

## People &amp; Places

## Helping farmers grow agritourism

Audrey Comerford assists Marion, Polk, Yamhill county farms

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

SALEM — Audrey Comerford was coordinating school tours for the annual harvest festival at Bauman's Farm and Garden in Gervais, Ore., when she realized the full impact of agritourism.

Comerford remembers a young boy, about a second-grader, who came to visit the 400-acre family farm north of Salem. Inside the animal barn, he saw a Jersey calf that was brought over from a nearby dairy, and had no idea what it was.

"He looked at it, and he goes, 'What is it?'" Comerford said. "He had no name for it. He couldn't even guess."

Comerford didn't think much about it at first, but then a dozen or so different kids asked the exact same question over the next several weeks — one of them even thought it was a deer, she said. It served as a reminder of just how far removed generations have come from farming and ranching. As of 2008, less than 2% of the U.S. population is directly employed in agriculture.

"That's where it clicked for me," Comerford said. "The educational component (of agritourism) is so important for the general public."

Comerford now works as

the agritourism coordinator for Oregon State University Extension Service, serving Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties in the Mid-Willamette Valley. She was hired in September 2019, replacing Mary Stewart, who retired earlier in the year.

Agritourism is a bit of a nebulous term. There is no universally accepted definition or list of approved activities, which can make it difficult for farmers to know what they can and cannot do on their property.

Comerford's job is to work with farms, county planners and local tourism organizations to help make connections and answer questions.

In general, agritourism falls into 1 of 5 categories: direct sales, entertainment, hospitality, education and outdoor recreation. Events might include weddings, concerts and festivals, or it can be as simple as having a farmstand or U-pick orchard to sell fresh fruit and produce directly to consumers.

"A lot of farms are having to go that way, selling directly to consumers because the prices of crops are remaining the same or dropping," Comerford said. "This is a great way to get more revenue out of it, and then also provide great food connections for the public."

Comerford grew up surrounded by thousands of acres of grass seed farms in Rickreall, Ore. Both of her parents also worked for OSU Extension Service.

Her father, Richard Regan, was a horticulture professor



Audrey Comerford

**As the agritourism coordinator for Oregon State University Extension Service in Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, Audrey Comerford works with farms, county planners and local tourism organizations to make connections and help producers add a new revenue stream to their operations.**

and extension agent for the university, and her mother, Eileen Regan, did community education and outreach for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Comerford earned her bachelor's degree in English with a minor in photography from OSU in 2015. She spent four seasons working for Bauman's Farm and Garden, a diversified family farm that has become one of the largest agritourism operations in Marion County.

According to the latest USDA Census of Agriculture, Oregon had 481 farms that made more than \$16 million in income from agritourism and recreational services in 2017, compared to 576 farms and \$10.6 million in 2012. That is a little more than 1% of all farms statewide.

The picture locally is a

little less clear. Since joining OSU Extension Service, Comerford estimated she works with somewhere between 250 and 300 farms across the three counties, which includes vineyards and wine tasting rooms.

Comerford said she hopes to complete a full inventory of agritourism in the area over the next few years. A study was done in Marion County from 2017 to 2018. It looked at 75 agritourism operations, though studies have never been done for Polk and Yamhill counties.

A national survey of agritourism led by the University of Vermont and supported by OSU is also making the rounds. Comerford said the data should give a more complete picture of what agritourism looks like, and how organizations like OSU Extension can help. Surveys



**WESTERN INNOVATOR**  
**AUDREY COMERFORD**  
**Age:** 27  
**Hometown:** Turner, Ore.  
**Family:** Husband, Cody  
**Occupation:** Agritourism coordinator for Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, Oregon State University Extension Service  
**Education:** Bachelor's degree in English and photography, OSU, 2015

are due by Jan. 31.

"I think more farms are looking to add (agritourism), or add another agritourism piece, but may not necessarily know how to go about doing it," Comerford said, adding that confusion over state and county regulations is the number one concern.

Agritourism can be an intimidating subject, Comerford said, but farmers should not be scared off by the word. "Agritourism does not mean busloads of people are coming and walking all over farmland or agricultural land," she said.

"It very much is a broad term that encompasses a lot. I would love to see more farms playing a role in educating the public by having them come onto their farm."

## New Oregon dairy princess ambassador crowned

By **GEORGE PARKS**  
For the Capital Press

SALEM — Jaime Evers was chosen the 2020 Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassador at the program's 61st annual coronation and banquet Saturday at the Salem Convention Center.

After participating in two days of interviews, speeches and commercials promoting dairy products, Evers was picked from a field of three candidates. The 20-year-old from Banks represents Klamath County.

She takes over this year's ODP duties from Emily Henry, who placed the crown on her head during the ceremony. Taysha Vee-man, 18, a 2019 graduate of St. Paul High School representing Marion County, and Araya Wilks, 20, of Tillamook County, a 2017 graduate of Tillamook High School, were the other two 2020 candidates.

Evers was also chosen by the other finalists as Miss

Congeniality.

Evers, a 2017 graduate of Banks High School, grew up showing her Ayrshire dairy cattle at county and state fairs with her family.

"Since my very first day in the show ring, I dreamed of being a princess — not a Disney princess, but a dairy princess," she said. "I want to reach out to people who I can teach and inspire."

She is now a student at Oregon Institute of Technology, pursuing a bachelor's degree in biology and health sciences, and wants to continue her education as a veterinarian.

Directly after the ceremony, she was presented \$3,000 in scholarship awards from business, group and individual sponsors. After her year as the 2020 Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassador, she will receive more in scholarships, which last year totaled \$14,000 for Henry.

She begins a year of statewide travel and making presentations at fairs, town

meetings and public events representing Oregon's dairy industry. The presentations will focus on life on a dairy farm and the nutritional benefits of dairy products.

"All the candidates were well prepared and did an excellent job during the competition," said first-year ODP Director Becky Droz-Albeke. "The hard work they did during the past year has helped make them wonderful ambassadors for the dairy industry. I am very proud to have had the opportunity to work with them during the coming year."

The ODP program sponsor is the all-volunteer, nonprofit Oregon Dairy Women, whose mission is to promote the dairy industry.

"We're very proud of our program," said Becky Heimerl, president of the ODW. "We've now had six generations of young women involved in promotion and education for the Oregon dairy industry."



Geoff Parks/For the Capital Press

**2019 Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassador Emily Henry places the 2020 crown onto the head of Jaime Evers, representing Klamath County at the culmination of the 2020 Coronation Banquet in Salem.**

## CALENDAR

## MONDAY, FEB. 3

**Oregon Blueberry Conference:** 8 a.m. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. This is the Oregon blueberry industry's annual meeting and features a variety of presentations and other informational sessions. Contact: <http://oregonblueberry.com> 503-364-2944

## TUESDAY, FEB. 4

**Create a FSMA Compliant Food Safety Plan:** 1-4 p.m., Idaho Falls, Idaho Falls. The IFSC is a free program that helps small food processors (500 employees or less) create a FSMA compliant food safety plan during six afternoon sessions spread over 2 months. Idaho Falls course takes place 1-4 p.m. on Feb. 4 and 18, March 3, 17 and 31 and April 14. Janna Hamlett, [jannahamlett@techhelp.org](mailto:jannahamlett@techhelp.org), (208) 731-9363.

## TUESDAY-THURSDAY, FEB. 4-6

**Spokane Ag Show:** 9 a.m., Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., Spokane, Wash. Spokane's annual celebration of all things agricultural, with a large ag equipment show and full schedule of presentations that will be of interest to all ranchers and farmers. Online: [www.agshow.org](http://www.agshow.org)

## TUESDAY-THURSDAY, FEB. 11-13

**World Ag Expo:** 9 a.m., International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Laspinia St., Tulare, Calif. World Ag Expo is the world's largest annual agricul-

tural exposition. More than 1,500 exhibitors display the latest in farm equipment, communications and technology on 2.6 million square feet of exhibit space. Free seminars focus on a variety of topics important to dairy producers, farmers, ranchers and agribusiness professionals. [www.worldagexpo.com](http://www.worldagexpo.com)

## TUESDAY, FEB. 18

**26th Annual Larry Branan Idaho Ag Summit:** 7:10 a.m., Red Lion Downtowner, 1800 W. Fairview Ave., Boise. The 26th Annual Larry Branan Idaho Ag Summit will kick off on Feb. 17 at Boise Centre East with the All Idaho Strolling Supper with Idaho legislators. Feb. 18 at the Red Lion Downtowner features a full agenda of speakers and award presentations for those who have contributed greatly to Idaho agriculture. The keynote speaker is Todd Van Hoose, president and CEO of the Farm Credit Council. Website: [www.idahoagsummit.org](http://www.idahoagsummit.org)

## WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY, FEB. 19-22

**82nd Oregon Logging Conference:** 7 a.m., Lane County Fairgrounds and Convention Center, 796 W. 13th Ave., Eugene. View the latest technology in logging and construction equipment on display inside and outside at the Lane County Fairgrounds. Participate in hands-on training seminars and earn as many as 11 professional logger credits and 8 SAF-CFE credits. Network and socialize with forestry professionals from around the

world. [info@oregonloggingconference.com](mailto:info@oregonloggingconference.com), 541-686-9191.

## THURSDAY, FEB. 20

**Idaho Hay and Forage Conference:** Canyon Crest Event Center, 330 Canyon Crest Drive, Twin Falls, Idaho. The association's annual conference and trade show will be in a new venue this year in Twin Falls. Contact: 208-888-0988, [www.idahohay.com](http://www.idahohay.com)

## THURSDAY-FRIDAY, FEB. 20-21

**Family Farm Alliance Conference:** Eldorado Resort Casino, 345 N. Virginia St., Reno, Nev. This year's agenda will include members of the Trump administration's "Water Subcommittee" ways to use technology and innovation in water management, Western litigation updates, a Reclamation Roundtable and look at key congressional water committees. Online: <http://familyfarmallianceconference.com/>

## FRIDAY, FEB. 21

**PNWCTA Christmas Tree Short Course:** 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Holiday Inn Portland South, 25425 SW 95th Ave., Wilsonville, Ore. Experts will discuss new growing and harvesting methods, research, pesticide and safety information, business practices and tax implications for the industry. This program offers attendees the opportunity to earn pesticide re-certification credits with ODA and WSDA. Angie Smith, [smith@pacwestcom.com](mailto:smith@pacwestcom.com), 503-364-2942. \$60 for members, \$80 non-members. <http://www.pnwcta.org/news-events/events/short-course/>

Submit upcoming ag-related events on [www.capitalpress.com](http://www.capitalpress.com) or by email to [newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com).

## THROUGH SATURDAY, JAN. 25

**American Sheep Industry Association Convention:** Scottsdale Plaza Resort, Scottsdale, Ariz. This year's theme is "Reverence for the Past, Innovation for the Future." Website: <http://www.sheepusa.org>

## SATURDAY, JAN. 25

**Women in Agriculture Conference:** 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Pacific time. Various locations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska and Hawaii. "Healthy Farms" is the theme for the eighth annual Women in Agriculture Conference. Experience an engaging, interactive day full of inspiration, learning and networking with other women farmers. Website: <http://wominag.wsu.edu/>

## SUNDAY-WEDNESDAY, JAN. 26-29

**International Dairy Foods Association Dairy Forum 2020:** Westland Kirkland Resort, 6902 E. Greenway Parkway, Scottsdale, Ariz. Thought leaders, renowned experts and industry executives will share their insights and perspectives on relevant topics to advance dairy's growth and prosperity in the years ahead. [www.dairyforum.org](http://www.dairyforum.org)

## TUESDAY, JAN. 28

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