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Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Oregon mint grower John Reerslev stands in his distillery beside a boiler, built in 1944, which he still uses.

'MINT IS A REALLY INTERESTING SPECIALTY CROP TO GROW. BUT IT'S NOT EASY. YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR TO GROW MINT.'

John Reerslev, Oregon mint grower

IT'S MINT TO BE

Northwest mint farmers endure deadly fungi and foreign competition to keep regional tradition alive

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — John Reerslev, 65, a second-generation mint farmer, bent and plucked a young mint sprig from the soil. He rubbed it between leathery fingertips and held it to his nose. A breeze rippled his graying hair.

"When harvest comes, everything smells like peppermint," he said. "It fills the air."

Reerslev and his family grow mint and distill mint oil in the Willamette Valley, heartland of America's mint industry.

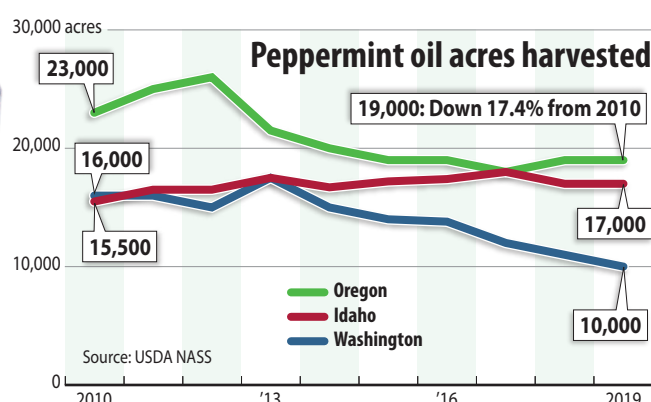
The Reerslev farm near Junction City is part of a colossal domestic industry impacting how millions of Americans brush their teeth, chew gum, suck cough drops, swallow medications, inhale essential oils and flavor their ice cream.

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Peppermint versus spearmint



Of the mint oil produced, roughly 45% is used to flavor oral hygiene products like toothpaste and mouthwash. Thus, the demand for peppermint is much greater than other varieties, such as spearmint.



Peppermint

- ~ **Menthol content:** 40%
- ~ **Scent:** Pungent
- ~ **Flavor:** Spicy, cool, refreshing
- ~ **Popular uses:** Holiday treats, medicinal purposes, toothpaste and mouthwash



Source: American Culinary Federation

Spearmint

- ~ **Menthol content:** 0.5%
- ~ **Scent:** Delicate
- ~ **Flavor:** Savory, sweet, herbal
- ~ **Popular uses:** Savory recipes like tzatziki sauce over lamb, mint-flavored gums



Sierra Dawn McClain and Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Western farm water use data to go online



NASA, Google, environmental groups to make water management data more accessible to public in 2021

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

Irrigation data has historically been limited in scope and expensive to access. A new project seeks to change that.

Researchers from NASA, the Desert Research Institute and the Environmental Defense Fund, with support from Google Earth Engine technology, are working to create an

online platform with free, accessible, satellite-based water data open to anyone.

Farmers have expressed both excitement and concern about the prospect. Industry leaders and water experts say the project will have a profound impact on water management in the West.

"The implications are tremendous," said Andrew McElrone, professor and research plant physiologist

at the University of California-Davis. "This will impact growing decisions, water usage, water rights and trading."

The project, called OpenET, will launch in 2021.

OpenET's leaders say its purpose is to improve "sustainable water management" for communities, rivers, wildlife and agriculture. It is funded by environmental organizations and charitable foundations.

OpenET is so named because it measures evapotranspiration, or ET, the process by which water moves from ground to atmosphere through both evaporation from the land and

transpiration from plants.

Forrest Melton, a senior research scientist at NASA, said consistent information on evapotranspiration "is probably the biggest data gap for water management."

ET technology isn't new. According to Maurice Hall, who leads EDF's Western Water program, universities and other groups have used ET data for years, but the existing approach is "piecemeal at best."

"Given the importance of water, it's surprising how archaic many of

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Agriculture still open for business during virus outbreak

Oregon governor orders 'nonessential' businesses to close; agriculture marches on

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown issued an executive order Monday establishing legally enforceable restrictions on public activity and ordering "non-essential" businesses to close.

Meanwhile, agriculture is open for business. Farmers and farmworkers across the West are doing field work, planting crops and getting ready for another growing sea-

son, and suppliers are staying busy keeping up with their needs for seed, fertilizer and equipment.

"For agriculture itself — that is, the farmers producing the crops — it's mostly business as usual," said Jeff Freeman, sales and marketing director for Marion Ag Services, a supplier of fertilizer and other agricultural products. "Food is important, so farming will go on."

For some farm industries, the COVID-19 virus outbreak has actually increased revenue.

Wheat, for example, is in high demand. Shoppers stockpiling staples such as flour have triggered an "unprecedented" demand, according to the Wheat Foods Council.

Potato prices have also skyrocketed as consumers have also stockpiled. The price of 10-pound bags of Idaho Burbanks and Norkotahs has increased from \$11 to \$17 in the past week — a 54% jump, according to data collected by United Potato Growers of Idaho.

"We see so many foods selling

at unheard-of amounts," said Bryan Ostlund, administrator of the Oregon Blueberry Commission. "Berry processing alone — it's crazy. Just crazy. It's hard to find enough Grade A fruit out there to meet the demand. Costco alone looks like the apocalypse hit."

Some farmers are yet to see any major changes.

Helle Ruddenklau, a farmer near Amity, Ore., and former president of Oregon Women for Agriculture, said she and her husband, Bruce, grow

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Helle Ruddenklau

Helle Ruddenklau, left, and husband, Bruce, inspect grass seed on their farm near Amity, Ore.