

People & Places

A believer in KGB cherries

John Morton says unique pedestrian orchard system has its advantages

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

THE DALLES, Ore. — A grower, former fieldman and promoter of dwarfing cherry trees for more than two decades says more growers should adopt an Australian tree system to cut labor costs in half and grow large, top-quality cherries.

John Morton, 70, is bullish on the KGB. No, he's not talking about Russians, but a goblet-style cherry tree developed in 1993 by Australian grower Kym Green. It is a takeoff of the Spanish Bush cherry tree — hence the Kym Green Bush, or KGB. It's pedestrian, meaning it is harvested from the ground without ladders.

"The brine industry was the bulk of the cherry industry in Oregon in the early 1990s and prices were collapsing. We had a lot of old Bing and Royal Anns," says Morton, an Oregon Cherry Growers fieldman from 1992 to 2009 and a grower since 2000.

Part of the problem was a labor shortage. The Dalles has a harder time attracting and keeping pickers since there were few pears and apples to extend picking after cherries, he said.

Searching in Europe

Looking for answers, the industry helped send Lynn Long, an Oregon State University Extension agent in The Dalles, to Europe in 1994.

"Europe was having the same problems of labor shortages and Lynn came back and reported on dwarfing cherry rootstocks that we didn't know existed," Morton said.

The next year, Morton headed a tour of 25 Cherry Growers members to Europe and saw smaller trees that were easier to pick and resulted in higher picker production. They met Tobias Vogel, a German grower and extension agent, who developed the Vogel Spindle, a central leader dwarfing tree.

In 1997, Morton met Green at an international cherry symposium in Norway and learned about the KGB.

"John got it. He understood the principles I was teaching because I talked grower language and so did John," said Green, 62, who spoke with Capital Press on Feb. 15 while visiting Morton in The Dalles.



Kym Green, the Australian developer of the KGB cherry tree, left, and John Morton, with Morton's KGB trees near The Dalles, Ore., on Feb. 15.

Morton found Regina and Kordia cherries did well on the Vogel Spindle. Bing, Skeena and Lapin did not, but do well on the KGB.

Morton and Long became Oregon promoters of the two dwarfing systems, enlisting several visits from Green and Vogel. Several smaller growers in The Dalles turned to those systems and the manager of 3,000 acres of orchards for investment companies adopted a version of the KGB, Morton said.

Using the dwarfing systems in his orchards, Morton said by 2003 he was able to pick the same amount of fruit with 35 pickers that previously had required 75.

Morton believes more growers should consider the KGB and Vogel systems for labor savings and high fruit quality. A legitimate question, he said, is whether Bing is becoming the Red Delicious of the cherry industry. There's just too many on the market after the Fourth of July, he said.

"I left 240 tons of Bing on the trees last season because I couldn't afford to pick them," he said.

KGB viewpoint

The KGB's 25 leaders coming off the main trunk a couple feet above the ground in goblet fashion transfer the tree's vigor from vegetation to fruit, Green said.

Cherries grow in clusters on the vertical leaders instead of horizontal limbs. The leaders have more sap flow, nutrients and water than lateral limbs and thus grow larger, firmer and better cherries, Green said. Summer topping at eight feet de-vigorates the tops and allows more light lower on the leaders, making

stronger buds, he said.

It's about six feet across open space from leaders on one side of the goblet to the other. Double planting rows and 600 trees per acre keeps volume up, he said.

"Some modern systems have 30,000 lineal yards of fruiting wood per hectare whereas the KGB has 50,000 to 60,000, so double. It's a lot more fruiting wood and less structural wood," Green said. A hectare equals 2.47 acres.

Growers in Chile also use it, he said.

The UFO (Upright Fruiting Offshoot) developed by Matthew Whiting, a Washington State University plant physiologist, is based on the KGB but is 10 leaders on a single stem in the same plane to form a fruiting wall for mechanical harvesting, Green said.

The UFO has too much vegetative vigor, about 10 percent per limb versus 4 percent for the KGB and 20 percent for a normal tree, he said.

"UFOs are monsters. To get volume you have to go higher and then you're fighting the tree the whole time. It's not a pedestrian orchard," Green said. "Mechanical harvesting is way overrated. It's like pissing in the wind. It won't happen in our lifetime."

A UFO defense

Whiting disagrees. He said the UFO was not developed from the KGB, is not too vigorous, does not yield "monster" trees and that mechanical harvesting is a proven possibility.

"Industry adoption is inevitable," Whiting said of mechanical harvesting, adding the UFO is designed for production efficiency, not just mechanized harvest.

"We have data to show better hand harvest efficiency in UFO compared to KGB," he said. "I am against any pedestrian system for sweet cherries because it will unnecessarily limit yield and profit."

He said his observations do not support Green's per limb vigor percentages.

"The biggest challenge is achieving relatively uniform vigor among uprights and knowing the right balance of uprights per tree to be neither excessively vigorous nor weak in annual growth," Whiting said.

"The KGB is certainly not better in general. I do not think growers should be turning to any system that does not form a compact fruiting wall," he said.

Roughly 50 percent of Washington's cherries come from low-density orchards of large old trees. New plantings are not mainly UFO, but many are V-trellised, Whiting said. There is a great diversity in systems with a clear trend toward higher-density, size-controlling rootstocks and planar systems, he said.

Mark Hanrahan, husband of Ines Hanrahan, postharvest physiologist for the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission, is a proponent of the UFO system, which he began using 15 years ago in his orchard near Zillah, Wash. He uses it on 40 acres of Rainier, Santana, Tieton, Cowiche, Early Robin and Chelan cherries.

The UFO fruits on vertical leaders but people let it fruit on laterals as well, he said.

"I've seen a lot of train wrecks because of apical (central leader) dominance is so strong. You want the strong leader at the end," he said.

The SSA (Super Spindle



Western Innovator

John Morton
Age: 70

Origins: Born and raised in Sweet Home, Ore., and spent summers on his grandparents' wheat ranch near Pendleton, Ore.

Family: Wife, Doriene, a retired nurse, four grown children, seven grandchildren.

Education: Bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering, Oregon State University, 1971.

Work History: Western Farm Service (fertilizer), Athena, Ore., 1971 to 1982; managed center-pivot farms for insurance companies in Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington, 1982 to 1988; spray manager Mt. Adams Orchards, White Salmon, Wash., 1988 to 1992; The Dalles fieldman for Oregon Cherry Growers, 1992 to 2009; cherry grower since 2000.

Axis) tree style also is good, and any planar system is better than the KGB because they can be mechanically harvested while the KGB can't, he said. He also believes cherries will be mechanically harvested.

Other innovations

While there's still debate over the KGB, UFO and other systems, Morton's interest in innovation hasn't stopped there.

He's experimented with rain netting used in Europe but determined it's too expensive. It works in Europe because governments pay half the costs, he said.

Morton has been testing new varieties owned by private nurseries but bred in university programs in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

"A lot of good cherry breeding was done there before the fall of the Berlin Wall but it was never promoted," he said. "So we've been sorting through and testing varieties from there for a number of years."

It's a slow process, he said. Material comes in under quarantine to the WSU Clean Plant Center Northwest in Prosser.

Calendar

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. Write "Calendar" in the subject line.

March 23-April 30

Wooden Shoe Tulip Fest. 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm, 33814 S. Meridian Road, Woodburn, Ore. The colorful annual festival includes a wide variety of activities. Cost: \$5 per person for 13 and older. Maximum per car charge \$20. Website: <https://www.woodenshoe.com/>

Friday-Monday

March 23-26

Oregon FFA Convention. Deschutes Fair & Expo Center, Redmond, Ore. Website: <http://www.oregonffa.com/EarnToLive/State-Convention>

Saturday, March 31

Welding and Basic Metal Work for Small Farms. 1-5 p.m. Dunbar Farms, Hillcrest Road, Medford, Ore. This popular class is small and hands-on. With space limited, register early. David Mostue, farmer and equipment guru, will teach the basics of welding techniques on-site at his farm. Particular focus will be on those skills most useful to farmers, including the types of welders, tools and safety equipment needed. Participants will have a chance to try MIG welding, the most useful and common form of welding on farms. General metalwork like drilling, bending and welding prep will also be covered. Cost: \$50 each person.

Contact: paula.burkhalter@oregonstate.edu or 541-776-7371. Website: <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms>

Wednesday-Saturday

April 4-7

Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference. College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls, Idaho. Website: <https://www.idahoffa.org/conferences-conventions/>

Thursday, April 5

Part 4: Farm & Ranch Succession Planning Workshop. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Clackamas Small Business Development Center, 7726 SE Harmony Road, Milwaukie, Ore. This program is offered and taught by the Clackamas Small Business Development Center, along with guest presenters such as attorneys and CPAs. A complimentary light dinner will start each evening at 6 p.m. To register, call 503-594-0738. Cost: Free. Website: <http://bit.ly/2CX1jv1>

Saturday, April 7

28th Dayton FFA Alumni Auction and Dinner. 5:30-9 p.m. Old Dayton High School Gym, 801 Ferry St., Dayton, Ore. The auction is the largest fundraiser for the Dayton FFA Alumni does each year. If you or your business would like to donate an item, time, money or services to this year's auction, or if you are interested in joining Dayton FFA Alumni, please contact Mitch Coleman at (503) 864-2080. The silent auction starts at 5:30 p.m. The first table closes at 6:30 and dinner featuring local foods will be served at 7. Cost: \$10 at the door or from the Dayton Ag Shop at 503-864-2080.

Basic Irrigation System Design and Operation. 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Dunbar Farms, Medford, Ore. This

class will look at a variety of irrigation systems suitable for different crops. The class will be particularly useful for those planning to build or alter their irrigation systems. The day of instruction includes a trip around Dunbar Farms to look at a wide variety of pump stations and irrigation methods in operation. These systems will include overhead sprinklers for hay, drip irrigation in wine grapes, high uniformity rotator sprinklers for row crops, large volume canons for infrequent irrigation purposes and flood irrigation in hay. Directions to the farm will be sent to registrants. Registration options other than on line, contact Paula, 541-776-7371. Register online: <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms> Cost: \$35 per person. Website: <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms>

Tuesday, April 10

Southern Idaho Livestock Hall of Fame induction. 6:30-9 p.m. Turf Club, 734 Falls Ave., Twin Falls, Idaho. This year's inductees are: cattle rancher Jim Baker of Filer; sheep and cattle ranchers Ed and Emily Baker (posthumously) of Filer; cattle ranchers Scott and Sarah Bedke of Oakley; dairy producers Harry and Flora Bokma of Buhl; long-time Bureau of Land Management supervisor Dean Brown of Jerome; and cattle ranchers Wade and Gwenna Prescott of Carey. Cost: \$25

Saturday, April 14

Understanding and Maintaining Farm Equipment. 1-5 p.m. Dunbar Farms, Medford, Ore. This class offers an introduction to farm equipment maintenance and repair including: how small gas engines and larger gas and diesel engines run, basic maintenance and tuning; trouble-shooting problems and how to tell whether you can fix a problem. Register online at <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms> or send an email

to paula.burkhalter@oregonstate.edu or call 541-776-7371. Cost: \$20 each person Website: <http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms>

Thursday, April 19

In the Field: Salem Agriculture Seminar. 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Willamette Heritage Center, 1313 Mill St. SE, Salem, Ore. A seminar for a discussion specifically designed to provide agribusiness owners and their managers with tools they need to get organized. Topics include the new tax cuts, finances and financial statements, regulatory updates on water and wetlands, organizing an agri-business and estate planning. Sponsor: Schwabe, Williamson and Wyatt. RSVP at <http://bit.ly/2FwRPV>. Cost: Free

Shepherds' Extravaganza. 2-10 p.m. Washington State Fair, 110 Ninth Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. Sheep and Fleeces Show, vendors of supplies, used fiber-related equipment, demonstrations, workshops. Cost: No cost after admission to the Spring Fair. Website: www.shepherds-extravaganza.com

Thursday-Sunday

April 19-22

Puyallup Spring Fair. Washington State Fairgrounds, 110 Ninth Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. Website: <http://www.thefair.com/spring-fair>

Saturday, April 21

Oregon Women for Ag Auction and Dinner. 5:30 p.m. Linn County Fair and Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road, Albany, Ore. This exciting event is a fundraiser for Oregon Women for Agriculture, which advocates for all things involving agriculture in the state. Web: owaonline.org

Tree School East. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Baker High School, 2500 E St., Baker City, Ore. The school will offer 29 classes on multi-aged forest management, insects, disease, weeds, succession planning, geology of Northeast Oregon, wildflower identification and small scale harvesting for the "do it yourself" folks. Sponsored by OSU Extension, the Oregon Forest Resources Institute and the Oregon Small Woodlands Association. Cost: \$50, \$20 for 18 and younger. Website: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/baker/>

Sunday-Wednesday

April 22-25

California FFA State Convention. Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, Calif. Website: <http://www.calagfed.org/stateconvention>

Saturday-Sunday

April 28-29

Oregon Ag Fest. 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. A two-day event, aimed to help families better understand where their food, fiber and flora come from, is a unique learning experience, where hands-on exhibits make learning about Oregon's vast agricultural industry educational and entertaining. Kids 12 and under free. Virtually all activities are free of charge. Cost: \$9 for ages 13 and over. Website: <http://oragfest.com/>

Thursday-Saturday

May 10-12

88th Washington FFA Convention & Expo. Washington State University, Pullman, Wash. Website: <https://www.washingtonffa.org/convention-overview/>

Capital Press

Established 1928
Board of directors
Mike Forrester
Steve Forrester
Kathryn Brown
Susan Rana
Mike Omeg

Corporate Officer
Heidi Wright
Chief Operating Officer

Capital Press Managers

Joe BeachEditor & Publisher
Elizabeth Yutzie Sell.... Advertising Director
Carl Sampson.....Managing Editor
Jessica Boone Production Manager
Samantha McLaren.... Circulation Manager

Entire contents copyright © 2018
EO Media Group
dba Capital Press

An independent newspaper
published every Friday.

Capital Press (ISSN 0740-3704) is published weekly by EO Media Group, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem OR 97301. Periodicals postage paid at Portland, OR, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to Capital Press, P.O. Box 2048 Salem, OR 97308-2048.

To Reach Us

Circulation..... 800-882-6789
Email..... Circulation@capitalpress.com
Main line 503-364-4431
Fax 503-370-4383
Advertising Fax 503-364-2692

News Staff

Idaho
Carol Ryan Dumas 208-860-3898

Boise
Sean Ellis..... 208-914-8264

Cent. Washington
Dan Wheat..... 509-699-9099

W. Washington
Don Jenkins..... 360-722-6975

E Washington
Matthew Weaver 509-688-9923

Oregon
George Plaven 406-560-1655
Mateusz Perkowski 800-882-6789

Graphic artist
Alan Kenaga..... 800-882-6789

To Place Classified Ads

Ad fax 503-364-2692
or 503-370-4383
Telephone (toll free)..... 800-882-6789
Online www.capitalpress.com/classifieds

Subscriptions

Mail rates paid in advance
Easy Pay U.S. \$3.75/month (direct withdrawal from bank or credit card account)
1 year U.S. \$49.99
2 years U.S. \$89.99
1 year Canada \$275
1 year other countries..... call for quote
1 year Internet only..... \$49.99
1 year 4-H, FFA students and teachers \$30
9 months 4-H, FFA students & teachers \$25
Visa and Mastercard accepted

To get information published

Mailing address:
Capital Press
P.O. Box 2048
Salem, OR 97308-2048

News: Contact the main office or news staff member closest to you, send the information to newsroom@capitalpress.com or mail it to "Newsroom," c/o Capital Press. Include a contact telephone number.

Letters to the Editor: Send your comments on agriculture-related public issues to opinions@capitalpress.com, or mail your letter to "Opinion," c/o Capital Press. Letters should be limited to 300 words. Deadline: Noon Monday.

Capital Press ag media

www.capitalpress.com
www.FarmSeller.com
marketplace.capitalpress.com
www.facebook.com/capitalpress
www.facebook.com/farmseller
twitter.com/capitalpress
www.youtube.com/capitalpressvideo

Index

Dairy 9
Livestock 9
Markets 11
Opinion 6

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 set the record straight.