

People & Places

Seeking new markets for farmers

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

LACEY, Wash. — Stephen Bramwell's grandfather, an Idaho sugar beet grower, invited him to farm, but that was far from Bramwell's mind after graduating from high school in Eugene, Ore.

He went to the University of Washington and earned a degree in international studies. Then he took a low-paid internship at an organic farm.

"It transformed my life. There's nothing as satisfying as making money from something you grow," Bramwell said. "It's hard work; it's good work. It's an area of total moral clarity. You're producing something that's going to sustain people."

For three years he worked on organic farms on Vashon and Lopez islands in Washington. He then went back to college and earned a master's degree in soil science at Washington State University.

He taught for a few years before becoming WSU Extension's agriculture agent in Thurston County in 2016. In that position, he's trying to help farmers in the South Puget Sound area and southwest Washington stay or become profitable.

"He's hustling," said Lewis County farmer Bill Reisinger. "I could tell by talking to him the first time he was damn sincere."

Of 39 counties in Washington, Thurston and Lewis counties rank 13th and 14th, respectively, in the value of agricultural goods sold, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

Farming remains important, but faces development and regulatory pressures. The region is not dominated by large-scale agriculture. But small-scale, direct-to-the-consumer agriculture isn't enough, according to Bramwell.

He's conducted several surveys to gauge whether farmers can buck the trend to get big or get out.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State University Extension Thurston County agriculture agent Stephen Bramwell at the county fairgrounds, where WSU Extension has its office.

'Ag in the middle'

"Where's the agriculture in the middle?" he asks.

One potential place is growing barley for the region's brewers and distillers.

WSU contracted with Reisinger to grow barley for craft brewers. The beers were showcased at a brew festival in Tumwater in August.

Reisinger said the experiment went well. The barley grew, WSU paid a good price and there were a lot of people at the brew fest, he said. "I was just in awe."

To check the potential market, Bramwell and undergraduate student Monte Roden last year surveyed 23 grain buyers in urban Thurston County. The respondents included brewers, distillers, bakers and a malter.

According to the survey, 65% said it was "very" or "somewhat" important to buy local grain. The most commonly given reasons were quality and to support the local economy.

The survey also found that most were willing to

pay a premium for local grain, especially organic.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm for (local grain) because the brewing community is always after something new," Bramwell said. "Local buyers want quality, but they don't need the same thing time after time."

"We don't need to be a grain-producing region. We want grain to be among a suite of crops we grow," Bramwell said.

Farmer survey

To gauge grain-growing potential, Bramwell surveyed 21 farmers in Lewis and Grays Harbor counties. Farmers reported they were already growing more than 2,300 acres of grains such as barley, wheat and oats.

The acreage would approximately double if farmers could be guaranteed a market and good price, the survey found.

The survey also revealed that three-quarters of the farmers already didn't have a place to store all their grain. If they grew more, they would need still more storage.

To solve that problem, farmers, the Port of Chehalis and Northwest Agriculture Business Center are trying to line up public funds to build storage silos at the port, which is next to Interstate 5. From there, the grain could be sent north or south to customers.

Bramwell said he hasn't "been totally comfortable" with the idea of the public funding what ultimately will benefit businesses. But he said he believes the public investment will pay off if private enterprise thrives.

"If that happens, then those investments will be worthwhile," he said.

Lewis County farmer Dave Fenn said Bramwell's survey showed the potential benefits of grain silos at the port. "He's been instrumental in trying to improve agricultural viability in Thurston County and southwest Washington," Fenn said.

Reisinger said he could imagine a group of small farmers growing barley, especially if it could be processed locally.

"What we really need is a malting facility," he said.



Western Innovator

STEPHEN BRAMWELL

Age: 41

Position: Washington State University Extension Thurston County agriculture agent.

Education: Bachelor's degree, international studies, University of Washington, 2002; master's degree, WSU, soil science, 2008.

Local preference

Bramwell and research assistant Sydney Debien looked at the potential value of processing fruits and vegetables locally.

A survey of more than 500 shoppers at a farmers' market in Olympia found that 79% said it was "important" or "very important" for locally processed foods to have locally grown ingredients.

Demand was highest for frozen vegetables or fruit grown locally, followed by pickled or fermented vegetables, according to the survey.

In another research project, Bramwell is the principal investigator in evaluating whether farming can be continued or even enhanced while improving conditions for rare plants and animals.

"I don't know if we can do it," Bramwell said. "The role of extension is to ask questions and try to find out."

Bramwell never did farm with his grandfather, the late Casimir Schell, an emigrant from Russia. Nevertheless, he links his grandfather to what has turned out to be his occupation. "Those roots kind of stuck."

SATURDAY, OCT. 5

Oregon's Bounty Event:

10 a.m.-2 p.m. Oregon State Capitol, 900 Court St. NE, Salem. This free celebration of the state's agricultural harvest is sponsored by the Oregon State Capitol Foundation. Contact: 503-986-1388

Treasure Our Valley: 4-8 p.m. Indian Creek Plaza, 120 S. Kimball Ave., Caldwell, Idaho. Festival celebrating protection of farm and ranch land. To include local foods and wines, entertainment, activities, opportunities to meet with representatives of agricultural organizations. Contact: 208-890-3543 www.treasureourvalley.org or kbc@crookham.com

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 9, 16, 23

Exploring the Small Farm Dream for Veterans: 1-3:30 p.m., Benton County Extension, Sunset Meeting Room, 4077 SW Research Way, Corvallis, Ore. A 3-part workshop series offered to veterans free of cost. Sponsored by Benton County Veteran Affairs. Contact: https://tinyurl.com/yy2fnnyo

FRIDAY-SUNDAY, OCT. 11-13

Young Farmers & Ranchers Ag Tour: All day, various locations. The Young Farmers & Ranchers (YF&R) Ag Tour of southwest Oregon Coast is open to Farm Bureau members. Tour will depart from Corvallis at 8 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 11, and will return by 5 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 13. Contact: Jacan Taylor, jacan@oregonfb.org, 503-399-1701

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, OCT. 12-13

Hemp and Hops Event: 11 a.m. Yakima County Fairgrounds, 1301 S. Fair Ave., Yakima, Wash. In addition to many exhibitors, hear a wide variety of speakers at this event, including state Sen. Judy Warrick, Scott Salisbury of Green Globe Inc., grower Trey Willison and Applied Genetics founder Jason Zitzer. Contact: info@hempandhopsevent.com

MONDAY, OCT. 14

Coos County Fall Noxious Weed Day: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Bandon Barn, 1200 11th St., Bandon, Ore. Presentations on weed identifica-

tion and control, weed mapping, gorse best management practices, pesticide safety. Finish the day with a tour to some weed hot spots and talk about treatment options. Receive ODA herbicide applicator license credits. Contact: Cassie Bouska, 541-396-2541

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 16

Forest Stewardship Coached Planning Course: 6 p.m. Cowlitz County Administration Building General Meeting Room (3rd Floor), 207 Fourth Ave. N, Kelso, Wash. Forest Stewardship Coached Planning is a comprehensive series of classes that are taught by recognized forestry experts from around the state of Washington. Participants receive one-on-one assistance in writing a forest stewardship plan, a forestry reference library, maps of their properties, a forest measurement tool and a personal site visit from a professional forester. It takes place Oct. 16-Nov. 20 (a field trip will be Nov. 16). The registration fee is \$125 before Oct. 5, and \$150 after. Cost is per household (limit 4 people). Contact: Patrick Shults, patrick.shults@wsu.edu, 360-740-1213. http://forestry.wsu.edu/kelsocp/

THURSDAY, OCT. 17

Oregon Farm Bureau Tax Symposium: 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Oregon Farm Bureau Office, 1320 Capitol St. NE, Suite 200, Salem. Join Oregon Farm Bureau and leading tax professionals in a half-day workshop to discuss how to best prepare for the upcoming tax season. Event is free to voting and supporting members of Farm Bureau. RSVP by Oct. 11. tiffany@oregonfb.org 503-399-1701

FRIDAY, OCT. 18

Meaningful Incentives to Sustain Small Forest Lands: 7:30-11:30 a.m., Mason County Auditorium, 2621 Johns Prairie Road, Shelton, Wash. A unique partnership between conservation districts and state and federal agencies has been formed to bring financial and technical assistance to help retain working family forest lands in SW Washington. Join us for a free breakfast to learn about and help shape incentive programs and conservation efforts for small forest landowners. Contact: Patrick Shultz, 360-740-1213, patrick.shults@wsu.edu

CALENDAR FRIDAY-SATURDAY OCT. 18-19

Biochar Workshop: 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, 7175 NE Evergreen Parkway, Suite No. 400, Hillsboro, Ore. Learn how charred biomass (biochar) can increase soil productivity, reduce wildfire risk and slow climate change. Biochar consultant Kelpie Wilson will provide a history and science of biochar followed by a full-day interactive demonstration of how to make biochar from your burn piles using a simple "flame cap kiln." She will also share methods for using biochar in compost and in animal barns to recover nutrients for use in soil. This is a free, two-day workshop that includes hands-on activities. You have the option to sign up for just one of the workshop days if that's what best suits your schedule. Contact: Charlotte Trowbridge, 503-277-3709, charlotte.trowbridge@tualatinswcd.org

SATURDAY, OCT. 19

Meaningful Incentives to Sustain Small Forest Lands: 7:30-11:30 a.m. Willapa Harbor Community Center, 916W First St., South Bend, Wash. A unique partnership between conservation districts and state and federal agencies has been formed to bring financial and technical assistance to help retain working family forest lands in SW Washington. Join us for a free breakfast to learn about and help shape incentive programs and conservation efforts for small forest landowners. Contact: Patrick Shultz, patrick.shults@wsu.edu, 360-740-1213

Oregon Ag in the Classroom Fall Harvest Dinner:

5 p.m., CH2M Hill Alumni Center, Oregon State University, Corvallis. Make plans to join us for our 2019 Fall Harvest Dinner and Auction. All proceeds will directly support our mission: "To help students grow in their knowledge of agriculture, the environment and natural resources." Contact: AITC@oregonstate.edu, 541-737-8629

SUNDAY, OCT. 27

Young Farmer Tour, Mixer: 6-10 p.m. Washington Hall, 153 14th Ave., Seattle. Ninth annual Young Farmer Mixer hosted by Washing-

ton Young Farmers Coalition. Urban farm tours followed by mixer. Potluck and live music. Farm tours 2 to 5:30 p.m. Mixer 6 to 10 p.m. More details on coalition's Facebook page. Contact: http://washingtonyoungfarmers.org or wayoungfarmers@gmail.com

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY OCT. 30-NOV. 2

92nd National FFA Convention and Expo: Indiana Convention Center, 100 S Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, Indiana. This is the organization's annual gathering. Contact: https://convention.ffa.org/

SATURDAY, NOV. 2

Goat Discovery Day: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Pleasant Hill High School, 36386 Highway 58, Pleasant Hill, Ore. If you are an experienced "goat person" or you hope to be, this event is for you. A full day of workshops, demos with live goats, vendors and networking. Presented by Emerald Dairy Goat Association and Oregon State University Extension Services. Contact: Teagan Moran, teagan.moran@oregonstate.edu, 541-713-5011

SATURDAY-TUESDAY NOV. 2-4

2019 Angus Convention: Reno-Sparks Convention Center, 4590 S. Virginia St., Reno, Nev. From outstanding educational seminars to nationa: Centre on the Grove, 850 W Front St., Boise, Idaho. Annual meeting of Idaho and Utah dairy industries. Contact: https://www.dairywest.com

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY NOV. 13-16

Tri-State Grain Growers Convention: Davenport Grand Hotel, 333 W Spokane Falls Blvd., Spokane, Wash. This is the annual convention of grain farmers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho and features a full slate of presentations and breakout sessions. Sponsored by the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, Idaho Grain Producers Association and the Oregon Wheat Growers League. Early bird registration ends Oct. 18. Contact: http://www.wawg.org/convention

THURSDAY-FRIDAY NOV. 14-15

Washington State Grape Society Annual Meeting: Church of the Nazarene, 500 N. Elm, Grandview, Wash. This is the Washington State Grape Society's annual meeting and trade show. Contact: 509-585-5460 https://www.grapesociety.org/annual-meeting.html

FRIDAY-SUNDAY NOV. 15-17

2019 Young Farmers & Ranchers Leadership Conference: Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 NE Airport Way, Portland, Ore. A conference for young Farm Bureau members interested in improving their leadership and communication skills, learning about issues impacting Oregon agriculture, gaining ag business tips from industry experts, making new friends, and having a blast! Contact: Jacan Taylor, yfr@oregonfb.org 541-589-9694

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY NOV. 19-20

Washington Farm Bureau 99th Annual Meeting & Trade Show: Wenatchee Convention Center, 121 N Wenatchee Ave., Wenatchee. Join us for information, inspiration, and fun. Have your voice heard as "the voice of agriculture." Contact: Kathie Davies, kdavies@wsfb.com 360-528-2911 https://wsfb.com/2019-wfb-99th-annual-meeting/

THURSDAY, NOV. 21

Water Rights Boot Camp: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, 7175 NE Evergreen Parkway No. 400, Hillsboro, Ore. Join Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District and attorney Laura A. Schroeder for a free seminar about water rights in the Willamette Valley. During the seminar, you'll learn about dissecting your water right, protecting water rights, transfers, title issues, losing a water use or right and rights pre- & post-water code. Contact: Charlotte Trowbridge, 503-277-3709, charlotte.trowbridge@tualatinswcd.org



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