

People & Places

A farmer branches out

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

WINTERS, Calif. — Aomboom Deasy says farming was not necessarily a career choice but more about being born into it.

“My dad was a pomologist (a branch of botany that studies and cultivates fruit) for the University of California and advisor for USDA for over 20 years,” she said. “In my college days at the University of San Francisco I worked on the farm and continue to this day with my husband, Timothy.”

Their 100-acre K&J Orchards is in Winters.

The operation, which began in 1990, has a long fruit season that begins with the first cherry harvest in spring and culminates in pear and apple harvests in autumn.

“We grow a wide range of products as we are considered a year-round farm, growing and selling directly to consumers,” Deasy said.

They start their harvest season in May with cherries and peaches.

“Then we roll into other stone fruits: apricots, apriums (a combination of 75% apricot and 25% plum), plums, pluots and nectarines,” she said. “Apples and pears roll in by late summer. We round out the autumn with persimmons and then go into winter with citrus.

We produce nuts as well.”

She said that, depending on the weather, the most temperamental crops are the apples and pears.

But they also grow several more exotic crops.

“I was born in Bangkok, and due to my Asian heritage we tend to grow miscellaneous products not usually found in a local grocery store,” she said.

The best example, she said, is the “jujube” — also known as Chinese dates.

She also balances work on the farm with a growing career in finance.

Deasy is involved in a San Francisco startup as its finance director and is getting a master’s degree from Harvard University.

“I spent the last 17 years of my professional career in sourcing and product-project management for some well known consumer product companies,” she said. “I am attending Harvard (through their extension school) because I changed my career focus a couple of years ago. I go to school online and attend classes on campus.”

In the meantime, the farm continues to be a mainstay of the Ferry Plaza Farmers’ Market in San Francisco.

“K&J Orchards has been part of the Ferry Plaza Farmers’ Market family for 25 years, bringing a delicious diversity of the highest quality, tree-ripened fruit sea-



Aomboom Deasy, who operates K&J Orchards on 100 acres in Yolo County, Calif., says farming isn’t for everyone. Although many outside the industry view it as romantic, the hard work can be overwhelming.

son after season,” said Brie Mazurek, communications director of the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture, known as CUESA, which operates the Ferry Plaza Farmers’ Market at the San Francisco Embarcadero.

“Aomboom Deasy is carrying her parents’ legacy with business savvy and a warm and generous spirit, making K&J a go-to for our chef community and market

shoppers alike,” she said.

Deasy said she would advise anyone to choose farming as their life’s work only if they are willing to put in the hard work. The idea is romantic to many outside the industry but the work it involves can be overwhelming for some.

In addition to long hours, Mother Nature and fluctuating agricultural prices, she said another challenge is facing California farmers.



Western Innovator

AOMBOON DEASY

Occupation: Farmer and finance director of a startup company in San Francisco

Family: Husband, Timothy, and two dogs

Hometown: Winters, Calif.

Education: Bachelor’s degree in business administration, National University, San Diego; master’s degree in project management from the University of San Francisco and will earn a master’s degree in finance from Harvard University at the end of 2020.

Kiwi berry growers look to build bigger demand

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — Western Oregon’s few hardy kiwi berry growers have raised a bumper crop of the fruit this year. The 2019 volume is three to four times greater than the past couple of years.

But with that good news comes the issue of scrambling to find enough markets for the berry that is relatively unknown to many consumers.

“The crop size surprised us a little bit,” admitted Ryan Cleary, an account manager in the sales division of Domex Superfresh Growers in Yakima, Wash.

Domex is marketing the kiwi berries grown by Norris Farms near Riddle, Ore.

“There are various markets in the U.S. and around the world,” Cleary said. “And there are still stones to be turned over out there to develop new markets for this fruit. It’s just a matter of educating consumers about what it is. It’s a cousin to the bigger fuzzy kiwi fruit without the mess of peeling. Just eat it like a grape.”

“It’s a fascinating, emerging market,” said Ellie Nor-



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Ellie Norris, co-owner of Norris Farms in Douglas County, Ore., checks on the quality and ripeness of kiwi berries prior to shipping.

ris, co-owner of Norris Farms. “The challenge is getting them in front of people for the first time. People who do try them, love them.”

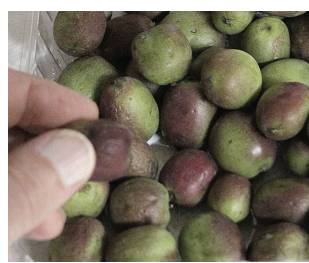
Growers are getting \$3.50 to \$4.50 a pound for the berries.

The research that has been done says the kiwi berry is rich in vitamin C, low in fat, cholesterol and sodium, high in fiber and a good source of potassium, vitamin E and magnesium.

Jaysen Weidner, sales manager for HBF Interna-

tional that markets kiwi berries for Hurst Berry Farms of McMinnville, Ore., agreed that many consumers remain unfamiliar with the fruit. He added, however, that there are markets for the fruit across the U.S. and some in Asia.

“When people have tried them, I’ve never had anyone say they didn’t like them,” Weidner said. “There’s a convenience for the kiwi berry compared to the fuzzy kiwi. Just pop it in your mouth and eat it. They have



The kiwi berry has a smooth, edible skin that is more convenient for eating than the bigger, fuzzy variety of kiwi because there is no peeling involved. The berry is hard when picked, but softens as it ripens.

a smooth, edible skin. The softer the berry, the sweeter the flavor.”

Will Ratto of Aurora, Ore., has 2 acres of kiwi berries. He sells his crop directly to New Seasons stores in the Portland area. To help educate consumers about the berry, Ratto adds a free half flat of the fruit with each of his deliveries so the stores can provide samples to potential consumers.

“I believe in niche markets,” Ratto said. “It’s just a matter of educating the end user so they understand the ripening process and when is the right time to eat the berry.”

On the outside, the berry has a smooth, green-and-red skin. It is the size of an olive or large grape. There is no brown, fuzzy skin to peel as is the case with the larger, better-known kiwis.

The inside of the kiwi berry is exactly the same as the larger fuzzy variety. The fruit is green with tiny black seeds.

It’s estimated there are only about 80 acres of the kiwi berry being grown and harvested in Oregon.

Harvest of the berries in Oregon is from late September to mid-October. After being picked, the berries needed a couple days at room temperature to ripen. They are sweetest when they are soft. After ripening, they can be refrigerated and will remain good up to one to two weeks, or they can be frozen.

In addition to being eaten whole, the berries are popular in smoothies, blended with yogurt and in salads.

“It’s a niche market right now for the berries, but we’re hoping it catches on,” Norris said.

“It’s a challenging sale to the retail sector, but there has been growth even though it’s been slow growth,” Weidner said.

CALENDAR

Patrick Shultz, patrick.shultz@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

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 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

SUNDAY, OCT. 27

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

tion 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.org, 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

MONDAY, NOV. 4

Exploring the Small Farm Dream: 6-8:30 pm. OSU Extension Office, Josephine County, 215 Ringette St., Grants Pass, Ore. This three-session beginning farmer training series meets in Nov. 4, 11 and 18. Southern Oregon abounds with enthusiastic

farmers involved in pursuing the commercial small farm dream.

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY NOV. 5-6

Intermountain Native Plant Summit IX: Boise State University Student Union Building. The use of native plants on rangelands in the West. Open to the public. Contact: Thomas Jones, thomas.jones@usda.gov

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 6

Women and Leadership 3: 5-8 p.m., Urban Studio, 935 Northwest Davis St., Portland. Jordan Ramis PC announces the Third Annual Women & Leadership event. Designed to motivate, inspire and educate women who are leaders or aspiring leaders. Food, drinks, and whiskey tastings will be provided with the goal in mind of bringing women and allies in the agricultural industry together to network, discuss issues regarding careers and growth and enjoy the company of like-minded colleagues. A panel discussion features Caylin Barber, an environmental and natural resources attorney with Jordan Ramis; Cory Carman, owner of Carman Ranch in Wallowa County, Ore.; Leigh Geschwill, owner of F&B Farms and Nursery; and Mallory Phelan, executive director of Oregon AgLink. Contact: info@jordanramis.com, (503) 598-7070. https://bit.ly/WomenAndLeadership3

WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY NOV. 6-10

American Agri-Women Convention: 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Embassy Suites by Hilton, 9000 SW Washington Square Road, Tigard. Hosted by the Oregon Women for Agriculture, the American Agri-Women Convention will bring members from around the nation. Contact: Oregon Women for Agriculture, 541-791-6031. https://owaonline.org/2019-aaw-convention/.

FRIDAY-SUNDAY NOV. 8-10

Tilth Conference 2019: Yakima Convention Center, 10 N. Eighth St., Yakima, Wash. Every year, the Tilth Conference brings together hundreds of farmers, producers, researchers and food system professionals for a weekend of learning, building relationships and sharing best practices. Contact: Kevin McAleese, kevinmcaleese@tilthalliance.org. http://www.tilthconference.org

MONDAY-WEDNESDAY NOV. 11-13

Idaho Cattle Association Annual Convention: Sun Valley Inn at Sun Valley Resort, Sun Valley, Idaho. The annual ICA event is focused on cattlemen’s needs, putting them face-to-face with some of the industry’s most renowned experts. Contact: 208-343-1615, www.idahocattle.org/



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