

## People &amp; Places

## For first-generation farmers

Tierney Creech helps form coalition to support young producers

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Tierney Creech grew up in a Seattle suburb and became a farmer, surprisingly.

"I didn't know it was an option," she said.

Creech comes from Redmond, Wash., the home of Microsoft and other high-tech companies. She got a college degree and went to work for a YMCA. Her first move toward becoming a farmer was leaving her Y cubicle.

That was about a decade ago. Now Creech, 35, grows vegetables on roughly 2 acres on plots in Maytown and Grand Mound in Thurston County, Wash. She and her farming partner, Julie Puhich, supply about 100 families who sign up for weekly boxes of produce during the growing season.

To connect with other fledgling growers, she helped found the Washington Young Farmers Coalition in 2010. She's also on the board of the National Young Farmers Coalition.

Most members, she said, are like her. They have small parcels of land and are making a go at an occupation they didn't grow up around.

"A lot of us are coming in as first-generation farmers," Creech said. "We can't look back on generations of knowledge in our families."

### Advocacy, support

The Young Farmers Coalition combines advocacy, socializing and practical support. Membership in the state coalition is fairly informal. The group's Facebook page has more than 1,750 friends.

"The camaraderie is really valuable," Creech said. "It's a



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Western Washington farmer Tierney Creech is on the board of the National Young Farmers Coalition.

hard thing to go from 'I want to farm' to farming."

Last year, the national organization dug into what makes getting into farming hard by surveying more than 3,500 past, current or aspiring farmers under 40 years old.

The survey found that the top challenges faced by young farmers were finding land and workers, paying for health insurance and paying off student debt. An accompanying report recommends more government support for low-interest loans and a variety of farmer assistance programs, especially for minorities. The report also advocates student loan forgiveness for farmers.

On the state level, Creech testified in support this year of a bill to provide farmers with free mental health counseling. Her testimony included a story about a young farmer who committed suicide. Representatives from other farm groups had similar stories. The bill passed.

Creech said the state and

national chapters of the Young Farmers Coalition started at about the same time.

She said her involvement began by attending another organization's gathering of young farmers.

"It was the first time I had ever met other young people farming," Creech said.

Creech graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in psychology and a minor in environmental studies. Her interest in the outdoors and summer camps led to the YMCA job. She, however, wanted a foreign adventure. She found it by signing up with Willing Workers on Organic Farms, a cultural exchange program. She spent a year working on organic farms in New Zealand, she recalled.

"I continued to learn that I loved farming," Creech said.

### CSA honor system

She came back to Washington and worked on several farms before going into business with Puhich, the long-

time operator of the Common Ground CSA, the initials of community supported agriculture. After a couple of years, Creech took over ownership at the beginning of 2017.

Customers sign up to receive small or large boxes of vegetables for 25 weeks. A small share costs \$450 to \$700. A large share costs \$700 to \$1,000. Customers choose the exact price. It's a sliding scale meant to tie what customers pay to their income using the honor system.

"It's a great model. It's really simple," Creech said.

The model has been durable. Puhich started Common Ground more than 25 years ago. The farm has no website. It relies on word-of-mouth advertising.

Creech said her customers like fresh vegetables — and who's growing their food. "It's a way for people to feel part of a community," she said.

Creech said she tries to deliver about a dozen differ-

**Western  
Innovator**

**Tierney Creech**  
Age: 35

**Occupation:** Farmer, owns Common Ground CSA in Thurston County, Wash.

**Positions:** National Young Farmers Coalition board; founding member of Washington Young Farmers Coalition

**Education:** Western Washington University, major in psychology, minor in environmental studies

ent kinds of vegetables each week. "It's cool to watch the seasons change and watch the boxes change," she said.

Customers assume some risk for poor crops. "If I have a bad year for carrots, they know they're not going to have many carrots," she said.

This does not relieve Common Ground of responding to market demands. "If I gave them only kale for four weeks, they probably wouldn't stick around," Creech said. "We have customers saying, 'We want more beans.' At the same time, we have customers saying, 'We want less beans.'"

Creech said she hires one full-time seasonal worker. Even with just one worker, Washington's \$11.50 per hour minimum wage — the highest among all states — is a major expense.

She said her plans are to keep the enterprise going and to keep farming.

"It's definitely the most satisfying work I've ever found," she said.

## Kircher appointed to Oregon Dairy Farmers Association board

SALEM, Ore. — Robert Kircher, a partner to two organic dairy farms, has been appointed to the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association Board of Directors representing producers in the Willamette Valley.

Kircher will complete the remaining two years of a term vacated by Pete DeHaan, according to an ODFFA press release.

Kircher has a unique background for a dairy producer. He was born in Kodiak, Alaska, and moved to Oregon when he was two years old. His family invested in a brew pub, and when Robert was 11, he met Dan Bansen, the owner of For-



ODFFA

Robert Kircher, newly appointed board member of the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association.

est Glen Jerseys. Robert's father was looking for a dairy to take the brewers grain leftover from

the beer making process and Bansen was interested. He invited Robert and his two younger

### Online

[www.oregondairyfarmers.org](http://www.oregondairyfarmers.org)

brothers to spend the day with him and learn about the farm. That one-day visit turned into a job after school, working weekends and during summer break.

Kircher graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in agriculture and a focus on dairy science. He spent a term on a conventional dairy in Hilmar, Calif. Following his graduation, he returned to the farm full-time. He worked his way up to farm manager and became a partner in the business with his brother, Stewart

Kircher, and Dan Bansen. They currently milk 1,500 organic Jerseys on two farms.

Kircher and his wife Callyn have two children. Kircher graduated from ODFFA's Dairy Leadership Program and currently serves on Organic Valley's Dairy Executive Committee.

The Oregon Dairy Farmers Association is governed by eight producers from across the state and one industry representative. ODFFA was founded in 1892 to work on behalf of Oregon dairy farmers. ODFFA represents Oregon's 218 multi-generational Grade A dairy farming families.

## Calendar

To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at [www.capitalpress.com](http://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](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com). Write "Calendar" in the subject line.

### Saturday, May 19

Goat Academy 2018. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Latah County Fairgrounds, 1021 Harold St., Moscow, Idaho. An all-day conference on all things goat. The event is limited to 200 participants, and preregistration is required. The full schedule and a registration link can be found under events at [www.palousegoatguild.com](http://www.palousegoatguild.com). Cost: \$50 general/\$25 4H, FFA.

### Monday, May 21

Bee workshop. 6:30 p.m. OSU Extension, 505 N. Columbia River Highway, St. Helens, Ore. Varroa mites: What they are, what they do and what the future holds. Cost: Free Website: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia>

### Saturday, May 26

Goat healthcare/nutrition/packgoat seminar. 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Workshop, 7211 40th Court NE, Olympia, Wash. Seminar includes handouts and hands-on time with goats. If you are new to goats or just need a refresher for goat care this is a great event. Instructor has 30-plus years of successful goat care experience. Cost is \$25 for public; \$7.50 for 4-H/FFA members/family/volunteers. For more information contact Donna at 360-742-8310 or [dsemasko@comcast.net](mailto:dsemasko@comcast.net). Website: [eddelweissacresobers.com](http://eddelweissacresobers.com)

### Saturday-Sunday May 26-27

Alpaca Shearing Day & Fleece Sale. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, 21345 SW Aebischer Road, Sherwood, Ore. Join EasyGo Farm at Alpacas of Oregon and take a break from the Memorial Day Winery Tours to watch the alpacas get their annual haircuts. Get up close, hand feed them, and handle their luxurious fleece. Shearing Day is Saturday. On Sunday, learn to felt an alpaca gift. Phone Suzanne at 503-348-6954 to reserve a spot. \$25-\$75 covers materials and instruction. Cost: Free. Website: [www.easygofarm.net/AOOMemDay](http://www.easygofarm.net/AOOMemDay)

### Saturday-Monday May 26-28

Memorial Day Weekend Festival. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Redhawk Vineyard & Winery, 2995 Michigan City Lane NW, Salem, Ore. Join us for wine and barrel tasting, food, our incredible view and music. \$12 tasting fee. Website: [www.redhawkwine.com](http://www.redhawkwine.com)

### Wednesday, May 30

Field to Market Workshop. 1-4 p.m. OSU Extension Service, 505 N. Columbia River Highway, St. Helens, Ore. Learn from experts about Oregon Department of Agriculture regulations, recipe selection, labeling guidelines and other issues involved in producing value-added products. Cost: \$25/person, \$40/couple Website: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/>

### Friday-Saturday June 1-2

WSU Beef 200 Course. Okanogan County Fairgrounds, Annex Building, 175 Rodeo Trail Road, Okanogan, Wash. Topics for Friday night session, which will be 5:30-

8:30 p.m., include management of lupine on range and beef pairings with wine and beer, with a focus on direct marketing of your beef. Topics for Saturday, which will be 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m., include live animal evaluation and grading, ruminology 101/beef nutrition, factors affecting beef quality and palatability, carcass and retail cutting demonstrations, grid pricing, team evaluating and auction, and fetal programming. Sponsored by WSU Extension and the Methow Conservancy. Access the information brochure and hard copy registration at: <http://extension.wsu.edu/okanogan/> Cost: \$60/person (additional \$25 after May 21); Friday or Saturday session only: \$40/person (additional \$25 after May 21). Website: <https://okanogan-beef200.brownpapertickets.com>

### Saturday, June 2

81st Annual Marion County Lamb & Wool Show. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Turner Elementary School, 7800 School St., Turner, Ore. The show is a day of fun with 4-H & FFA events, wool animals and market lambs. The show also includes craft vendors, an ice cream vendor, a local spinning club and plants for sale. Again this year we will start the day with the children's classes: Most Beautiful Lamb, Young Herdsman and Young Market Lamb classes for children under the age of 10. Website: <http://marioncounty-lambwoolshow.yolasite.com/>

### Wednesday, June 6

Our Valley, Our Future Breakfast. 7:15-8:45 a.m. Emmanuel Baptist Church, 1515 College Way, Mount Vernon, Wash. Join us for our fourth annual celebration of past, present and future Skagit Valley agricultural

leaders over a hearty breakfast. This year our keynote speaker will be Cisco Morris of King 5 TV. Awards will also be presented to honor the Skagitians that shape our industry. This event is a great way to connect with regional businesses and farmers, celebrate successes, and start the day feeling informed and inspired. Cost: Free; donations requested Website: <http://www.skagitians.org/events/valley-future-breakfast/>

### Tuesday-Friday June 12-15

Agriculture Transportation Coalition Annual Meeting. Greater Tacoma Convention Center, 1500 Commerce St., Tacoma, Wash. The meeting will be the largest annual gathering of ag shippers sourcing and delivering to foreign markets. The agenda includes an off-the-record best practices session for members, a port tour and sessions on other topics. Website: [www.agtrans.org/events](http://www.agtrans.org/events)

### Wednesday, June 13

Sherman County Field Day. 8:40 a.m.-noon. Sherman County Station, 66365 Lone Rock Road, Moro, Ore. Topics include wheat breeding and variety testing, weed control, disease control and agronomy. Website: <http://cbarc.aes.oregonstate.edu>

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the first session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: [cschnepf@uidaho.edu](mailto:cschnepf@uidaho.edu)

### Saturday-Sunday June 16-17

84th Annual Glenwood "Ketchum

Kalf" Rodeo. 12:30-10 p.m. The Glenwood, Wash., Rodeo Association is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization that sponsors this rodeo. Cost: \$10 for adults, \$3 for ages 4 to 12.

### Wednesday, June 20

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the second session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: [cschnepf@uidaho.edu](mailto:cschnepf@uidaho.edu)

### Saturday-Sunday June 23-24

Aquaponics in Oregon Conference. Smith Hall, Western Oregon University, 345 Monmouth Ave., Monmouth, Ore. Hear from some of the top commercial growers, innovators and educators in this emerging green industry and discover the challenges and opportunities aquaponics present. Cost: \$135/person. Website: <https://bit.ly/2KdDXSM>

### Wednesday, June 27

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the third session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: [cschnepf@uidaho.edu](mailto:cschnepf@uidaho.edu)

### Wednesday, July 11

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the fourth session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: [cschnepf@uidaho.edu](mailto:cschnepf@uidaho.edu)

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