

People & Places

Second-generation organic farmer

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

CAPAY, Calif. — Thaddeus Barsotti, who received the Organic Farmer of the Year award last December from the California Certified Organic Farmers and the Organic Produce Network, says all farmers should get an award.



Thaddeus Barsotti



Courtesy of Bill Goidell

Thaddeus Barsotti raises many organic crops year-round and advocates educating the public about agriculture and its challenges.

job that I decided to work on the farm full-time — figuring if it didn’t work out I could always fall back on an engineering job.”

That was almost 20 years ago.

“Our farm was certified organic in 1984,” he said. “Before that, my parents were farming in a manner that ended up developing the organic standard. I like to tell people that our farm was originally organic and that my brothers and I are likely the first, second-generation organic farmers.”

They farm 600 acres.

He is firm in the conviction that a farmer cannot eradicate pests.

“What we can do is create a healthy environment in which problem pests are minimized and crops are healthy enough to deal with them,” he said. “We do this by maintaining wild areas that foster beneficial insects and when

we see problem pests begin to show up, we treat with organic pesticides to keep the pest population from taking over.”

The summer crops include melons, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, figs and apricots. The fall brings kales, chards, carrots, lettuces, bok choy, radishes and beets. Winter crops are Satsuma Mandarins, Meyer lemons and winter squash.

He is modest about receiving the prestigious award.

“Most of farming, organic or not organic, is the same. A good foundation on equipment use, irrigation use, soil and plant health, labor management are the same. When you farm organic, the only thing that changes is the list of items you are allowed to apply in the field.”

About half of what is grown is sold through the farm’s home delivery company, Farm Fresh To You.

Barsotti goes to 12 farmers’ markets year-round and sells the balance on the wholesale market.

“As one of the first organic farms in the Capay Valley, the Barsotti and Barnes families (a family name) have long been pioneers in the legacy of organic farming in California,” said Lulu Meyer, director of operations at CUESA, the Center for Urban Education About Sustainable Agriculture. “We are so grateful that the legacy continues with the vision and leadership of Thaddeus Barsotti.”

Barsotti believes the disconnect between the public and the farmers of California is the biggest challenge facing the industry.

“We need to do a better job at educating people about agriculture and its challenges,” he said.

As an example, he said, everyone — farmers, too — in California wants to pay



Western Innovator

THADDEUS BARSOTTI

Hometown: Capay, Calif.

Education: Esparto High School. Bachelor’s degree in bioresource and agricultural engineering from Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo

Occupation: Organic farming

Family: Wife Moyra, children Lola, Lucca and Julien

Personal quote: “Life is not about where you are going or where you have been — it is about what you are doing right now.”

farmworkers more money.

“But when California makes laws that dictate this and then California shifts its buying practices of fresh fruits and vegetables to products that are not grown in California, it makes it very difficult for California agriculture to keep growing vegetables,” he said. “If we (California individuals and government) say that we want local agriculture and we want better wages for the people that work on those farms, we (California individuals and government) need to buy those products.”

Researchers test deficit watering in berries

By PADMA NAGAPPAN
For the Capital Press

In an irrigation trial that lasted several years, strawberry and blackberry crops in Northern California were given different amounts of water to determine how to maximize water use efficiency without affecting yield.

Farm advisors found that deficit watering did not necessarily reduce the size of the fruit or sugar content by much, but it did impact taste — in a positive way.

Aziz Baameur is a retired small farms advisor with the University of California’s Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) who worked with specialty crops and small growers in Santa Clara County.

“Our initial focus was to see if current practices with the amount of water used is efficient, how to quantify it, and how do we research it if we think it could be done better,” he said.

Plants in different areas use different quantities of water to stay alive. The universal principle is transpiration, and Baameur used crop co-efficiency factors to calculate how much water plants lose depending on environmental factors, and how to replace it.

“We used a network of weather stations within the state, the California Irrigation Management Informa-



California Strawberry Commission/

Pickers harvest strawberries near Santa Maria, Calif. Researchers have found that deficit irrigation of berries can save water without impacting quality.

tion System, which gives us information on how much water was lost in the previous few days, so I can plan my irrigation for the next few days,” he explained.

Applications

The trial involved four types of water applications.:

- Normal irrigation in which 100 percent of the lost water was replaced. This also functioned as the base measurement level for the trial.
- Deficit irrigation levels in

which they went with 25 percent lower water replacement, watering the plants at only 75 percent of their water needs.

• 50 percent lower water, in which the berry plants were given half of what they needed.

• Surplus irrigation, in which 125 percent of the water needed was applied.

The surplus treatment was to help those farmers who like to use more water, and to see if it actually helped the fruits in terms of production and

yield.

What they found was that yield did not vary as much as they expected. Even at 50 percent deficit watering, Baameur expected to lose half his yield but while there was some loss, it wasn’t significant.

So he said as long as growers stay within a reasonable range, production figures will not be impacted.

“Fruit size changed a little but not drastically,” he noted. “It was smaller by a few percent.”

Better flavor

The berries were harvested once a week and tested for sugar content and pH levels. He did not see significant differences in these measurements for the four different levels of watering, but there was a noticeable difference in taste.

“We took the fruit to farmers’ markets and asked people to taste the berries, look at texture and appearance, and give us their impression,” Baameur said.

Many folks responded that they liked the 50 percent deficit watered berries more than the 125 percent level fruits, but others said they found them to be fairly similar.

“So this tells you, even with reduced water, the fruits were not shabby looking,” he said. “In terms of texture and flavor, the 50 percent level fruit had better texture and flavor than the rest although the others were fine, but these came out a little higher.”

CALENDAR

Saturday, Feb. 9
Forest Owners Winter School: 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Spokane Community College, 1810 N. Greene St., Spokane. One-day course for 200 forest owner families through Washington State University Extension. More than a dozen topics will be covered. Andy Perleberg, andyp@wsu.edu, 509-667-6540. \$30 to \$50. http://forestry.wsu.edu/

Tuesday, Feb. 12
Produce Safety Rule Course: 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Clarion Inn Ontario, 1249 Tapadera Ave., Ontario, Ore. The Produce Safety Rule is part of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s efforts to carry out its Food Safety Modernization Act. The course is slated to cover identifying microbial risks, reducing risks, and how to best start using recommended produce-safety practices on the farm. \$35. https://bit.ly/2CDMrZL

Walla Walla Food Producers Workshop: 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Walla Walla County Fairgrounds Community Center, 363 Orchard St., Walla Walla, Wash. The meeting will include a discussion on the feasibility of a Walla Walla food hub. Jeff Mathias, jeffm@bmacww.org, 509-524-5218. https://bit.ly/250DlaO.

Wednesday, Feb. 13
Changing Hands in Baker City: Workshop on Farm/Ranch Transfer

and Access: 8 a.m.-3:45 p.m., Geiser Grand Hotel, 1996 Main St., Baker City, Ore. This workshop is a part of a series that will bring together retiring and aspiring farmers for a full day of training on land access and succession planning. We will also have facilitated networking throughout the day to introduce landseekers to landowners. The day-long workshop starts with breakfast at 8 a.m. Ashley Rood, ashley@roguefarmcorps.org, (971) 409-6806. \$20. https://bit.ly/2MexZIw.

Thursday, Feb. 14
Organicology 2019: Hilton Portland and Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Ave., Portland. Organicology seeks to bring all of the stakeholder groups to the table to not only develop skills in their own areas of activity but to gain exposure to the challenges and accomplishments of those in other areas of the trade and movement. http://www.organicology.org/welcome/.

PNW Pollinator Summit and Conference: 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., CH2M Hill Alumni Center, Oregon State University, 725 SW 26th St., Corvallis. A two-day conference and an additional day of workshops designed to “connect-the-dots” between research, extension and application. This meeting is for extension agents, natural resource professionals, land managers, educators, as well as pollinator enthusiasts who

want to develop or enhance the pollinator programming in their area. https://www.oregonbeeproject.org/pnwpollinators2019.

Friday, Feb. 15
Organicology 2019: Hilton Portland and Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Ave., Portland. http://www.organicology.org/welcome/.

PNW Pollinator Summit and Conference: 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., CH2M Hill Alumni Center, Oregon State University, 725 SW 26th St., Corvallis. https://www.oregonbeeproject.org/pnwpollinators2019.

Harvest and Hearth Farm and Heritage Workshops: 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., College of Idaho, 2112 Cleveland Blvd., Caldwell. The Ada Soil & Water Conservation District is hosting the first Harvest and Hearth Farm and Heritage Workshops for local farmers and small acreage owners. This all-day workshop features four tracks: livestock, farmstead management, crop production, and enterprise diversification. Guest speakers are the Muller family from Full Belly Farm in Guinda, Calif. http://www.adaswcd.org.

Saturday, Feb. 16
Organicology 2019: Hilton Portland and Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Ave., Portland. http://www.organicology.org/welcome/.

PNW Pollinator Summit and Conference: 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., CH2M

Hill Alumni Center, Oregon State University, 725 SW 26th St., Corvallis. https://www.oregonbeeproject.org/pnwpollinators2019.

2019 Organic Agriculture Research Forum: 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Hilton Portland and Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Ave., Portland. The forum will feature innovative presentations from researchers across all disciplines related to organic farming and food systems. https://bit.ly/2GamkDY

Farm Transition Play & Workshop: 4-8 p.m., Jessie Mays Community Hall, 30975 NW Hillcrest St., North Plains, Ore. Join the Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, Rogue Farm Corps and instructors from Oregon and Iowa to learn how to plan for the future of your farm. Dinner is included. Agenda includes a performance of “Map of My Kingdom,” a play about the issue of land transition. It will be followed by a discussion and a presentation and Q&A with attorney Maria Schmidtkofer. Charlotte Trowbridge, charlotte.trowbridge@tualatinswcd.org, 503-277-3709. https://www.swcd.net/event/farm-transition-workshop/.

Sunday, Feb. 17
‘Map of My Kingdom’ Hood River: 6:30-8 p.m., Wy’east Middle School Auditorium, 3000 Wyeast Road, Hood River, Ore. Who’s going to feed the farm, and what are they going to do with it? “Map of my

Kingdom,” a play commissioned by Practical Farmers of Iowa and written by Iowa Poet Laureate Mary Swander, tackles the critical issue of land transition. Doors open at 6:00 with the one-hour performance beginning at 6:30. The event includes a brief panel discussion facilitated by Mary Swander. A \$10 donation is requested. https://www.facebook.com/events/359649488192946.

Tuesday, Feb. 19
Farm succession workshop: Herrett Center, 315 Falls Ave., Twin Falls. University of Idaho Extension workshop, featuring Ron Hanson, University of Nebraska. Includes light breakfast and lunch. Ashley Westerhold, ashleew@uidaho.edu, 2087363604. \$30. http://www.uidaho.edu/farm-business.

Changing Hands in Medford: Workshop on Farm/Ranch Transfer and Land Access: 8 a.m.-3:45 p.m., Central Point Extension, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. This workshop will bring together retiring and aspiring farmers for a full day of training on land access and succession planning. We will also have facilitated networking throughout the day to introduce landseekers to landowners. The program begins at 8:30 a.m. and goes until 3:45 p.m., with light breakfast and lunch included. Ashley Rood, ashley@roguefarmcorps.org, (971) 409-6806. \$20. https://bit.ly/2G02Wdx.



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