

Apple Club delivers diverse varieties, taste

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

A cool breeze blows between the rows of heirloom apple trees at Queener Farm in Scio, Ore., where Jeannie Berg plucks a small, unripened Almata apple to show its bright red flesh.

Almatas are just one of roughly 80 apple varieties that Berg expects to pick from the orchard this year. Some, like Honeycrisp, are well known and popular. Others, like Calville Blanc d'hiver and Dumelow's Seedling, are a bit more adventurous.

With such a diverse selection, Berg launched the Queener Farm Heirloom Apple Club in 2015, delivering boxes of unique, organically grown apples to members looking to broaden their palate.

"There are people who had no idea apples could taste this different," Berg said.

For example, Berg described the Whitney crabapple, which she said is sweet with a distinct-



George Plaven/Capital Press
Jeannie Berg, of Queener Farm in Scio, Ore., thins one of 2,000 heirloom apple trees at the 40-acre property. The farm started an heirloom apple club in 2015. Members can taste as many as 80 different varieties.

ly vanilla flavor. On the other hand, there is the Alkmene apple, a juicy variety that Berg said tastes (and even sparkles) like lime soda.
The Heirloom Apple Club



George Plaven/Capital Press
Jeannie Berg holds up a red flesh apple variety known as Almata, which typically ripens in August.

works on a community supported agriculture, or CSA, model. Members pay for apple boxes delivered every other week during the heart of the season, from roughly mid-July through October.

In turn, Berg said members are supporting the biodiversity of apples at Queener Farms, which has 2,000 heirloom trees — most of which are more than 20 and 30 years old.

"It is much more interesting and fun to both farm and mar-

ket a wide variety of apples," Berg said.

That biodiversity also poses an intellectual challenge on the farm, Berg said. Different varieties bloom and ripen at different times throughout the season, which means there is no one-size-fits-all treatment for pests, such as codling moths, and fungal diseases prevalent across the Mid-Willamette Valley.

"We have all these variables in the orchard that are

incredibly educational," Berg said. "But the thing about them from a farm perspective is there is nothing about this farm that's efficient."

Berg, who took over farming at the 40-acre property in 2014, said she is also beginning to grow 700-800 new trees that will eventually be planted in the orchard.

"We feel that continuing to plant more orchard block is important," Berg said. "Eventually as these trees get older, they're not going to be as productive. ... It's sort of renewing over time."

Along with the Heirloom Apple Club, Queener Farm offers U-pick days at the orchard and a Hard Cider Club featuring workshops taught by Zeb Dewar, of Baird & Dewar Farmhouse Cider.

Berg said the orchard at Queener Farm is "a laboratory like no other."

"You may not love every apple in the box, but it's never boring," she said.

Ruling provides new rationale for blocking Oregon solar project

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

The Oregon Court of Appeals has provided a new legal rationale for why an 80-acre solar power project on farmland in Jackson County was improperly approved.

Last year, the county government granted Origen Energy, the project's developer, an exception to Oregon's land use goal of preserving farmland, but the decision was reversed by the state's Land Use Board of Appeals.

According to LUBA, the solar project didn't qualify for the exception because it's not dependent on a "unique resource" that would require converting farmland for industrial development.

It's not unusual for farmland to be "flat, 80 acres in size and exposed to the sun" and the project's proximity to an electrical substation in Medford also doesn't justify the exception, LUBA's ruling said.

Approving the project on this basis would undermine the purpose of "urban growth boundaries" by allowing development on farmland near cities, the ruling said.

The Oregon Court of Appeals has now disagreed with this interpretation of the state's land use law but has still reversed the county's approval of the project.

The relevant statute provides a list of "unique resources" that would justify converting farmland, including "geothermal wells, mineral or aggregate deposits, water reservoirs, natural features, or river or ocean ports."

However, this list is "not a description of the entire group of possible advantageous locales" and the "locational attractor" does not have to be found exclusively on rural land, according to the Oregon Court of Appeals.

Even so, the appellate court has concurred with LUBA that Jackson County improperly used the exception because a solar power project is not an "industrial development" under land use rules.

The county evaluated the project with criteria for such an "industrial development" but an "energy facility" doesn't fall into this category, according to the Oregon Court of Appeals.

The county's other justification for the project — conserving energy is encouraged by another Oregon land use goal — did not fare any better in the ruling.

The Oregon Court of Appeals sided with LUBA, finding that this goal simply means development should be "managed and controlled" to conserve energy.

"Neither the text of the goal nor its guidelines 'require' the county to develop or facilitate the development of any particular land use, much less large solar power generation facilities," the ruling said.

Capital Press was unable to reach attorneys for Origen Energy or the Oregon Solar Energy Industries Association.

Though the ruling has blocked the project for now, it's possible the developer will seek another pathway under land use law to gain approval for it, said Meriel Darzen, attorney for 1,000 Friends of Oregon, a conservation group that opposed the project.

However, the developer would need to re-apply to the county for permission and begin the process anew, she said. "They will have to start over if they want to try again."

Small garlic grower hit by Okanogan flood

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

OROVILLE, Wash. — It doesn't sound like much — a \$10,000 to \$25,000 loss — but it's a fair chunk in the annual income of Noah and Heather Burnell.

They're small-scale growers of garlic, probably one of the most unusual crop losses in this spring's Okanogan Valley flood. And at 3,500-foot and 3 miles from the Canadian border they're also probably one of the highest elevation and most northern garlic growers in the Lower 48 states.

Rapid mountain snowmelt has caused the worst flooding of the Okanogan Valley, particularly between Oroville and Tonasket, since 1972. Damage to houses, structures, hay fields and orchards along the Okanogan River will reach into the millions of dollars.

Snowmelt caused ground water to rise, flooding the Burnell's garlic field at Ellemeham Mountain, 10 miles west of Oroville between Palmer Lake and Nighthawk.

The Burnells haven't seen anything like it in the 22 years they've owned land on the mountain.

"Last year springs were popping up in the middle of the county road and our roads and this year it's even more. One of our fields was completely under water. We dug ditches to drain it," said Noah Burnell, 44.

A lot of it was snowmelt on the mountain but there's always been snowmelt so he suspects some larger change in underground water movement.

The field is about half an acre. Burnell figures he's lost a majority of last fall's planting of two varieties of garlic. He won't know



Courtesy Noah Burnell
Noah and Heather Burnell with garlic from their field on Ellemeham Mountain, west of Oroville, Wash.



Courtesy Noah Burnell
The Burnells' garlic field on about May 7, partially drained after two to three weeks under water.

how much can be salvaged until July harvest. If the whole field is lost, it would be a third of his annual crop.

It's a dryland operation, dependent on winter snow and rain.

"Most years we have our fingers

crossed that we'll have enough moisture," he said.

They have no crop insurance and will try to buy seed from other growers if they can to keep supplying their customers.

Burnell was a carpenter before

experimenting with garlic seven years ago. They were not sure it would survive harsh winters at 3,500 feet, but found out it does.

Their production has expanded to 8,000 to 10,000 pounds of garlic seed on 1.5 acres on the mountain and at another field in the lowlands on the east shore of Lake Osoyoos east of Oroville.

"We make about \$80,000 to \$100,000 a year, which is very good. We were looking for a crop we could grow as a family and pay the bills," Burnell said.

It's labor intensive and they do all the work themselves. Fall planting by hand, one mechanical weeding, a hand weeding and harvesting by hand.

Their crop is certified organic. Bulbs bigger than 2 inches in diameter they sell for seed under their Great Northern Garlic brand and bulbs smaller than that are sold as Okanogan Organic directly to local grocery stores and through a broker to Seattle grocery stores.

"The Okanogan Valley is the Napa Valley of garlic," Burnell said, "because we have so many small, specialized growers and so many different varieties."

There are probably 30 to 40 small growers and one of the nation's largest garlic seed banks, Filaree Garlic Farm, in Omak, he said.

"Conditions here are hot, dry summers and very cold winters which is what garlic needs," he said.

Gilroy, Calif., where Heather Burnell is from, is where most of the nation's garlic is grown.

"We had some hail damage one year, but otherwise this is our first natural disaster," Burnell said. "We've never had any winter loss because of the cold."

Washington Grain Commission approves \$6.33 million budget

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Washington Grain Commission board members have approved a \$6.33 million budget that's close to last year's spending plan.

Commission CEO Glen

Squires called the budget "virtually unchanged" from last year's.

The state's wheat crop could be comparable to last year, Squires projected. Pockets of Washington are reporting some water shortages, while others are reporting good soil moisture.

Wheat prices appear to have room for growth in light of drought in Australia, questions about dry conditions in Russia and Ukraine and tightening corn supplies, he said.

Soft white wheat ranged from \$5.80 per bushel to \$5.90 per bushel on the Portland market. Hard red winter wheat ranged from \$5.74 per bushel to \$7.14 per bushel, depending on its protein content. Dark northern spring wheat ranged from \$7.11 per bushel to \$8.04 per bushel, depending on protein.

"There could be some upward pressure on price," he said. "We're certainly hoping the price is up, because producers need to have a little

better prices."

The budget for marketing was increased by 4 percent, from \$1.24 million to \$1.29 million. Commissioners felt the need to increase trade teams and handle problems that may arise during the year, Squires said. He cited uncertainty in China with the on-going talk of new tariffs and in Japan with the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal.

The increase will help bring South American trade teams to Washington state or the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland.

Funding for research in the budget decreased by 2.9 percent, from \$2.42 million

to \$2.35 million. Squires said some research projects had come to an end.

Funding remains available to address falling number concerns. Squires expects some of that funding may not have to be used, with the USDA Agricultural Research Service slated to receive federal funding to address the starch damage test.

The commission assesses three-fourths of 1 percent of net receipts at the first point of sale for wheat and 1 percent of net receipts at the first point of sale for barley.

Squires expects an income of \$6 million to \$6.1 million. Earlier in the year, the commission expected less income, but prices are slightly higher, he said. Income depends on grain prices and production, Squires said.

The income doesn't fully cover the \$6.3 million budget, so the commission will dip into reserves, Squires said. However, the commission may not end up spending the entire \$6.3 million, he said.

The commission maintains the equivalent of a year's income in reserves in case of a crop failure.

Squires said the commission has \$4.6 million in reserves with \$1 million in reserves designated for marketing in case it's needed to address any marketing uncertainties.

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