

People & Places

Farmers add grocery stores to mix

By PADMA NAGAPPAN
For the Capital Press

Noel and Jerome Stehly are not your stereotypical farmers, despite being third generation growers hailing from a family that has worked the land in southern California for decades.

The brothers own Stehly Farms Organics in San Diego County, where they grow citrus fruit, avocados, berries and vegetables on nearly 300 acres.

But they do things differently.

They live in San Diego and commute to their farm, which is about an hour north of the city, because they married “city girls.” And they began their own grocery stores, Stehly Farms Markets, to sell their produce and that of other select local farmers.

Unlike other growers, they don’t have farmstands because their farm is off the beaten track and they don’t own public road frontage. A few years ago, they noticed the trend toward buying local food gathering momentum. And since they lived in the city, they saw there were several underserved areas where residents had to travel far to get fresh organic produce.

Noel had toyed with the idea of opening a retail store for several years, but he didn’t bring it up until Jerome suggested it.

“I didn’t want people to think I was crazy, but when



Padma Nagappan/For the Capital Press

Farmers Jerome, left, and Noel Stehly at one of their grocery stores in San Diego.

Jerome brought it up, I was excited,” Noel said.

His worry was, with all the work that the farm required, how would they find the time to expand into retail?

“But my opinion was, how can we not do it?” Jerome said. “If you do it right, it would be a great extension of our business.”

They stumbled upon the location for the first store almost by accident, when Jerome noticed a guitar shop had closed and was available for rent. It fit their needs, being neither too

small nor too big. There were no other grocery stores and the area didn’t fit the demographics for the larger chain stores like Jimbo’s or Whole Foods, so they would not be competing against them.

Soon after, they opened a second store in another underserved area of the city. On the advice of an early employee, they put a juice bar in their stores, which has been a huge draw for foot traffic into the stores.

The brothers resisted the idea initially, wanting to get the store up and

running before venturing into smoothies and juices, but they adapted once they saw how popular it became.

“We didn’t know some of this initially, we were amateurs, but that’s OK,” Jerome said. “In business you make mistakes, but you learn from them as quickly as possible and correct them.”

The two stores consume a good portion of their time, although they represent a small portion of their total business. The brothers make joint decisions, but Noel concentrates more on run-



Western Innovator

NOEL AND JEROME STEHLY

Occupation: Co-owners, Stehly Farms Organics

Education: University of San Diego, international relations (Noel), University of San Diego, business (Jerome)

Family: Wife, Stella and three daughters (Noel), wife, Chris and three daughters (Jerome)

Website: <http://stehlyfarmsorganics.com>

ning the farm while Jerome focuses on the stores.

Local residents have appreciated having a store in their neighborhood, and many stop by before or after work or school drop-offs to pick up their favorite smoothie or juice, and stock up on groceries.

While the two stores have done well, the Stehlys are not rushing to open a chain of stores, instead biding their time and focusing on doing what they do well. Hiring experienced store managers has been key to the success of the stores.

Oregon’s top forage growers honored

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — John Myers credits the silt loam soil, the warm days and the humid mornings for the quality of hay he grows on his family’s property in the Butter Creek Valley southwest of Echo, Ore.

Judges Glenn Shewmaker, a University of Idaho Extension forage specialist, and Steve Norberg, a Washington State University Extension regional forage specialist, recognized that quality and presented Myers with three Hay King Contest awards at the Nov. 16-17 Fall Forage Festival. Myers earned Hay King honors in the Retail Alfalfa, Dairy Alfalfa and Grass/Legume categories. His grass hay entry also won Best of Show honors.

This was Myers’ fourth year of entering the annual Hay King Contest and his entries have graded high each year. He is the fifth generation in his family to farm the Butter Creek land that has been in his family since 1872. The 63-year-old has been farming it since 1972, when he was a teenager.



Courtesy of Mylen Bohle

Glenn Shewmaker, left, and Steve Norberg judge a hay entry for the 2018 Hay King Contest during the Fall Forage Festival in Corvallis, Ore. Norberg is a forage specialist from Washington State University and Shewmaker is a forage specialist from the University of Idaho.

“We have 16 feet of soil in this valley,” said Myers, explaining the soil reportedly settled in the valley after a landslide brought it from the northeast during the Ice Age. “It has high organic matter and drains very well.”

Myers said while he has ideal conditions to grow alfalfa, grass and barley, he admires other hay growers who grow quality hay

despite having problematic ground with thinner or rocky soils, a higher elevation, colder weather and elk issues.

“I admire them for the effort they put forth to grow the quality hay they do,” Myers said. “The other contestants I talk to have learned how to turn disadvantages into advantages. I really respect them for that.”

The McGinnis Ranch of

Bend, Ore., under the management of Greg Mohnen, won the Grass King honor and Scott Pierson of Silver Lake, Ore., won the Cereal King.

The Fall Forage Festival was a two-day event that was co-hosted by the Oregon Forage and Grasslands Council and the Oregon Hay and Forage Association. Presentations about nutrient value of hay, hay storage and its impact on quality, matching hay to livestock, coping with drought, and current research and resources in the Pacific Northwest were given on the first day and the Hay King Contest was the main event on the second day.

Previously the two associations had held separate annual gatherings. This first-time festival drew about 70 people who were both growers and buyers. The hay contest had 20 entries.

“I was pleased with the turnout,” said Jerome Magnuson, a member of OFGC and co-coordinator of the festival. “It was a more diversified group that attended, meaning a broader range of producers and people interested in forages. It was very good to have west side-east

side interaction. People took the opportunity to network, to better understand where they could source hay or sell hay.”

Magnuson added that having the festival on the OSU campus was important because it connected the land grant college and its research with producers who benefit from that work.

“It gave producers the opportunity to cooperate on present and future research projects,” he said. “Producers in the field have a different perspective than somebody on campus. This was a chance to bring those perspectives together, a stronger opportunity to make those research projects more relevant.”

Mylen Bohle, an OSU Extension forage specialist in Central Oregon, said the quality of the Hay King entries was “very good.” He said the top two entries in one category were separated by less than a point and another category was almost as close.

The two associations are evaluating this year’s festival and are considering holding a similar event again in 2019.

CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JAN. 12

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

SUNDAY, JAN. 13

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

Precision Ag VISION Tech Conference: 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Hyatt Regency Waterfront Hotel at Seattle’s Southport, 1053 Lake Washington Blvd., Renton, Wash. <http://www.thevisionconference.com/>.

TUESDAY, JAN. 15

2019 American Farm Bureau Fed-

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Precision Ag VISION Tech Conference: 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Hyatt Regency Waterfront Hotel at Seattle’s Southport, 1053 Lake Washington Blvd., Renton, Wash. <https://www.thevisionconference.com/>.

Cereal Grains Workshop: 8:20 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Walla Walla Airport, 45 Terminal Loop, Walla Walla, Wash. Workshop covers Hessian fly, soil health, weed issues, winter wheat, legumes. Becki Green, becki.green@wsu.edu, 509-524-2685.\$25. <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4025007>.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 16

Northwest Hay Expo: Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 W Grandridge Blvd., Kennewick. Two full days of presentations and workshops plus a trade show. Presented by the Washington State Hay Growers Association. <http://www.wa-hay.org>.

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Precision Ag VISION Tech Conference: 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Hyatt Regency Waterfront Hotel at Seattle’s Southport, 1053 Lake Washington Blvd., Renton, Wash. [### THURSDAY, JAN. 17](https://www.thevi-</p>
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Northwest Hay Expo: Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 W Grandridge Blvd., Kennewick. Presented by the Washington State Hay Growers Association. <http://www.wa-hay.org>.

Northwest Ag Show: 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Oregon State Fair & Exposition Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem. The 49th edition will focus on the emerging trends in the ag industry such as small farming, technology and education. It will provide useful information to attendees regarding equipment, best practices, job training and state-sanctioned certifications as well as legal and financial issues facing all farmers. \$3, \$1 for seniors, children under 12 are free. <http://northwestagshow.com>.

Oregon Ryegrass Growers Association 58th Annual Meeting: 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Linn County Fair and Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road, Albany, Ore. The keynote speaker is Kevin Swartzell of Columbia Bank. Other topics include best practices for cybersecurity and hemp. Oregon’s new “grass.” <http://www.tan-gentcps.com/2014/01/oregon-ryegrass-growers-association.html>

Family Foresters Workshop: 8:30 a.m.-4:15 p.m., Mirabeau Park Hotel and Convention Center, 1100

FRIDAY, JAN. 18

Northwest Ag Show: 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Oregon State Fair & Exposition Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem. The 49th edition will focus on the emerging trends in the ag industry such as small farming, technology and education. It will provide useful information to attendees regarding equipment, best practices, job training and state-sanctioned certifications as well as legal and financial issues facing all farmers. Everyone is free Friday. <http://northwestagshow.com>.

Northwest Hay Expo: Three Rivers Convention Center, 7016 W Grandridge Blvd., Kennewick. Presented by the Washington State Hay Growers Association. <http://www.wa-hay.org>.

N Sullivan Rd., Spokane Valley. Sponsored by the University of Idaho Extension, the program will include presentations research on the application of stand density index for the inland Northwest, newer forest inventory technologies for family forests, using drones for forest metrics and fire, cross-laminated timber, a new online curriculum to help foresters and forest owners navigate carbon markets and hunting and fishing leases. Registration forms are available at UI and Washington State University Extension offices. Information: Chris Schnepf at 208-446-1680 or Andy Perleberg 509-667-6540.\$85 (\$90 online). <https://www.uidaho.edu/~media/UIdaho-Responsive/Files/Extension/forestry/events/Family-Foresters-Workshop-2019.pdf>.

SATURDAY, JAN. 19

Cattlemen’s Workshop: 8:45 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Blue Mountain Conference Center, 404 12th St., La Grande. The Cattlemen’s Workshop has continued in 2005 as the result of contentious current issues highlighted by regional beef seedstock producers, allied industry and university research & extension personnel. Over the years, the Cattlemen’s Workshop has continued to highlight the most current and relevant issues facing the U.S. beef cattle industry, not just in the Northwest, but nationwide! Kim McKague, kim.mckague@oregonstate.edu, 541-562-5129. <http://www.cattlemensworkshopnw.com>.



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