

# People & Places

## In search of the best dairy cows

WinStar Genetics partner dairies incorporate their best producers

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
For the Capital Press

AMERICAN FALLS, Idaho — Three Idaho dairy businesses have combined their herds and resources to form a high-tech breeding company they anticipate will help improve Holstein performance worldwide.

WinStar Genetics, formed about a year ago, is a partnership involving American Falls-based Seagull Bay Dairy, Jerome-based Triple Crown Genetics and Shelley-based Cannon Dairy.

While most dairies seek to improve their herds by purchasing semen from top bulls, WinStar aims to supply the industry with "elite" genetics, explained John Andersen, with Triple Crown.

"With genomics, it's a pretty fast-moving game, and we predict it's going to be just a handful of individuals or groups that are going to provide the genetics for the entire industry," John Andersen said. "Forming this partnership is trying to make sure we're one of those groups that does that."

By pooling their animals, the partners benefit from an expanded catalog of desirable traits for breeding and a broader group of sires and surrogate cows for embryo transplants. Greg Andersen, who is John



John O'Connell/For the Capital Press

Greg Andersen, an American Falls, Idaho, dairyman who is a partner in a new dairy cow genetics company called WinStar Genetics, shows young bulls bred by the year-old business.

Andersen's brother and heads Seagull Bay Dairy, said about 20 percent of his calves result from embryo transplants, including some embryos developed in a laboratory through in vitro fertilization, which he said has gained popularity among dairies during the past five years. As a rule of thumb, Andersen said he invests about \$500 for each live calf born through IVF and embryo transfer.

"Even back in the early 1980s, my dad was one of the early adopters of embryo transfer in Idaho," Greg Andersen said. "You're trying to increase the number of offspring from your best genetic animals."

One of the top "cash cows" produced by advanced meth-

ods, named Ammon-Peachey Shauna, was voted as Holstein International's cow of the year in 2015.

"She has more than 100 offspring," Greg Andersen said, adding the cow's progeny have consistently sired or produced higher-producing cows with good milk quality, fertility and longevity. "Five or six of her best sons have been widely used throughout the world."

The WinStar partners also share an ovum pickup center in Shelley, where their technicians remove immature egg cells, called oocytes, which are placed in an incubator and transported to a Washington lab for in vitro fertilization. Prior to the WinStar partnership, Greg Andersen said his

dairy worked with a third party in Utah for its ovum pickups.

Greg Andersen said the best WinStar bulls are leased by top artificial insemination companies.

WinStar also sells top bulls, calves and embryos. WinStar uses sex-sorted semen to ensure about 90 percent of its calves are born as females.

"We'd like to have at least 1,500 calves per year from the WinStar program, and the top 20 percent from our program are going to be pretty good," Greg Andersen said.

Greg Andersen said WinStar has been expanding its global reach lately through embryo sales, which remain a relatively small portion of the business. He said the com-

**Western Innovator**

**WinStar Genetics**  
Business: A partnership of Seagull Bay Dairy, Triple Crown Genetics and Cannon Dairy.  
Location: American Falls, Idaho  
Innovation: Supplying the dairy industry worldwide with "elite" genetics

pany recently sold embryos to buyers in South Korea. WinStar also found potential embryo buyers during a recent state-sponsored trade mission to Vietnam. He said the Vietnamese were especially interested in embryos with the A2A2 trait, which consumers in the Pacific Rim believe makes the beta-casein protein in milk easier to digest, and may be beneficial to those with lactose intolerance. About a quarter of WinStar's herd possesses the trait, he said.

Greg Andersen said there's also been a growing emphasis within the industry on breeding cows that excel in feed efficiency and identifying genetic markers associated with certain "wellness" traits, such as low susceptibility to lameness and certain diseases.

## Researchers seek ways to grow better Christmas trees

By BRENNIA WIEGAND  
For the Capital Press

Christmas trees are a holiday icon, and researchers are looking for ways to grow better trees for about 4.7 million families across the globe that buy Oregon trees each year.

They are investigating better ways to grow the trees and keep pests away from them — and looking for varieties that will look best on Christmas morning.

A new growth regulator from Europe may take some of the guesswork out of growing lush Christmas trees.

Chal Landgren, at the Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, Ore., said they'll perform trials on a product so new it has yet to be named.

"We've had chemicals in the past that you could apply to the leader and it would shorten them, but it was always kind of a crap shoot about how much and when to put it on," said Landgren, an OSU Extension Christmas tree specialist. "This new product is touted as being able



Courtesy Photo

Chal Landgren of Oregon State University Research and Extension Center tallies slugs found among Christmas trees. He has been working with OSU slug specialist Rory McDonnell to learn the population dynamics of slugs.

to stop the leader growth at the point where you apply it."

The Research Center has four small seed orchards but conducts much of its testing at privately owned farms around the Willamette Valley.

Of the 4.7 million trees harvested annually in Oregon, 99 percent are grown in the Willamette Valley. Oregon is the country's largest Christmas tree producer, with 17 percent of the market. Trees are shipped to Asia as early as

Halloween, and about 700,000 trees are sold to customers in Mexico.

The biggest U.S. market is California, which is followed by the rest of the Southwest, but sales in Hawaii are slowed by that state's stringent requirements that include zero tolerance for most slugs.

"They don't damage the trees at all; they're probably eating mold," Landgren said. "It's just a hitchhiker they don't want."

Landgren has been working with OSU slug specialist Rory McDonnell to learn the population dynamics of the slugs found in area fields. Traps are set in Christmas tree fields and shipping yards and collected every two to four weeks.

"I think we've found five different species, most not native to Oregon," Landgren said. As the study matures they'll examine approaches to controlling them.

Landgren attributes this year's new pest problems to two dry summers. For instance, the Douglas fir twig weevil has become a big problem in Noble firs.

"They're inventorying how big the problem is and next autumn we may be looking at doing some spray trials, but once the insect is inside the tree, you're stuck," Landgren said.

Another pest, aphids, are showing up more frequently in Grand fir, sucking sugars from the needles, which become shorter and shriveled. Last year Landgren conducted a trial testing some "softer" biological insecticides on aphids.

"I guess the bottom line is it wasn't all that successful," Landgren said. "We did find a few of the newer ones worked at least as well as those we already have."

Another trial is taking a new look at a rare disease. Web Blight had rarely been seen but showed up at a couple farms this year, causing needles to drop, leaving basketball-sized bare patches on trees.

Research also continues on breeding projects in Noble, Douglas, Nordmann and Turkish firs, which resulted in about 400 promising specimens being grafted into orchards at NWREC this year. Branch cuttings of Nordmann and Turkish firs are sent to Gary Chastagner, a plant pathologist at Washington State University, who screens them for needle loss. Those who pass his test are grafted into seed orchards.

"And then we just wait," Landgren said. "It may take 10 to 15 years before the orchard produces seed, and cone production doesn't happen on any sort of regular clockwork. For example, on Noble firs you may only have a good seed crop every five years."

### Calendar

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#### 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\\_landscape\\_workshop](http://www.pesticide.org/healthy_landscape_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: [oregon-blueberry.com](http://oregon-blueberry.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 Con-

ference, which is celebrating its 80th year. Included is the Oregon Women In Timber annual dinner and auction. Website: [www.oregonloggingconference.com](http://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

Screening of the film "Food Evolution." 3-5 p.m. Polk County Fairgrounds, 520 SW Highway 99W, Rickreall, Ore. This documentary, narrated by Neil deGrasse Tyson, takes a close look at the facts associated with genetically modified foods. It was directed by Academy Award nominee Scott Hamilton Kennedy. This presentation will include an introduction by Helle Rundenklau and is sponsored by the Polk County Women for Agriculture. Cost: Free. Online: [foodevolution-movie.com](http://foodevolution-movie.com)

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 [producesafetyalliance.com](http://producesafetyalliance.com), [oda.state.or.us](http://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 Garden 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>

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