

People & Places

California rice farm flourishes

Ken LaGrande heads sprawling family operation in the Sacramento Valley

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Ken LaGrande grew up in the Sacramento Valley's "Rice Country." In its fifth generation, the sprawling family operation continues to thrive today.

"In 1851, the LaGrande family moved to the Sacramento Valley," he said. "We grow, dry, mill and market rice."

The brands include Sun Valley Rice, Planet Rice, Valley Select and Gen-Ji-Mai. Planet Rice was recently voted "best whole grain" rice by Delicious Living magazine.

LaGrande, founder of the Sun Valley Rice Co. and the LaGrande Family Foods Group, plants about 500,000 acres to rice each year. Because of consistent weather and low humidity, California does not have the pest issues that some other parts of the country experience.

Though one of the largest rice operations, the farm is one of many in the valley.

"There are approximately 2,500 rice farmers in the state," said Jim Morris, spokesman for the California Rice Commission. "In addition, 97 percent of the nation's rice is grown in



Ken LaGrande is a fifth generation rice farmer in California. He farms in the state's "Rice Country" near Sacramento. He is also active in water issues that challenge California.

Sacramento Valley and virtually 100 percent of America's sushi rice is grown in California."

What about competition? LeGrande said it's not a problem.

"The California rice industry is relatively small with a handful of competitors of different sizes," he said. "But, for the most part we all work together really well to bring the highest quality to the consumers. We currently sell rice in North America, parts of Asia, Europe and the Middle East."

When he is not farming rice, LeGrande is involved in many of the important issues that impact Cal-

ifornia's environment and farmers.

"Ken LaGrande has been a leader and advocate for California agriculture and irrigation water policy for over two decades," said Jeffrey Sutton, general manager of the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority. He has served as a member of the authority board of directors for 21 years.

The authority operates and maintains a 140-mile dual canal water conveyance system that provides irrigation water to 17 Central Valley Project water contractor districts throughout four counties: Tehama, Glenn, Colusa and Yolo.

"Ken's talent, conviction

and leadership were instrumental to the successful implementation of the \$185 million Red Bluff Fish Passage Improvement Project," said Sutton. The project is a partnership between the authority and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and resulted in the construction of a quarter-mile fish screen, one of the longest in the country.

"This important project secured reliable year-round water diversion capability for the 17 water districts served by the TCCA, while simultaneously resolving a huge (Endangered Species Act) conflict and greatly benefiting several listed threatened and endangered



Ken LaGrande

Residence: Sacramento, Calif.

Family: Wife, Julie, and two sons

Education: Santa Clara University, bachelor's degree in finance

Occupation: Rice farmer

Quote: "To provide superior and innovative rice and food products, services and solutions throughout the world."

fish species," he said.

"The successful implementation of the Fish Passage Improvement Project prevented a huge regional catastrophe to our rural agricultural communities," Sutton said. "Without Ken LaGrande's determination and ingenuity the project would not have been a reality. The success of this effort will serve to benefit the farms and ranches of the west side of the Sacramento Valley for generations to come."

Would LaGrande advise anyone to begin a career in rice farming today?

"A simple answer is 'Yes,'" he said, but he added a caveat. "Rice farming is a commitment of time, energy and resources and it would be difficult to jump into without experience."

Oregon FFA searches for first CEO

Organization recently approved restructuring

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press



Kevin White

10-member joint policy board. Kirk Maag, president-elect of the Oregon FFA Foundation, said the goal is to increase

efficiency and improve collaboration.

"We decided we could be more efficient in our use of funds by hiring a single executive to oversee all organizations," Maag said.

The groups each have similar but distinct roles in supporting Oregon FFA. The Association works directly with students and agriculture teachers to organize FFA activities,

How to apply

Candidates for Oregon FFA CEO are encouraged to apply by Dec. 15. Materials should be emailed to the Oregon FFA including:

- Cover letter
- Resume
- List of references
- Response to the following prompt: "Describe your top priorities for your first six months on the job if you are hired as Oregon FFA CEO."

For more information, or to suggest a candidate, contact Kirk Maag at 541-881-9613 or email kirk.maag@gmail.com.

such as the annual convention. The Foundation is the main fundraising arm, rallying support from members and corporate sponsors. Finally, the Alumni are an all-volunteer faction that provides on-the-

ground advice and support for local chapters.

Rather than seek individual executives for each entity, Maag said they felt it made sense to have one person at the top of the organizational chart who

will align their efforts and mission. The National FFA Organization, Foundation and Alumni underwent a similar restructuring in 2015.

"What you have now is a CEO who will understand both the fundraising side, and the needs on the association side of where that money is going," Maag said.

Conversations about restructuring Oregon FFA began in September, after Kevin White resigned as executive director of the Foundation. Under White's leadership, the Foundation went from raising less than \$10,000 per year to more than \$600,000 per year. The state Legislature quit funding FFA in 2011.

Wild West Seed sees flower interest rising

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press



Matt Hilbert

nies that sell primarily to home gardeners. With 10 full-time employees, it does business nationally and to an extent internationally — competing with big-name, merger-enlarged agribusinesses, among others.

"Those big companies participate in the same market. We are definitely small," Hilbert said. "We will be faced with our challenges, but we enjoy what we are doing. Mother Nature can throw you the challenge, but the real challenge is overcoming. Between us in

the group, we usually come up with some pretty good solutions."

Wild West grows echinacea and perennial blue flax flower seed in the Treasure Valley of southwestern Oregon, and has tried to grow some other flower seed in the region. It's one of the company's smaller flower-seed production areas, "but we have had growers in the area express interest in growing flower seed for us," he said. "That is relatively new. Growers are interested in flower production."

Wild West grows some herbs such as dill in the Treasure Valley. Hilbert said about 70 percent of revenue comes from vegetables

and herb seed, the rest from flower seed. The company grows most of its flower seed in the Willamette Valley of western Oregon.

"The share from flower seed has gone up — not in a big way, but it has increased a bit in the past four to five years," he said.

Seeds for edibles were in high demand during the recession years of 2008 and '09, when the popularity of vegetable gardens surged, Hilbert said. "Since then, flowers have rebounded a bit, a contributing factor being interest in pollinator habitat."

Though the home garden market is Wild West's main segment and has seen increased interest in polli-

nating insects, the company also may deal to an extent with farmland put into a federal conservation program. Recent years have seen new incentives to add pollinator habitat to conservation land.

"We may help them source that seed, probably from a seed company that is in their region or has formulated regionally appropriate conservation mixes," Hilbert said. Some of that seed could come from Wild West, which since its inception has developed seed blends suited to particular regions.

The company lately is doing some more organic seed production. And it is developing more specialized products, including certain pollinator-attracting flowers.

CALENDAR

Wednesday, Dec. 19
Lease Literacy for Farmers & Landowners: 7-9 p.m., WSU Snohomish County Extension's Cough Auditorium, 600 128th St. SE, Everett. This informal workshop is designed to help address some of the challenges landowners and tenants have related to developing and maintain good land lease arrangements. We'll have a lawyer familiar with land leases on hand to explain the legal details and answer questions. In addition, much of the evening will be devoted to a

panel of experts on the topic: farmers, landowners, and farm incubator managers willing to share their experiences regarding what works, what doesn't, and how to create good lease relationships. \$15 per person. <https://extension.wsu.edu/snohomish/event/grow-your-farm-3/>.

Thursday, Jan. 10
69th Annual Oregon Mint Growers Meeting: Salishan Resort, 7760 US-101, Gleneden Beach. Attendees will hear the latest on the mint industry. Pesticide recertification credits

have been applied for. <http://oregonmint.org>.

Friday, Jan. 11
69th Annual Oregon Mint Growers Meeting: Salishan Resort, 7760 US-101, Gleneden Beach. Attendees will hear the latest on the mint industry. Pesticide recertification credits have been applied for. <http://oregonmint.org>.

2019 American Farm Bureau Federation Convention and IDEA Trade Show: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. The Farm

Bureau's annual national meeting. <http://www.fb.org/events/afbf-annual-convention/>.

Saturday, Jan. 12
2019 American Farm Bureau Federation Convention and IDEA Trade Show: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. The Farm Bureau's annual national meeting. <http://www.fb.org/events/afbf-annual-convention/>.

Sunday, Jan. 13
2019 American Farm Bureau Federation Con-

vention and IDEA Trade Show: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. The Farm Bureau's annual national meeting. <http://www.fb.org/events/afbf-annual-convention/>.

Monday, Jan. 14
2019 American Farm Bureau Federation Convention and IDEA Trade Show: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, 900 Convention Center Blvd., New Orleans. The Farm Bureau's annual national meeting.



Capital Press
EMPOWERING PRODUCERS OF FOOD & FIBER

Established 1928

Board of Directors

- Mike Forrester
- Steve Forrester
- Kathryn Brown
- Susan Rana
- Harrison Forrester
- Mike Orneg
- Cory Bollinger
- Jeff Rogers

Corporate Officers

- Heidi Wright
Chief Operating Officer
- Rick Hansen
Chief Financial Officer

Capital Press Managers

- Joe Beach Editor & Publisher
- Elizabeth Yutzie Sell ... Advertising Director
- Carl Sampson Managing Editor
- Jessica Boone Production Manager
- Samantha McLaren Circulation Manager

Entire contents copyright © 2018
EO Media Group
dba Capital Press

An independent newspaper
published every Friday.

Capital Press (ISSN 0740-3704) is
published weekly by EO Media Group,
2870 Broadway NE, Salem OR 97303.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, OR,
and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to
Capital Press, P.O. Box 2048 Salem, OR
97308-2048.

To Reach Us

- Circulation 800-882-6789
- Email Circulation@capitalpress.com
- Main line 503-364-4431
- Advertising Fax 503-364-2692

News Staff

Idaho
Carol Ryan Dumas 208-860-3898

Boise
Brad Carlson 208-914-8264

Central Washington
Dan Wheat 509-699-9099

Western Washington
Don Jenkins 360-722-6975

Eastern Washington
Matthew Weaver 509-688-9923

Oregon
George Plaven 406-560-1655
Mateusz Perkowski 800-882-6789

Graphic artist
Alan Kenaga 800-882-6789

Designer
Randy Wrigthouse 800-882-6789

To Place Classified Ads

or 503-370-4383
Telephone (toll free) 800-882-6789
Online CapitalPress.com/classifieds

Subscriptions

- Mail rates paid in advance
- Easy Pay U.S. \$3.75/month
(direct withdrawal from bank
or credit card account)
- 1 year U.S. \$49.99
- 2 years U.S. \$89.99
- 1 year Canada \$275
- 1 year other countries call for quote
- 1 year Internet only \$49.99
- 1 year 4-H, FFA students/teachers \$30
- 9 months 4-H, FFA students/teachers \$25

Visa and Mastercard accepted

To get information published

Mailing address:
Capital Press
P.O. Box 2048
Salem, OR 97308-2048

News: Contact the main office
or news staff member closest to you,
send the information to
newsroom@capitalpress.com
or mail it to "Newsroom," c/o Capital Press.
Include a contact telephone number.

Letters to the Editor: Send your
comments on agriculture-related public
issues to opinions@capitalpress.com, or
mail your letter to "Opinion," c/o Capital
Press. Letters should be limited to
300 words. Deadline: Noon Monday.

Capital Press ag media

- CapitalPress.com
- FarmSeller.com
- MarketPlace.capitalpress.com
- facebook.com/CapitalPress
- facebook.com/FarmSeller
- twitter.com/CapitalPress
- youtube.com/CapitalPressvideo

Index

- Ag Finance 8,9,10
- Markets 15
- Opinion 6

Correction policy

Accuracy is important to Capital Press
staff and to our readers.
If you see a misstatement, omission or
factual error in a headline, story or photo
caption, please call the Capital Press news
department at 503-364-4431, or send
email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.
We want to publish corrections
to set the record straight.