety Rule training requirement. Cost: \$25. To register, visit produce-safetyalliance.cornell.edu or contact Sue Davis at sdavis@oda.state.or.us or 503-807-5864.

Saturday, Feb. 24

Oregon Small Farms Conference 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Oregon State University LaSells Stewart Center and CH2M Hill Alumni Center, 200 LaSells Stewart Center, Corvallis, Ore. The Oregon Small Farms Conference is a daylong event geared toward farmers, agricultural professionals, food policy advocates, students and managers of farmers' markets. Twenty-seven educational sessions are offered on a variety of topics relevant to the Oregon small farmers and include a track in Spanish. Speakers include farmers, OSU Extension faculty and agribusiness representatives. Website: <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfc/registration>

Monday-Tuesday Feb. 26-27

Oregon Dairy Farmers Association Annual Convention. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. Website: <https://oregon-dairyfarmers.org>

Tuesday-Thursday March 6-8

FSPCA Preventive Controls for Animal Food. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Hilton Gar-

den Inn, 1741 Harrison St. North, Twin Falls, Idaho. The new FSMA regulation requires every processing facility to have a trained resource person who has completed a specialized training course (such as this one) developed by the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance that is recognized by the FDA. Cost: \$720/individual or \$648 per person for 2 or more. Website: <http://www.techhelp.org/events/400/fspca-animal-food-2-5-day-course-twin-falls/>

Thursday, March 8

Part 2: Farm & Ranch Succession Planning Workshop. 6-8:30 p.m. Clackamas Small Business Development Center, 7726 SE Harmony Road, Milwaukie, Ore. This workshop can be accessed remotely from anywhere in the state. This program is offered and taught by the Clackamas Small Business Development Center, along with guest presenters such as attorneys and CPAs. In addition to informative topics and experienced ag professionals, courses include confidential, one-on-one business counseling. A complimentary light dinner will start each evening at 6 p.m. To register, call 503-594-0738. Cost: Free. Website: <http://bit.ly/2CX1jvl>

Tuesday-Thursday March 20-22

International Mass Timber Conference. Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland, Ore. There will be 70-plus speakers from 20 nations and more than 60 exhibits, plus a tour of Oregon's mass timber buildings. Website: www.forestbusinessnetwork.com

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