

Pay range for most of these workers can go up to \$16 an hour

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Unique operation

Norris and state agricultural representatives said they believe the farm and its packing facility are the only berry operations in Oregon that hire the majority of their summer packing and shipping help from the high school and college ranks of nearby communities. Other berry facilities in the state that need a large number of workers during harvest hire workers of various ages.

The Norris farm had previously also hired young people and other community members to pick blueberries during harvest, but the management and paperwork required for those workers and their inconsistent presence and quantity picked led to the farm going with contract pickers only. The farm also uses mechanical pickers to harvest fruit for the frozen market.

Norris, who is now 71, said compared to when he was a youth, there aren't many opportunities for today's youth to experience agriculture and to learn how to work hard. He is pleased his farm can continue to offer such an opportunity and he is pleased with the response of the young workers and their commitment.

"The youth who work here are absolutely amazing and resourceful," Norris said. "They stay with the job until it is done. They learn responsibility. We have orders and we have to get them out. They have to stay with the job until it is done. The young adults know that and they respond very well."

During the busiest time of harvest — two to three weeks from mid-June to early July — the workers put in 10- to 16-hour days.

The young people can be found out in the hot sun weighing, recording and stacking blueberries as pickers bring in the fruit. The packing and shipping barn is full of youth working on the inspection lines where blueberries are sorted, packaged, labeled and stacked on pallets for shipping. On the other side of a wall, workers feed flat cardboard into machines that turn out finished boxes.

Members of the pallet jack crew use manual and electric jacks to bring stacks of empty boxes to the inspection lines and to move pallets of boxed berries into nearby coolers.

Outside the barn, there are young people at the machine that washes the empty fruit trays, stacking them on pal-



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press
Carrie Norris, left, and Beth Patt check on the progress of blueberry orders in the packing barn at Norris Blueberry Farms during harvest season in July. Norris, a co-owner, has worked in the barn since she was a teenager 20 years ago. Patt, a barn manager, has worked at the farm for eight summers.



Anna Lake, left, and her sister, Sarah Lake, work at a field weigh station during the blueberry harvest in July at Norris Blueberry Farms near Roseburg, Ore. This is Lake's second summer working at the farm and Sarah's first.

lets. Others hand wash the yellow buckets that pickers will use the next day in the field.

A handful of the young workers are certified in forklift use, operating those machines at one end of the barn to unload pallets of fruit coming from the field and using them at the other end of the barn to load orders into the refrigerated trailers of semi-trucks.

Hard work pays

The workers begin by earning minimum wage — \$10.50 an hour — in their first summer at the farm, but can earn a raise that is retroactive to their first day on the job if they show energy and enthusiasm in getting their jobs done. The pay range for most of these workers can go up to \$16 an hour, based on their specific job duties, performance and number of summers working at the farm.

Paul Norris and two of his daughters, Carrie and Ellie, who are now in their late 30s, work in the field and in the barn, providing guidance for the young workforce.

Beth Patt, 22, and Zack Moffitt, 23, are in their seventh seasons working in the farm's barn. Kristen Beebe, 22, is in her fifth year. Anna Lake, 19, is in her second year and her sister, Sarah Lake, 17, is in her first year. Patt and Beebe are recent college graduates, Moffitt is a fifth-year college senior, Anna Lake is a college sophomore and Sarah Lake is a high school senior.

"It's really been a good place to work," said Patt, who worked her way up to being a barn manager. "You can make so much money in a short amount of time because of the hours. If you have a willingness to work, if you work hard for them (the Norrises), they compensate you for that."



Young workers from the local area work on the sorting line at Norris Blueberry Farms near Umpqua, Ore. The farm has been hiring a workforce of young local people to work in the packing and shipping barn for the past 20 years.

'An opportunity'

"It's such an opportunity," added Patt, who will be a first-grade teacher at Dayton, Ore., this fall. "Very few places hire this many high school and college kids and pay above minimum wage. Working here helped me buy a reliable car, paid for rent and some (college) tuition."

Moffitt said other than "bucking hay for one day," he had held no paying job until starting at the Norris farm seven summers ago. He kept returning and this summer was the shipping/receiving manager, having the responsibilities of working with the fruit broker, truck carriers and drivers, and loading many pallets of berries into semi-trailers from the seat of a forklift.

"This job will help me with my future," said Moffitt, who is a student at Oregon State University. "It will show potential future employers that I'm not against hard work and

long hours. When it comes down to getting the job done, I will see it through to the end and not quit or pass on the responsibilities so it is easier for me. I've learned a hard work ethic and to get what needs to be done, done."

"It says a lot about the Norrises, who could hire a crew of adults, but instead they are teaching young kids the value of hard work and what hard work brings them," Moffitt adds.

Beebe is a pallet jack crew leader and manages 15 young workers in the barn.

"The Norrises are very gracious in hiring young people," she said. "You learn how to work hard here, you get an idea of what it takes to work in any company. You have to get along with people, to be able to talk with both superiors and people below you in efficient ways."

"I now have an appreciation for the work that goes into

food, from a plant to a store," she said. "There's so much work that goes into each package, the small details along the way, the people to move it from the field to the house, along the pack lines. It's a bigger operation than I would have ever thought if I hadn't had the experience here."

Sisters Anna and Sarah Lake worked in the field at a weigh-in station. Anna said it is satisfying work even if it is hard. She described herself as a "blueberry snob," explaining that she now knows what a good blueberry should taste like.

"It's interesting to think of the back story of where food comes from," she said. "It was a shock to experience that but now it is cool to know the process."

Sarah Lake added that the work has been gratifying because she knows she has been part of the process, lifting and stacking hundreds of trays of blueberries onto trailers before they leave the field.

"It's hard for teenagers to get a job," Sarah said. "It's good to be able to put this job on your resume."

The Norrises admit they have had to fire some young workers over the years, but that has been rare. They said those teenagers who can't manage the work usually weed themselves out, quitting because the work is too hot, too hard or too long.

A tradition

Ellie Norris, now a co-owner and the farm manager of the business, said she wants the farm to continue to hire a young local workforce during harvest.

"It started small with us as kids, but has become a tradition," she said. "I wouldn't want it any other way, to see kids in their first adult jobs, to help them with their skills, to watch them evolve into adults."

"Working with the young people does require so much more attention and assistance, more coaching, how to show up to work on time, how to communicate, how to be a reliable worker," Ellie Norris explained. "We definitely want to continue this tradition with young people, to help shape the lives of kids in the county. We want to see these kids succeed and to go on to great things."

Paul Norris said 40 to 50 percent of the young workforce return and work at the farm during several harvests.

"I'm just absolutely proud of these kids," he said. "They do a great job. They know their jobs and they're doing them."

Groups estimate purchases will amount to 12 million to 15 million gallons of milk

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purchase relatively inexpensive and nutritious fluid milk for use in the network of food banks and food pantries that participate in the Emergency Food Assistance Program, the officer said.

The International Dairy Foods Association and MilkPEP, which represent dairy processors, have been working with USDA to utilize Section 32 funding for milk purchases, Bailey Wood, IDFA vice president of communications, said.

The groups estimate the purchases will amount to 12 million to 15 million gallons of milk.

"We don't quite yet know what food banks will request. The cost will vary depending on the product" and transportation costs, he said.

"We want this to be flexible," he said.

The goal is to help people, especially children, get the nutrition they need, he said.

"As many as 41 million Americans, including 13 million children, face hunger daily and are at risk of missing out on essential nutrients when they don't have access to milk," Michael Dykes, DVM, president and CEO of IDFA, said in a press release on Tuesday.

Feeding America, which is trying to increase milk donations through The Great Amer-



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
\$50 million in USDA milk purchases will help people through food assistance programs and provide support for dairy markets, industry leaders say.

ican Milk Drive, says its food banks are able to provide only the equivalent of one gallon of milk per person per year.

"Milk is one of the most requested nutrition staples at food banks, yet it is rarely available," Julia Kadison, CEO of MilkPEP, said in the press release.

With one out of two children ages 9 and up falling short on calcium, vitamin D and potassium, there is an even greater need to make sure milk is getting to children and families who need it most, she said.

USDA's purchase will address the significant challenge of hunger and at the same time have a positive impact on the dairy industry at a time of significant market uncertainty, Dykes said.

The National Milk Producers Federation also welcomed

the USDA purchases for food assistance programs, saying it's the first time the agency has bought milk for that use.

"We are pleased that ISDA is now including milk in the assortment of foods it is buying and donating, as milk is in high demand at food banks because of its unparalleled nutritional benefits," Jim Mulhern, NMPF president and CEO said.

But NMPF did not request the purchases, Chris Galen, NMPF executive vice president of communications, said.

The organization's focus with USDA has been on how to best use the \$12 billion tariff mitigation package, he said.

"So that's been our main point of discussion with the agency. We are hoping they will have more on that by the end of the month," he said.

Still a chance for the situation to improve before Oregon hazelnut harvest hits full swing

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Demand for hazelnuts is "huge" but the industry has encountered two "hugely unlikely scenarios" that create uncertainty for this year's crop, said George.

The tumbling value of the Turkish lire could have the same effect as "65-70 percent of the world's hazelnuts going on super-sale," he said.

Normally, difficulties in selling hazelnuts to China would simply prompt the hazelnut industry to direct more crop to the kernel market, which generally isn't as lucrative but still offers a decent price, he said.

With the Turkish lire in free-fall, though, "you pivot from China to a not-good situation," George said.

Even so, there's still a chance for the situation to improve before the Oregon hazelnut harvest hits full swing in early autumn, he said.

While Turkish farmers continue to receive the same number of lire for their hazelnuts, they're still affected by the currency drop due to the rising price of fertilizer and other imported inputs.

It's possible that growers in Turkey will demand to be paid in dollars for their crop to compensate for their unstable currency, which would strengthen prices



Courtesy Lynn Howlett Photography
Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore., speaks to Oregon hazelnut growers about trade issues at an event in Newberg, Ore. Higher tariffs in China and currency devaluation in Turkey threaten to create problems for the 2018 crop.

for the crop, George said. "Whether the Turkish farmer has enough power to demand that, we don't know."

There's also a chance of a breakthrough on the China front that would cut tariffs on U.S. hazelnuts headed to that country, since the Oregon industry now has direct communication with the Chinese Consulate General's office in San Francisco, said Ross.

"It could open up a whole new frontier for us," he said.

Oregon's Congressional delegation has kept the issue alive in Washington, D.C., most recently with a letter to trade and agriculture officials coordinated by Rep.

Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore.

For her efforts, Bonamici was recognized as the "2018 Legislative Champion" by the Associated Oregon Hazelnut Industries in Newberg, Ore., on Aug. 8.

For her part, Bonamici said it was tough to make predictions on trade in light of "inconsistent messages" from the Trump administration.

Unexpected trade actions, such as a possible withdrawal from the North American Free Trade Agreement, can quickly roil markets, she said. "That kind of uncertainty sends shock waves through the business community."