

People & Places

Researcher studies human side of issue

UI social scientist Dentzman seeks grower experiences with resistant weeds

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — Some people blame farmers for weeds that have developed resistance to herbicides. “If they would just do XYZ, then it would be solved,” is the sentiment, University of Idaho research associate Katie Dentzman said. It’s an attitude Dentzman admits she once held, until she talked with growers face-to-face.

“When you’re sitting in a focus group with this farmer who everyone respects, and he starts to break down and cry because of where he sees it affecting his own farm, but also farming in his community and the people he cares about, that really changes how you think about the issue,” she said. “These people really, really care and they are trying their best. There are certain social structures in place that constrain them and how much they can do.”

Dentzman wants to help farmers adapt to those structures, and to change them.

She works as a social scientist with Washington State University weed researchers Drew Lyon and Ian Burke to help farmers combat increased herbicide resistance in weeds.

Dentzman is “one of the foremost world experts” on the social aspects of herbicide resistance, Burke said.

“Weed resistance is just as much a socio-economic problem as it is a basic weed science problem,” Burke said. “I can come up with lots of technical long-term solutions, but if there’s a



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

University of Idaho postdoctoral research associate Katie Dentzman wants to learn and share the “human dimension” of herbicide resistance to help farmers find solutions.

social reason why they’re not acceptable, they might not be adopted. Having a sociologist help us understand social barriers to adoption is critical.”

Dentzman has worked on the topic for six years. As part of her doctoral dissertation, she worked with a national research team looking at herbicide resistance, including focus groups and a survey. She also works with the Weed Science Society of America.

Growers are more likely to act when they think they actually may have herbicide resistant weeds, she said. They can either rely more on herbicides, or they can get involved with their community and learn about integrated weed management, which is more likely to find success.

But how do you get a farmer concerned about resistant weeds if they don’t have them?

It’s important to help farmers see the problem, at

conferences or through test plots that show the differences in weed management, she said.

“It’s trying to bridge that gap between, ‘I know it’s out there’ and actually seeing and feeling the repercussions,” Dentzman said.

Dentzman points to “techno-optimism,” an attitude common to all of society, not just limited to farmers. It’s the idea that no matter what problems exist in culture, they can always be solved through innovation.

Farmers might say, “The next new herbicide will come out, and then it will be solved,” Dentzman said.

But farmers are being pushed into a corner where they don’t see any other options except for herbicides, Dentzman said.

“They’re kind of being forced into this techno-optimism, saying, ‘If I don’t believe this, I’m going to have to believe I’m going to lose the farm’ or ‘I’m going to be kicked out of this,’”

she said.

The researchers want to help growers learn that the next thing might be already available, but it’s not necessarily a herbicide.

The point is to show farmers there are affordable, more imaginative ways to act, Dentzman said.

Simply asking what they need is a big part of the solution, she said. She wants to take that information back to the university and build the team that can give it to them.

Ryanne Pilgeram, UI associate sociology professor, said she’s dreamed of working with someone like Dentzman for a decade.

“She’s such a clear thinker, but a big thinker,” Pilgeram said. “She’s just really brilliant. I can’t imagine her work won’t be influential and important to agricultural policy, because she’s working on projects that connect directly to farmers.”

Dentzman, Burke and Lyon will talk about their



Western Innovator

KATIE DENTZMAN

Age: 30

Title: Postdoctoral research associate, University of Idaho

Hometown: Holland, Mich.

Current location: Moscow, Idaho

Education: Bachelor of arts, Central Michigan University, double major in environmental science and sociology; master’s degree and Ph.D., Michigan State University in sociology, specializing in ecological, food and farming systems; postdoctoral research associate at Washington State University, 2017-2019; postdoctoral research associate at University of Idaho, July 2019-present

Family: Husband Sam Mindes; border collie Ruby

Website: <https://katherinedentzman.wordpress.com/>

efforts, and then host a listening session Nov. 15 during the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention in Spokane.

Dentzman hopes to hear from growers willing to host a meeting for other farmers in their area.

“I’m not an expert in herbicide resistance, and I’m not supposed to be,” she said. “I want to go and talk to the people who are experiencing this and hear from them, because they’re the experts in what they are experiencing.”

Green thumbs in training for Pendleton High School students

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON, Ore. — Pendleton High School agriculture teacher Kylee Hunt can share various chapters of her family’s stories with three buckets of dirt.

As the students in her crop and soil science class gathered around her in the high school’s new greenhouse, she explained the contents of Bucket A.

The first bucket contained soil from her family’s ranch near Ukiah. Hunt said the dirt was hard and ill-suited for growing crops.

Bucket B had soil from her parents’ home off of Butter Creek near Pilot Rock. The creek flows the way it does by their house because of her grandfather.

“The week when my



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Students take soil from buckets containing dirt from three different regions of the area. After collecting the soil, students were tasked with planting a set of seeds, which they will monitor over the coming weeks to chart growth and other pertinent information.

grandpa first moved in there, he kind of made it go where he wanted it to,” she said.

The contents of Bucket C came from her Pilot Rock home, where she grows

alfalfa.

The class was going to plant beans in each bucket and compare it to store-bought soil being used as a control on the experiment.

Hunt later said that she was using small experiments like these to help students grow their data skills ahead of bigger experiments later in the year. Hunt’s experiment faced some early skepticism.

“I’m not going to lie: I don’t think they’re going to grow,” junior Madison Pryor told Hunt earlier in the class.

Hunt later admitted that not much had grown since the start of the school year, an early season cold snap stunting the class’ attempts at exercising its green thumb.

While a new greenhouse can’t always compete with Mother Nature, the facility represents a major upgrade over PHS’ previous greenhouse.

Hunt said the old greenhouse could only fit a few students at a time, making the prospect of giving all students

a hands-on lesson in crop science all but impossible.

Senior Joshua Brooks is also a fan of the greenhouse, a fact he displays when he’s one of several students who eagerly waters the greenhouse plants.

Joshua said he loves the serenity of a greenhouse, and he uses his own greenhouse at home to cultivate an international menagerie of plants.

And despite her earlier skepticism, Madison and her classmates — juniors Mackenzie Burke and Natalie Neveau — think the greenhouse might become much more livelier in the spring.

That’s when the various classes and clubs that use the greenhouse will try to use the new facility to their advantage by selling their bounty to fundraise for the school.

CALENDAR

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

FRIDAY, NOV. 22

Denim and Diamonds Awards

Dinner and Auction: 5 p.m. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. This is Oregon Aglink’s annual awards dinner and fundraising auction to support the organization’s activities, including Adopt a Farmer, roadside crop signs and a multimedia campaign promoting Oregon agriculture. Contact: <http://www.aglink.org>

DEC. 2-5 MONDAY-THURSDAY

Growing for the Future Online

Virtual Conference: Online at <https://nfu.org/growing-for-the-future/> NFU’s Growing for the Future is a unique online, interactive virtual conference

focused on the issues that today’s farmers and ranchers face. The free, four-day event includes farmer-to-farmer webinars, live Q&A sessions, a discussion board, an online resource center, and free giveaways. This year’s conference will cover topics ranging from cooperatives to insurance, business planning, energy efficiency, accounting and more. Contact: Hannah Packman, hpackman@nfudc.org, 202-554-1600

TUESDAY-THURSDAY DEC. 3-5

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting: Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. The primary business of the annual convention is to set policy and elect leaders of the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. Participants will also hear from Farm Bureau leaders and are updated on developments from the past year. A series of workshops follows covering a range of topics. Contact: [www.idahofb.org/](http://idahofb.org/)

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY DEC. 4-5

Organic Grower Summit: Monterey Conference Center, 1 Portola Plaza, Monterey, Calif. Organic growers, producers and processors event for education, information and networking with production supply chain and support services providers. Sponsored by California Certified Organic Farmers and

Organic Produce network. Contact: www.organicgrowersummit.com

WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY DEC. 4-6

Washington Small Fruit Conference & Layground Ag Show: NW Washington Fairgrounds, 1775 Front St., Lynden, Wash. The conference focuses on the latest research and developments in small fruit farming. The latest relevant research information is delivered first hand by the scientists performing the research. Contact: www.wasmallfruit.com

California Cattlemen’s Convention: Peppermill Resort, 2707 South Virginia St., Reno, Nev. The organization will gather for its 103rd annual convention. Contact: <https://calcattlemen.org/event/convention2019/>

SUNDAY-WEDNESDAY DEC. 8-11

California Farm Bureau Federation 101st Annual Meeting: Portola Hotel and Spa, Two Portola Plaza, Monterey, Calif. Join fellow farmers and ranchers as we discuss and develop policy, recognize the county Farm Bureaus at the core of our grassroots structure and individual members who have demonstrated that working together during this past year is how we will continue “Building Our Future.” Contact: <https://cfbf.com/am2019>



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