

Apple schools sow seeds of cider success

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

Chris Blanchard took a continuing education class at Oregon State University, and in 2014 opened Longdrop Cider in Boise, Idaho, with two partners. Today, he's among the experts who teach other would-be cider makers how to launch their own cider businesses.

Blanchard is one of dozens of students who have taken OSU cider courses and gone on to open their own cider houses in the Northwest and beyond.

Educational opportunities abound in the Northwest for apple growers and cider makers looking to develop their skills in the orchard, in business or in the cidery. As the love for craft ciders develops, the region's schools have responded with short and long courses ranging from a few hours-long tasting

workshops to years-long fermentation science courses.

The recent surge in cider's popularity is fertile ground for expanding education. More than half of the cider businesses in the Northwest have been established in the past five years, according to statistics gathered by the Northwest Cider Association. The association's more than 70 members own orchards, cideries and tasting rooms in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and British Columbia.

The association helps organize several festivals each year including the BC Cider Week, April 27-May 6 this year, and the Cider Rite of Spring, which took place March 10 in Portland, and the Washington Cider Week in September. The association's website calendar listed 15 public Northwest cider festivals in the past year



Courtesy of OSU-PACE

Scott Robbins, Oregon State University Research Farms manager, talks to cider students at Lewis-Brown Farm in Corvallis.

sponsored by its members and associates. In these celebratory settings, visitors can taste and learn about cider varieties, and meet the cider makers.

Many new and experienced

farmers and growers attend festivals and take courses to get into craft apple production. Many are looking for a way to launch or expand current operations, said Greg Aronoff

of Oregon State University's non-credit educational arm, Professional and Continuing Education (PACE). Students in these various courses and workshops range in age from 25 to their mid-60s, and include homebrewers, retired and active farmers, and new or current business owners.

In addition to PACE, OSU offers a variety of orchard and cider courses, both for credit and noncredit.

The university's fermentation science program, for example, is among a handful of programs in the U.S. that offer a fermentation degree training students in biological, chemical and physical principles, as well as engineering, processing, preservation and other aspects of fermented food products. Students interested in orchards can earn degrees in research including fruit breeding and

genetics, entomology, fruit pathology, to name a few areas of study.

As of 2016, Washington State University merged its coursework with University of Idaho's to create a similar fermentation science degree, including specific cider courses.

Located in the state that produces more than half of the nation's apples, it is no wonder that WSU also sponsors one of the largest orchard research and extension programs in the Northwest. Its Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center includes more than 200 acres of orchards, labs and classrooms on three properties. The center is home to high-level apple research, but it is also a base for a multitude of public classes and workshops in orchard care and cider production taught by WSU experts.

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