

People & Places

Making the most of walnuts

Mollie Sitkin adds organic snack line to her family's walnut operation

By JULIA HOLLISTER for the Capital Press

LINDEN, Calif. — Maybe old dogs can learn new tricks. After five generations of ranching in San Joaquin County, Calif., the Sitkin family has added flair to the walnuts they grow in their orchards.

“Our ranch, whimsically named Old Dog Ranch, caught on when it was named after my parents’ dogs, Mollie and Poppy,” said Mollie Sitkin. “Both dogs were very old when my parents purchased some land from my great grandmother. My dad liked that one dog so much that they named me after her, too.”

Sitkin grew up on the ranch near Linden, and though she said she wasn’t always involved in it, she has reinvigorated it with unique products she makes from the organic walnuts they grow.

She started the family’s value-added line of snack products about 5 years ago.

“The raw honey-and-sea salt walnut butter is one of my favorite products,” she said. “Somehow it is super-healthy



Courtesy of Molly DeCoudreaux

Roger and Mollie Sitkin with their “crew” at Old Dog Ranch in San Joaquin County, Calif., east of the Bay Area. She started the family’s value-added line of organic snack products about five years ago.

but also tastes like cookie dough.”

They also grow the organic spices that they use in their flavored walnuts and keep bees for the honey that goes into their walnut butter. All of their products — with the exception of the whiskey spice walnuts — are made with 100 percent gluten-free ingredients.

“...We’ve been proud to watch their business grow as Mollie has developed the value-added side of her family’s walnut business,” said Brie Mazurek, communications director of CUESA — the Center for Urban Education

about Sustainable Agriculture — which operates the Ferry Plaza Farmers’ Market in San Francisco. Old Dog Ranch has been part of the market for 3 years.

“The ranch is a family operation,” Sitkin said. “My dad, Roger, farms our walnuts and seasonings and I hand-make our products, keep our bees and run our food business.”

The ranch has three orchards: two organic orchards totaling 27 acres and one 40-acre conventional orchard, she said.

Going organic is just one way the family farms sustainably and responsibly, she said.

“We use drip irrigation to conserve water, build healthy soil with cover crops and manure, and choose crop varieties that flourish in our microclimate here on the banks of the Calaveras (River),” Sitkin said.

Walnuts thrive in the deep, rich topsoil. Old Dog Ranch grows Chandler walnuts for their excellent flavor, golden color, and easy-to-crack shells, and for the trees’ natural resilience, the ranch’s website says. Chandlers leaf and flower later than other varieties, making them naturally resistant to winter frost damage and rainy-season blight.



Western Innovator

Mollie Sitkin

Farm: Old Dog Ranch.

Orchard: 67 acres of walnut trees (27 acres organic, 40 acres conventional).

Hometown: Linden, Calif.

Occupation: Creates added-value snacks and other foods made with walnuts.

Online: www.olddogranch.com

“As a rule, walnuts are not particularly hard to grow,” she said. “The problem is growing consistently high-quality organic walnuts can take some extra care, time and experience.”

The harvest lasts about a day and all the nuts are machine-harvested.

In spite of the beautiful weather and excellent soil conditions, there are pitfalls.

“The biggest challenge facing the growers is changing market conditions and price fluctuations,” she said.

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We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.

Start-ups awarded \$500,000 to help relieve ag labor woes

By DAN WHEAT Capital Press

IRVINE, Calif. — Two technology start-up companies have each received \$250,000 from Western Growers and Radicle Growth to advance automation and help alleviate agricultural labor shortages.

One of the companies, Ganaz, has built an app that helps farms recruit and engage with their workforce.

Using their growing network of thousands of farmworkers and their social media integrations, Ganaz lets farms recruit farmworkers with a few taps on their smartphone. Once on the job, farmers can get essential messages, like shift changes, to their workforce and solicit feedback on working conditions to improve retention. The company is based



Radicle Growth

The winning teams from Ganaz and GroGuru with Kirk Haney, second from right, of Radicle Growth.

at Western Growers Center for Innovation in Salinas,

GroGuru, in San Diego, has a wireless underground sensor that can transmit from as far below ground as six feet and work with other sensors. The system can instrument, monitor, collect and analyze data, and deliver real-time results for optimal soil and water

management across all soil and crop types. This helps farmers with on-farm efficiency, which can streamline operations.

The companies participated in an inaugural Radicle competition with other companies specializing in improving on-farm efficiencies. They received the monetary awards and access to farm acreage to

pilot their technology.

“The labor shortage in agriculture has reached a critical stage, and without legislation for workable ag immigration reform, we need to be proactive in accelerating technology if we want to continue to have a nutritious and uninterrupted domestic food supply,” said Tom Nassif, president and CEO of Western Growers.

“The vision Ganaz and GroGuru demonstrated was incredibly impressive, and they both have all the winning elements needed to succeed in the agtech arena and help farmers tackle ongoing labor issues,” said Kirk Haney, Radicle Growth CEO and competition judge.

The competition was the first in the nation providing ag tech start-ups with an opportunity to pitch their technologies

in front of a live audience to a panel of investors and industry-leading farmers for substantial capital funding.

Founded in 1926, Western Growers, of Irvine, represents family farmers growing fresh produce in Arizona, California, Colorado and New Mexico. Members provide over half the nation’s fresh fruits, vegetables and tree nuts, including nearly half of America’s fresh organic produce.

There are 51 start-up companies at Western Growers Center for Innovation & Technology that opened in Salinas in 2015.

Radicle Growth is an “acceleration fund” in San Diego that selects innovative ag and food tech startups for investment and has a unique proprietary platform to help visionaries in agriculture.

Washington state dairy ambassadors selected

BELLEVUE, Wash. — Abigail Zurcher, representing the Mid-Columbia Counties, was crowned the 2018-2019 Washington state dairy ambassador.

She was one of five finalists at the 63rd Annual Washington State Dairy Ambassador Coronation June 23 at the Bellevue High School Performing Arts Center, according to a Washington State Dairy Women press release.

Rebecca Ford, representing Lewis County, and Jacoba “Cobi” VanSlageren, representing the Yakima Valley area, were selected as equal alternate state dairy ambassadors.

“I am so excited to be representing the dairy farmers across the state this year,” Zurcher said.

As representatives of the Dairy Farmers of Washington, the state dairy ambassador and alternates will visit schools, attend local and state fairs, appear at Washington Interscholastic Activities Association events, parades and many more activities including addressing the Washington state legislature promoting the health and nutrition benefits of dairy products.

The dairy industry was well represented by their 2017-2018

Washington State Dairy Ambassador Anna Teachman, of Sea Tac, and Alternate State Dairy Ambassadors Juliana LeClair, of Mount Vernon, and Claire Leininger, of Everson. They traveled around the state educating students, parents and others on the positive impact and value of Washington’s dairy industry and the importance of dairy products.

Administered by the Washington State Dairy Women, the dairy ambassador program began in 1955 to mentor and support outstanding young women and promote the dairy industry.



Washington State Dairy Women

From left to right are Alternate State Dairy Ambassador Cobi VanSlageren, Washington State Ambassador Abigail Zurcher and Alternate State Ambassador Rebecca Ford.

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.

Through Saturday July 7

St. Paul Rodeo. 7:30 p.m. Rodeo Grounds, Main Street, St. Paul, Ore. The 83rd annual St. Paul Rodeo runs July 3-7 and celebrates Independence Day with five days of fun. Website: http://www.stpaulrodeo.com

Eugene Pro Rodeo. 5 p.m. Rodeo Grounds, 90751 Prairie Road, Eugene, Ore. Rodeo, dances and fireworks are featured. Closed Thursday, July 5. Website: http://www.eugenerodeo.com/

Wednesday, July 11

Caneberry Field Day. 1-5 p.m. OSU North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Mile

Road, Aurora, Ore. This is the annual field day for commercial and backyard caneberry growers. Sponsored by Oregon State University. Website: http://oregonstate.edu/dept/NWREC/

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

Friday, July 13

Forest Root Disease Workshop. 8 a.m.-4 p.m. UI Extension, Kootenai County, 1808 N. Third St., Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. This program is aimed at both forest managers and forest landowners who are interested in learning more about forest root diseases. The event spends the morning indoors learning about the basics. The afternoon is spent outside in the forest. This workshop is limited to 35 participants. Cost: \$20 by mail, \$22 online. Website: http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/

Friday-Sunday July 13-29

California State Fair. 11 a.m.-10 p.m. California Expo Center, 1600 Exposition Blvd., Sacramento, Calif. California’s state fair brings out the best in the state’s agriculture. Website: http://www.castatefair.org

Monday, July 16

Growing Organic Peaches. 5-7 p.m. Cloud Mountain Farm Center, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson, Wash. Participants will be able to ask questions and discuss the advantages of growing peaches, including the economics and potential for profits. Website: https://bit.ly/2N5mqOf

Wednesday, July 18

Blueberry Field Day. 1-5 p.m. OSU North Willamette Research and Extension Center, 15210 NE Mile Road, Aurora, Ore. This is the annual field day for commercial and backyard growers. Sponsored by Oregon State University. Website: http://oregonstate.edu/dept/NWREC/

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N.

Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the fifth session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost: \$38 Email: cschnepf@uidaho.edu

Friday, July 20

Agriculture Law Seminar 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Oxford Hotel, 10 NW Minnesota Ave., Bend, Ore. This program will examine key legal issues affecting Oregon agriculture including issues related to the environment, water, land use, employment, and bankruptcy. The program will include a timely recap of the 2018 legislative session, and a look ahead to the 2019 legislative session. Attendees will also benefit from a special presentation from representatives of the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon Farm Bureau Federation, who will provide an industry update. Website: https://bit.ly/2L8dE0D

Wednesday, July 25

Forestry Shortcourse. 9 a.m.-noon. Sandpoint Orchard, 10881 N. Boyer Road, Sandpoint, Idaho. This is the last session of a six-session course on forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife habitat, and other forestry topics. Cost:

\$38 Email: cschnepf@uidaho.edu

Thursday, July 26

Fresno Food Expo. 7 a.m.-5 p.m. Fresno Convention & Entertainment Center, 848 M. St., Fresno, Calif. The Fresno Food Expo is a food industry trade event that exclusively showcases California’s biggest brands and hottest new food trends, featuring food and beverage products from every category. Website: www.FresnoFoodExpo.com

Friday-Sunday Aug. 17-26

Western Idaho Fair. Western Idaho Fairgrounds, 5610 Glenwood St., Boise, Idaho. Website: www.idahofair.com

Thursday, Aug. 23

Inaugural Washington FFA Foundation Golf Tournament. 1:30-6 p.m. Apple Tree Golf Course, 8804 Occidental Road, Yakima, Wash. To take part, contact FFA Foundation Executive Director Jesse Taylor at jesse@washingtonffa.org or 253-208-9071. A dinner and auction will follow the tournament.