

Organic Farm School taking applications for 2019 class

Students learn on 10 acres in Washington

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The Organic Farm School on Whidbey Island, Wash., is accepting applications for an eight-month training program that will begin in March for people who aspire to own or manage a small organic farm.

Students learn about organic agriculture on a 10-acre farm about 30 miles north of Seattle. The tuition is \$6,500, and students put in full days in the field and in classrooms.

“What we want our potential students to know is that farming is an honorable profession and that we want to get them prepared to do it for the long term,” the farm’s executive director, Judy Feldman, said.

The school started a decade ago to train Whidbey Island residents for a community supported agriculture program. There are, however, only so many people on Whidbey Island. The school now draws students from around the country.

This year, Feldman said, there are students from Arizona, California, Iowa, Montana and Pennsylvania. They range in ages from 20 to 43. Some are getting started and some are looking to make a mid-career change.

The school takes applications into December, but caps enrollment at 12 to 15, so Feldman encouraged applicants to apply by Thanksgiving. This year’s class, which graduates in No-



Organic Farm School instructor Aaron Varadi and student Parker Downs tend plants growing at the school's farm on Whidbey Island, Wash. The school teaches organic farming and is enrolling students now for next year's eight-month program.



Courtesy of Bill Phillips/Organic Farm School
The Organic Farm School on Whidbey Island, Wash. The school teaches organic farming and is taking applications for next year's eight-month program.

sic mechanics and carpentry, operating equipment and greenhouse propagation. The school’s production manager is Raelani Kesler and the classroom instructor is Aaron Varadi.

“Our goal is to expose students to as much as possible,” Feldman said.

For housing, students have the option of renting a shared room in the farm’s five-bedroom house. Rent is reasonable and the house is a two-minute walk from the farm, she said. Not everyone chooses to live in the house, she said.

Scholarships are available. More information and applications are available online at organicfarm-school.org.

Washington AG to press for \$18 million fine against foodmakers

Court upholds conviction, overturns penalty

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson said his office will seek to restore an \$18 million fine against the Grocery Manufacturers Association, which an appeals court overturned Wednesday.

The Court of Appeals in Tacoma upheld GMA’s conviction and left in place a \$6 million judgment for shielding the names of food and beverage companies that contributed to a campaign against a GMO-labeling initiative in 2013. The court ruled, however, that a lower court judge erred by finding that GMA intentionally broke the law and tripling the penalty.

“We won on every issue except one — the trebling of the penalty — and we intend to appeal on that issue,” Ferguson said in a written statement. “GMA intentionally violated Washington state campaign finance laws, and they must be held accountable.”

Amalgamated Sugar seeks air quality permit

Amalgamated Sugar seeks an Idaho Department of Environmental Quality permit to improve its beet-sugar plant in Paul.

The department seeks public comment through Oct. 10 on a proposed air quality permit, which would regulate emissions from Amalgamated Sugar’s manufacturing plant at 50 S. 500 W.

Boise-based Amalgamated said in a Statement of Basis to Idaho DEQ that it proposes to replace a natural-gas-fired boiler, which would increasing the energy production capacity by 21 percent a year, and install a new juice storage tank.

Idaho DEQ, in reviewing the permit application, determined building and operating the equipment under the proposed permit’s conditions would not cause or contribute to a violation of an ambient air quality standard. It would not injure or unreasonably impact human or animal life, or vegetation, the department found.

A public hearing may be held of requested in writing by Sept. 15, the department said.

Information/comment: Tanya Chin, Idaho DEQ State Office Air Quality Division, 1410 N. Hilton St., Boise, Idaho 83706 or tanya.chin@deq.idaho.gov.

A GMA spokesman said the association was reviewing the decision and considering its next steps.

Even at \$6 million, the fine would be the largest campaign-finance penalty in U.S. history. The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation paid a \$3.8 million penalty in 2006 to the Federal Elections Commission.

Thurston County Superior Court Judge Anne Hirsch levied and then tripled the fine in 2016 after ruling GMA intentionally didn’t identify the brand-name companies that spent \$11 million to defeat Initiative 522.

The three-judge appeals court ruled that doing something that turned out to be illegal wasn’t the same as intending to break the law.

“The fact that GMA deliberately engaged in conduct that the trial court later determined was a violation of the (law) does not mean that GMA intended to violate” the law, Judge Bradley Maxa wrote for the court.

The appeals court sent the case back to Hirsch for further deliberations on whether the penalty should be tripled.

The court did not address GMA’s contention that the penalty violated the U.S. Con-

stitution’s prohibition on excessive fines.

GMA also cited constitutional rights in wanting to protect its members from criticism for opposing a ballot measure that would have required labels on most foods and drinks with genetically modified ingredients. The association said its members went through a bruising campaign the year before on the same issue in California.

“GMA presented minimal evidence that their members suffered adverse consequences because of their opposition to the California GMO initiative,” Maxa wrote.

The court also rejected GMA’s argument that voters weren’t misled because they knew the contributions came from “grocery manufacturers.”

Maxa wrote that the description was too broad. “Knowing the names of the companies actually funding GMA’s efforts — and particularly the types of products those companies sell — would be valuable to voters,” he stated.

PepsiCo, Nestle USA, Coca-Cola, Kraft Foods, General Mills and Conagra all donated more than \$1 million, according to PDC records.

GMA disclosed the names of 34 companies shortly before

the election and after receiving a notice from the Public Disclosure Commission that it was violating the law. GMA argues its cooperation argues in favor of leniency, but that argument was rejected by Hirsch and the appeals court.

All together, GMA raised \$14.6 million in 2013 to oppose GMO-labeling measures nationwide. The attorney general’s office suggested tripling that figure and fining GMA \$43.8 million. The previous record fine in Washington for campaign violations was \$975,000 paid by the Washington Education Association in 2008.

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