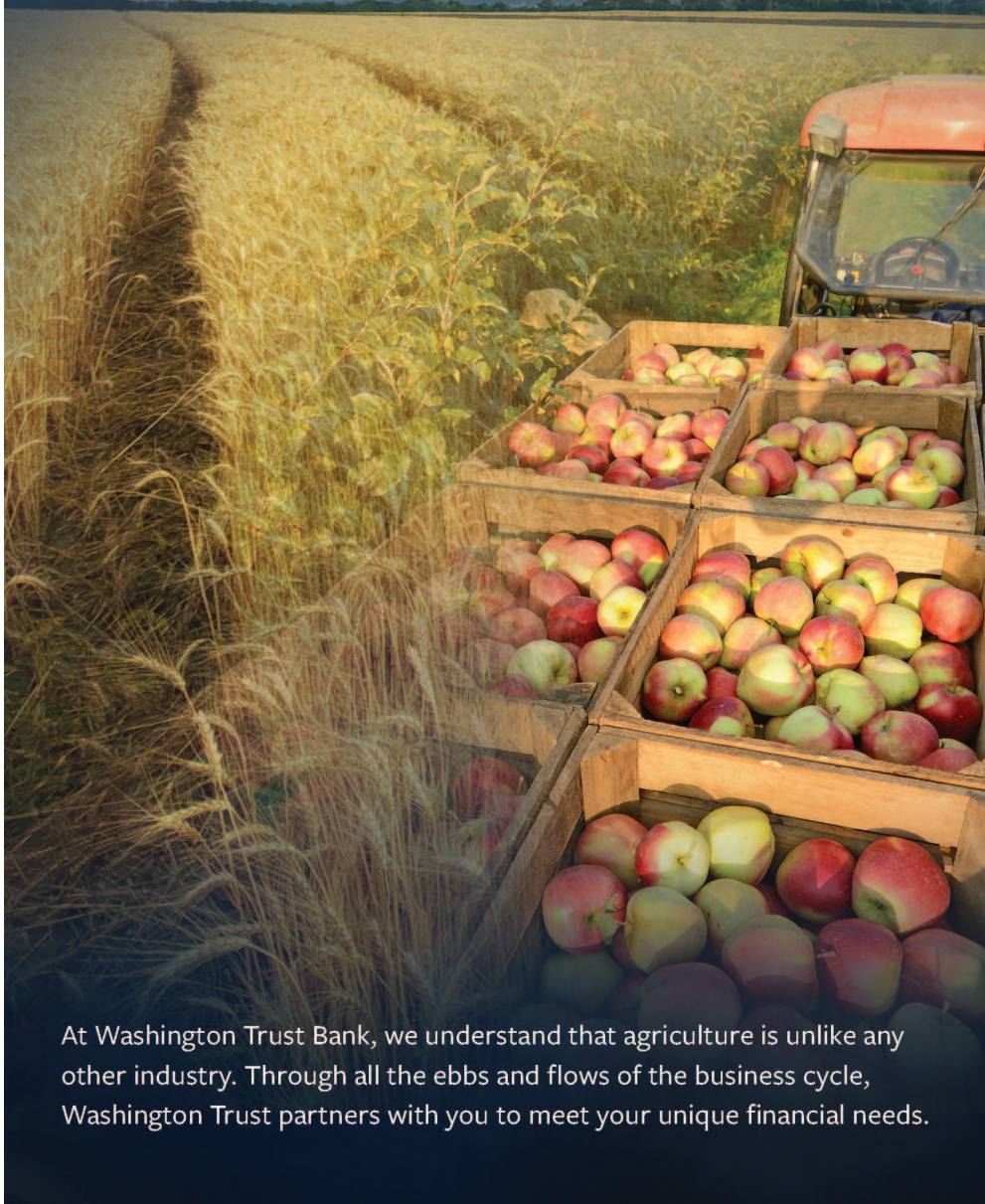




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Double J Jerseys continues Bansen legacy

By ALIYA HALL
For the Capital Press

MONMOUTH, Ore. — It's been said dairy farming is something you have to be born with, and Jon Bansen stands by that ideology.

Bansen is a fourth-generation Jersey dairy farmer, and many of his siblings and cousins are also in the industry. One brother owns the grandfather's dairy in Northern California, and another has taken over their father's farm in Yamhill.

He said that he had "a grand plan for anything" growing up, and after he graduated from Dana College in Blair, Neb., with a degree in biology he considered going to veterinary school.

"But I didn't love school that much," he said. "I also hate driving, and if you're going to be a large animal veterinarian, you're going to travel all over. That sealed the deal. I don't recall if my dad offered me a job on the farm or I just showed up one day. I have never turned in a job application, never written a resume."

Bansen started his dairy, Double J Jerseys, in 1991. After being approached by Organic Valley, Bansen switched to organic in 2000.

"(We switched) to remain economically viable on the farm," he said. "I didn't really fully understand the organic principles and it was new to me at that time. Since then — it's still economically viable — but it's a lot more of a bit-player in what we're doing. (Organic) revolves around producing really high quality food that consumers are desiring."

He said it wasn't a difficult transition, but it was "a little scary" at first. Then he realized his grandfather had been practically an organic farmer without knowing it.

"If he could do it, couldn't I?" He said.

Recently, Bansen has also stopped feeding his cows grain, because there is a mar-



Aliya Hall/For the Capital Press

Jon Bansen of Double J Jerseys is a fourth-generation dairy farmer. He started his dairy in 1991 and switched to organic in 2000.

ket for milk raised without grain supplement.

"The fat profile is much more beneficial to human health," he said. "I want to be where the consumers are; that's always a good thing."

Bansen raises around 200 Jerseys on 600 acres. The cows rotate to a new pasture every 34 days. The forage is a mixture of 15 plant species.

"The key is producing high quality forage that is efficient to milk cows on," he said.

Bansen said he attempts to keep as close to self-sustaining as possible.

He milks the cows twice a day in a parlor that accommodates six. He estimates that it takes about three hours. While he is aware it's not the most "highly efficient" parlor, he said it works well for his needs.

There are five employees at Double J Jerseys: Bansen; his wife, Juli; Bansen's oldest son Ross; and a father-and-son team. Eventually, Ross Bansen will take over the dairy.

"It kind of means everything. You can pass on your knowledge," Jon Bansen said. "That's the tragedy in farming nowadays, a lot of farmers who spend their life understanding animals and soils, and the kid doesn't want to come back; it just dies with them. It's pretty important

that we have people who understand how to grow such good food."

The biggest challenge that he has faced is "the gray matter between my ears."

"You can't let that get in the way of learning," he said. "A lot of times I have preconceived notions, and I'm pretty sure about something. The more sure you are about it the less you should be trusting it. It's not letting your gray matter get in the way of making progress."

Progress and continuing education is important to Bansen, and it's his favorite part of being a dairy farmer.

"It's a big playground," he said. "The conventional world is tied into producing bigger, faster stuff. I get to boil it down to what really works in the natural system, what can I add in to work better, and how can I make the system stronger biologically. As we built that soil system, we've seen the financial end of our farm get stronger, too."

Bansen is already making plans for the future once his son takes over.

"I might just play around with cider apples," he said. "It might work to plant in the fence lines. It's a thought process, but I'm closer to where my son is going to take over the farm, and I got to have something to do."