

People & Places

Organic, sustainable bridge builder

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Discovering that applying mulch to orchards for weed control was actually more beneficial in protecting trees from soil heat and water stress was just one innovation of David Granatstein’s career.

But he says his greatest contribution to agriculture was bringing people together over controversial issues. The two big ones were organics and sustainability.

Granatstein, 67, retired last fall as Washington State University Extension sustainable agriculture specialist, which included being a lead on organic agriculture. Now he is a professor emeritus.

Years ago, when Granatstein held the first organics session at the Washington State Horticultural Association annual meeting, the topic was controversial. Organic was seen as a fringe movement.

“It was viewed as a direct attack on conventional, implying it was poisoning the earth. Those feelings were pretty raw,” Granatstein says.

There was division, animosity. Each side had a stereotype of the other. Granatstein believes he helped people overcome that.

Building bridges

“My goal has always been to build bridges and help people see there are things they can learn from each other,” he says. “The world isn’t black and white, but gray.”

Today, many of the state’s tree fruit companies grow conventional and organic fruit. Organics make up about 15 percent of apples and pears and 7 percent of cherries.

“It’s been a 20-year evolution of the industry to accept organics and understand and recognize the benefits. There was a whole discussion on whether organics are sustainable,” he said. “We’re still working on acceptance and definition of sustainability.”

It’s the idea that agriculture should be profitable, environmentally sound and socially acceptable.

“When USDA started its sustainable ag program, it was ‘What the hell,’ people hated it. ‘You say sustainable. That’s implying I’m not.’ People took it really personally,” he said.

Growers thought protecting the environment could only come at the loss of profitability. It was either or. Granatstein helped educate all sides that environmental benefits could pay and that profitability was necessary for growers to invest in their land and people. In short, that practices to guard the environment could also guard the pocketbook.

For example, erosion eventually depletes the



Courtesy of Elizabeth Beers/WSU

David Granatstein, Washington State University Extension sustainable agriculture specialist, in an apple orchard in 2010. He spent a career bridging gaps between conventional agriculture and organic and sustainable agriculture.

soil wheat farmers need. Reduced tillage reduces erosion, which in the long run benefits the farmer. Other examples: biological controls and natural predators reducing pests in fruit trees and therefore reducing use of pesticides.

“David is a key force that put WSU on the map as a leader in sustainable agriculture outreach, research and education. His influence and impacts will be long lasting,” Todd Murray, director of the WSU Agricultural and Natural Resources Extension Program, said upon Granatstein’s retirement.

Tracking organics

In 2000, Granatstein began tracking organic acreage, transition acreage, the number of organic farms and varieties and specifics of organic crops. The main categories are tree fruit, vegetables and forages but he also tracks more than 100 other crops of lesser organic volume.

His annual reports have been used by growers, others in business, academics and policy makers. The reports are in greater depth than efforts by USDA. He gleanes the data from state and private organic certification programs in Washington, Oregon and California and, he says, covers about 98 percent of organic farms in Washington.

Organic production has grown from a gross farmgate value of \$101 million in Washington in 2005 to \$667 million in 2017. That’s 6.2 percent of total farmgate.

Granatstein’s initial motivation in pushing organics was to lessen farming’s impact on the environment. But he knew he also had to show an economic reason for growers to adopt it.

In 2014, production costs of organic Gala apples were estimated at 12 percent higher than conventional Gala, the yield was 8 percent lower but the price was 42 percent higher. That led

to a 270 percent higher profit margin for the organic crop.

In fact, he found, the market price for organic turned out to be 100 percent more than conventional gala, making it even better.

While the profit margin of organics over conventional has been narrowing in recent years, it is still large enough to make organics worthwhile, he said.

Finding his calling

A key moment in Granatstein’s career was during his undergraduate years at Cornell University. He was good in math and science and wanted to become an engineer. But he loved the natural world, hiking in the Adirondack Mountains.

In a biology class, he realized there was a whole science to the natural world and later realized agriculture had a huge impact on the environment. Combining agriculture and the environment clicked for him.

He had been born and raised in Syracuse, N.Y., with no farm background. His father helped manage a family clothing business. His mother used her Spanish training to work at the state employment security department.

Upon graduation from Cornell with a bachelor’s degree in environmental conservation in 1973, Granatstein worked for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. He was about to join the Peace Corps but thought it “ludicrous” that he was going overseas to teach farming to people who had been doing it for 3,000 years when he never had.

Career path

A friend from college invited him to an alternative ag conference in Ellensburg, Wash. He went and ended up co-manager of Libby Creek Farm, an organic farm in Okanogan County, for the next seven years.

He next spent a year in

southern Africa working as an agronomist on a WSU farming systems project while getting his master’s degree in soil management at WSU.

He was farm research director for the Land Stewardship Project, a private nonprofit, in Minnesota for two years. There he tried to find alternatives to address nitrate and herbicide pollution in groundwater.

“It needed to be profitable and environmental at the same time. It was really my first chance to work on sustainability,” he said.

While there he wrote, “Reshaping the Bottom Line,” an early sustainable ag book for farmers.

In 1989, he became project manager of the Northwest Dryland Cereal/Legume Cropping Systems Project at WSU in Pullman. It was one of the first USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension projects in the West.

In 1992, WSU formed the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources. Granatstein became statewide coordinator and moved to Wenatchee to be more centrally located. He held that position for 26 years until his retirement.

He has been involved in many projects relating to soil, compost, orchard floor management, climate, fruit production and was a founder of the Food Alliance, an ecolabel program in Portland. He has conducted sustainable ag training in Russia, Argentina, Italy, Germany, Taiwan, Ghana, Chile and Canada.

More recently, he spoke in Kyrgyzstan and at an international pear symposium in Uruguay. In retirement, he plans to complete at least the 20th year of his organic farming statistical report.

Concerns, optimism

Looking ahead, Granatstein said the tree fruit industry needs to be mindful



Western
Innovator

DAVID
GRANATSTEIN

Age: 67

Retired: Sept. 4, 2018

Born and raised: Syracuse, N.Y.

Family: Wife, retired WSU research associate; two grown children.

Education: Bachelor’s degree in environmental conservation, Cornell University, 1973; master’s degree in soil management, Washington State University, 1987.

Occupation: WSU professor emeritus.

Work history: Statewide coordinator of WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1992-2018; manager WSU SARE, 1989-1992; farm research director, Land Stewardship Project, Lewiston, Minn., 1987-1988; co-manager Libby Creek Farm, Carlton, Wash., 1975-1982.

of its environmental footprint with the expanding use of orchard inputs such as plastic netting for orchard protection.

There’s a lot of plastic waste when the netting gets old. While netting makes economic sense, “what’s the environmental impact, is use of a non-renewable resource sustainable and is it socially acceptable?” he asks.

Granatstein has held educational forums on the pros and cons of genetically modified organisms.

“Most GMO technology to date doesn’t meet my own personal sustainability perspective, but I suspect that will change,” he said.

Roundup Ready crops help with no-till but weeds become resistant, stronger herbicides are used and more genetic engineering is needed for the crop, he said, making it a never-ending cycle.

Genetic modification of apples to resist disease better fits with his sustainability concept but still needs careful evaluation for unintended consequences, he said.

“I’m not suggesting it be allowed in organic at this point,” he said.

“Overall, I’m really optimistic about the future of ag,” Granatstein said. “Particularly our understanding of microbiology and the potential for better microbial management in agriculture leading to breakthroughs similar to what we see in human health with the human microbiome findings.”



Capital Press
EMPOWERING PRODUCERS OF FOOD & FIBER
Established 1928

Board of Directors

Mike Forrester
Steve Forrester
Kathryn Brown
Susan Rana
Harrison Forrester
Mike Omeg
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 © 2019
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

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 Wrigthhouse 800-882-6789

To Place Classified Ads

Telephone (toll free) 800-882-6789
Online CapitalPress.com/classifieds

Subscriptions

Mail rates paid in advance
Easy Pay U.S. \$4/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

Dairy 12
Livestock 12
Markets 14
Northwest Ag Show Photo Gallery 8-10
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.

CALENDAR

year’s topic is the impact of water
reallocation on the agriculture
industry. Speakers will be Margaret
Matter of the Oregon Department
of Agriculture and Mary Ann Cooper
of the Oregon Farm Bureau. RSVP
by Feb. 22 to tlundy@sedcor.com.
http://www.sedcor.com/events.

**Palouse Alternative Cropping
Symposium:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Glad-
ish Community Center, 115 NW State
St., Pullman, Wash. Local farmers will
share experiences from on-farm tri-
als and efforts to find what works for
their operation. Sponsored by the
Palouse Conservation District and the
Washington State Soil Health
Committee. http://www.palousecd.
org/symposium.

THURSDAY, FEB. 28

The Commodity Classic:
Orange County Convention Center,
9800 International Drive, Orlando,
Fla. http://commodityclassic.com/.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

The Commodity Classic:
Orange County Convention Center,
9800 International Drive, Orlando,
Fla. http://commodityclassic.com/.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

The Commodity Classic:
Orange County Convention Center,
9800 International Drive, Orlando,

Fla. http://commodityclassic.com/.

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

**National Farmers Union 117th
Anniversary Convention:** Hyatt
Regency Bellevue, 900 Bellevue Way
NE, Bellevue, Wash. NFU’s 117th
Anniversary Convention will gather
family farmers and ranchers from
across the country, industry profes-
sionals and notable speakers. Farm-
ers and ranchers from Washington,
Oregon and Idaho are provided with
a special offer to receive a free, one-
year Farmers Union membership
with their registration. http://NFU.
org/nwfu-2019-convention.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

**National Farmers Union 117th
Anniversary Convention:** Hyatt
Regency Bellevue, 900 Bellevue Way
NE, Bellevue, Wash. http://NFU.org/
nwfu-2019-convention.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

**National Farmers Union 117th
Anniversary Convention:** Hyatt
Regency Bellevue, 900 Bellevue Way
NE, Bellevue, Wash. http://NFU.org/
nwfu-2019-convention.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

**Changing Hands in Corval-
lis: Workshop on Farm Transfer
and Land Access:** 8 a.m.-3:45 p.m.,
LaSells Stewart Center, 875 SW 26th

St., Corvallis, Ore. Join Rogue Farm
Corps for “Changing Hands: A Work-
shop on Farm Transfer and Access
to Land.” 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 suc-
cession planning. Ashley Rood, ashley@
roguefarmcorps.org, (971) 409-6806.
\$20. https://bit.ly/2GqGdHP.

**NRCS Northwest Working
Group Meeting:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m.,
Padilla Bay National Estuarine
Research Reserve, 10441 Bayview
Edison Road, Mt. Vernon, Wash.
The data collected at these meet-
ings plays a major role in the agen-
cy’s direction at the local level. Sno-
homish, Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan
Islands, Whidbey Island, Clallum, Jef-
ferson conservation districts. Sarah
Tanuvasa, 360-428-7684.

**OFFR’s 22nd Annual Benefit
Luncheon:** 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., The
City National Grove of Anaheim,
2200 East Katella Ave., Anaheim,
Calif. Organic dairy farmer Heather
Darby of Allburg, Vt., will be joined
by Allie Mentzer, advocacy senior
manager at National Co-op Grocers,
and Brise Tensor, executive direc-
tor at the Organic Farming Research
Foundation. Prepare to be inspired
by these groundbreakers in the
organic industry as you kick off Expo
West. https://ofrr.org/events.

SATURDAY, FEB. 23

**2019 OSU Small Farms Confer-
ence:** 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m., LaSells Stew-
art Center, 875 SW 26th St., Cor-
vallis, Ore. Educational sessions in
English and Spanish on farming and
the food system; exhibits by over 50
organizations. \$85 (no registration at
the door). http://blogs.oregonstate.
edu/smallfarmsconference/.

**Oregon Pork Producers
Annual Meeting:** 1-4 p.m., Ore-
gon State University Oldfield Animal
Teaching Facility, SW 35th St., Cor-
vallis. Oregon pork producers are
invited to the meeting, which will
include the election of delegate can-
didates for the National Pork Produc-
ers Delegate Body. For more infor-
mation, contact the Oregon Pork
Producers, 34231 SE Homan Road,
Gresham, Ore. 97030. Oregon Pork
Producers, burkegayle@gmail.com.

SUNDAY, FEB. 24

**Sustainable Horse Keep-
ing Workshop:** 1-4 p.m., Tualatin
Soil and Water Conservation Dis-
trict, 7175 NE Evergreen Parkway,
No. 400, Hillsboro, Ore. Join Tualat-
in Soil and Water Conservation Dis-
trict and Horses for Clean Water
for a free workshop about pas-
ture management, horse health
and water conservation. Charlotte

Trowbridge, charlotte.trowbridge@
tualatinswcd.org, 503-277-3709.

https://www.swcd.net/event/sus-
tainable-horse-keeping-workshop/.

MONDAY, FEB. 25

**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. Ash-
ley Rood, ashley@roguefarmcorps.
org, (971) 409-6806. \$20. https://bit.
ly/2MexZIW.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 27

The Commodity Classic:
Orange County Convention Center,
9800 International Drive, Orlando,
Fla. This is the combined trade show
and meetings of the National Asso-
ciation of Wheat Growers, American
Soybean Association, National Corn
Growers Association, National Sor-
ghum Producers and the Association
of Equipment Manufacturers. http://
commodityclassic.com/.

**SEDCOR Ag Breakfast for
Polk and Yamhill Counties:** 7:30-
9:30 a.m., Northwest Wine Stud-
ies Center at Chemeketa Eola, 215
Doaks Ferry Road NW, Salem. This