

UI to host annual Fruit Field Day, research tours

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The University of Idaho Parma Research and Extension Center will host its annual Fruit Field Day and tour from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mountain on Sept. 7.

Scheduled tours of research orchards will feature several cultivars of new table grapes, peaches, nectarines, apples, plums, quince, Asian pears and other alternative fruits. Among planned discussion topics are fruit research and production, and orchard mechanization.

Participants can tour the university's comprehensive project sites focused on apple irrigation, fruit nutrition, chemical thinning and pesticide use. Other scheduled tour stops include a super-high-density apple orchard with new architectures and rootstocks; stone fruit research orchards and selections; plantings of alternative fruits like quince, almonds, walnuts, Asian pears, jujube and haskaps; a national apple rootstock research site; table grape vineyards; new grape canopy research and a national cherry rootstock and training project.

"We have had a good year for most of the crops," said Essie Fallahi, UI pomology program director. Favorable weather and water conditions, and manageable levels of pests and diseases, helped fruit crops in southwestern Idaho and southeastern Oregon.



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

Essie Fallahi, who heads the University of Idaho's pomology program, and other researchers at the UI Parma Research and Extension Center will offer a field day and research tours on Sept. 7.

Participants always can see something new at Fruit Field Day because they can evaluate new projects or the progress of the many long-term projects in the research plots, he said.

Irrigation, pest and disease control, and various cultural practices will be discussed.

Fruit Field Day, held for more than a decade, tradi-

tionally draws commercial, small-scale and alternative fruit growers; fruit industry representatives; horticultural professionals and graduate students; university extension educators and research staff; horticultural hobbyists; and home and master gardeners.

Tour information and pesticide-credit detail: 208/722-6701 ext. 16228.

Alfalfa seed crop looks good as harvest approaches

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Western Farms' alfalfa seed fields looked good as of early August, but co-owner Joe Weitz wasn't celebrating just yet.

He and his brother, Tony, own 2,500-acre Western Farms. Based near Lake Lowell outside Caldwell, Idaho, they grow alfalfa seed — pollinated by alfalfa leafcutter bees they raise — but they also grow radish seed, onions, corn, wheat and mint.

The farm grows proprietary alfalfa seed on contract for a handful of Boise-area seed companies that own the seeds. The seed companies weigh, clean and package the harvested seed before they sell it to hay growers, sometimes directly but usually through dealers or farm cooperatives.

This year's alfalfa seed harvest at Western Farms likely will start around Aug. 20 and last two weeks.

As the month began, crop and field conditions were favorable and in line with long-term averages, Joe Weitz said. Weather and pollinating conditions, and water supplies, have been good this year.

"But there's a lot of things that can happen to alfalfa seed before it gets harvested," he said. "Wind, rain and hail are the three that can damage it. We're OK so far."

Such weather events can materialize in southwestern Idaho and southeastern Oregon as August unfolds, in contrast



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

Western Farms co-owner Joe Weitz, center, with farm managers Davis McConnell, left, and Brennan Gabiola on the farm outside Caldwell, Idaho, on Aug. 3.

to the hot, dry conditions that characterize much of the region in midsummer.

That's one of the reasons it's hard to predict alfalfa seed yield based on how it looks in the field.

"Until you get it to the cleaning facility, you don't know what you have," Weitz said.

Seed companies work with their contracted growers throughout the growing season to help control the variables that can be controlled. After harvest, the companies clean the alfalfa seed of extraneous material such as dirt, chaff and weed seeds to arrive at the rigorous industry standard for seed purity.

"The crop is in great shape for this time of year," said Lynn Nichols, field representative with Alforex Seeds in Homedale, Idaho. At this stage, yields look average or above average, "and if dry weather cooperates, we should see that relayed into harvest."

A normal spring and good

moisture conditions helped the area's alfalfa seed crop get into good shape as of early August, Nichols said. Timely applications of herbicide kept weeds at manageable levels, leaving fields largely weed-free, or "clean." Insect pressure has been minimal.

Bloom timing, a reflection of pollinator activity, was ideal and produced good seed set, he said. Growers this year took advantage of lower costs for pollination services and placed more pollinators overall, leading to better seed set.

Weitz said growing alfalfa seed is challenging even as seed companies and farmers make advancements. Western Farms has been growing it for 36 years.

"Most years, Idaho weather is conducive to growing alfalfa seed," he said.

The southwestern Idaho-southeastern Oregon region is among the world's top-ranked seed producers and is a major player in alfalfa seed.



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CASE study: Grants help Washington FFA members learn about ag technology

By Trevor Schmitt
Washington FFA Vice President 2018-2019

Earlier this year, the Washington State Legislature granted thousands of dollars to be allocated to CASE in Agricultural Education. They dedicated \$1.75 million to schools trying to obtain classroom CASE equipment. Teachers who qualified for this grant were awarded grants to help purchase CASE equipment for their classrooms to assist in teaching.

Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education (CASE) prepares teachers to teach students more practically in mathematics, technology, engineering and science in the agricultural field.

This grant that CASE-certified teachers have access to will allow them to purchase CASE equipment and will give students a better chance to learn about agriculture in a more technical aspect.

Renee Johnson, an ag teacher from Chiawana High School, obtained a \$26,500 grant to purchase classroom equipment to enhance her agricultural science classes. These funds will go toward purchasing equipment for CASE learning for her classroom, which in turn will bolster her students' education and promote their understanding of the agricultural fields in Washington.

These grants will also give chances to more students to be involved in clubs like FFA and will help FFA members further their education. Classroom instruction is an essential part to FFA members and these grants will better prepare them for careers in agriculture after high school. Overall this helps all Ag students and Ag Teachers in our state.

Hannah Patterson of the Eastmont High School Agriculture Education Program performs water quality tests on a local water source in East Wenatchee, Wash., using Vernier temperature, pH and conductivity probes.



Graduates of the Washington CASE Agriculture Power and Technology Institute held at Goldendale High School. Teachers from Washington, Oregon and Kansas participated in the nine-day CASE Institute, which provided extensive preparation for the teachers to be proficient and confident in their ability to provide proper instruction of mechanical skills and concepts to middle and high school students. Every lesson is aligned to national standards for agriculture, science, mathematics, and English language arts. Agricultural Power and Technology areas of study include shop safety, tool operation, materials selection, fabrication, machinery management, engineering & technology applications.

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