

Grower seeks to counter ag critics

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Central Washington tree fruit grower April Clayton told an audience last year that the percentage of Americans who farm equals the number who believe they have been abducted by aliens.

The quip, which has a factual basis, got a laugh. It also drove home why Clayton was motivated to become one of the Washington Farm Bureau’s go-to growers for explaining agriculture. There is a need, she said, to counter some wild claims.

“When you look at all the misinformation out there, it’s staggering,” she said.

Clayton, 46, got into farming by marrying a farmer, Mike Clayton. They married in 2005, soon after April earned a doctorate in analytical chemistry at the University of California-Davis.

Mike and April met on a blind date while she worked at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland. She was employed there between graduating with a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry at Florida State University and enrolling at UC-Davis.

Dissertation on wine

Her doctoral dissertation was on using nuclear resonance imaging to detect whether an old bottle of wine had become an old bottle of vinegar. She tested six bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon with vintages ranging from 1950 to 1977. Three bottles were spoiled.

She was the lead author of the resulting paper in the Journal of Magnetic Resonance titled: “Using NMR to study full intact wine bottles.”

The paper got press attention. An article in Wine Spectator quoted a New York wine auctioneer saying the technology could be useful in authenticating the quality of expensive wine, providing the testing was quick and inexpensive. It was neither, Clayton said.

Farm life

Mike’s father, John Clayton, a retired Air Force



Central Washington tree fruit grower April Clayton testifies Jan. 30 in front of the state Senate agriculture committee on a bill that would have restricted the use of the pesticide chlorpyrifos on select crops.

pilot, started the family farm, Red Apple Orchards, in 1965. It has 85 acres of organic apples and 65 acres of conventional cherries in Oronodo, near Wenatchee.

The cherries were organic until powdery mildew, a fungal disease, became impossible to control with organic methods, April Clayton said. “Organic is great, and so is conventional,” she said.

Speaking out

She got her start in farm advocacy speaking up against a statewide ballot measure that would have required genetically modified ingredients to be listed on food packages. The 2013 initiative, which failed, ignited the most-expensive election campaign in state history. The money flowed and so did passions.

“It was definitely trial by fire, and it scared me away from advocacy for awhile because hate mail came,” she said.

Clayton returned, however. “The need is so great,” she said.

Space aliens

The USDA’s 2017 Census of Agriculture counted 3,399,834 producers — people who own or man-

age farms. In a country of 325.7 million people, that’s a little more than 1% of the population.

It’s fewer people than the 3.7 million Americans who say they were taken hostage by space aliens, according to a survey published in 1992. (The survey was flawed, according to skeptics.)

To prepare to explain farming to a society removed from its agrarian roots, Clayton went through the American Farm Bureau’s two-year Partners in Advocacy Leadership.

Last year, she was among the farmers who came to Olympia to testify against a head tax on seasonal foreign farmworkers. This year, she testified against limiting the use of the pesticide chlorpyrifos on a handful of crops.

Three minutes

The sheer volume of bills introduced by lawmakers means witnesses are often limited to two or three minutes. (In extreme cases, 30 seconds). Distracted legislators routinely look at their open laptop computers while people testify.

“It’s tough. You drive three hours for, hope-

fully, three minutes of their time,” Clayton said.

As an organic farmer and chemist, Clayton was a natural to testify about chlorpyrifos, a pesticide under attack by environmental groups and some state attorneys general. The Environmental Protection Agency banned exterminators from spraying chlorpyrifos in homes two decades ago. Use on farms is far more controlled, she said.

“If we’re going to talk about the science of farming, let’s talk about the science of farming and not the emotions if it,” Clayton testified.

The bills that the Farm Bureau organized the most testimony against this year and last year failed.

‘We’ve been lucky’

“So far, we’ve been lucky,” Clayton said. “I am worried I may be regulated out of the business.”

She was invited to speak last year at an event on tariffs and agriculture hosted by the Washington Policy Center, a free-market think tank. “Tariffs are bad, yes,” Clayton began, “but the state legislation will kill our farms quicker than the tariffs will.”



Western Innovator

APRIL CLAYTON

Town: Orondo, Wash.

Age: 46

Position: Owns Red Apple Orchards with husband, Mike Clayton; went through American Farm Bureau advocacy training

Grows: Organic apples and conventional cherries

Education: Bachelor’s degree biochemistry Florida State University, doctorate degree analytical chemistry University of California-Davis

The Claytons experienced how shifting regulations can undermine business plans. The farm built housing for 16 foreign guestworkers. Before the housing was used, however, the state changed the standards. Only 12 foreign workers could be housed, not enough to cover the extra costs of using the H-2A visa program, she said.

The orchard continues to rely on U.S. workers, though not enough are available for harvest, Clayton said. The work is physically demanding and short term, she said. “There just aren’t enough people who want to do the work.”

The labor shortage requires farms to build up their reputation to keep workers coming back year after year, she said.

Another problem looms for this year’s harvest — the coronavirus. Clayton said workers in fields will be able to stay apart. But what if a worker in farm housing comes down with COVID-19? “It’s what everyone is most worried about,” she said.

Far West Association gets new executive director

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Margaret Jensen was part of the group looking for a new executive director for the Far West Agribusiness Association.

She didn’t realize she would end up in the job.

She is currently an agricultural recruiter for Ag 1 Source.

“We had some phenomenal candidates, absolutely wonderful candidates, and unfortunately we just couldn’t make a deal work,” Jensen told the Capital Press.

As the search to replace outgoing executive director Jim Fitzgerald continued, Jensen, an association



Margaret Jensen

board member for two years, and others began to consider somebody from the board taking over.

“The more we talked about it, the more it seemed like a different direction, but a good direction.”

She has been a member of the organization for more than a decade.

Far West Agribusiness Association is a 60-year-old regional trade organization covering Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Utah and Nevada. Its members are 120 agricul-

tural retailers selling fertilizer, crop protection products, seed, agronomic services and custom applications to farmers.

Fitzgerald is retiring after joining the association in 2008. Jensen took over April 15 as executive director.

She has nearly 30 years of experience in the vegetable and seed industry, working in research, market development, product development, sales and product management before becoming a seed and agronomy recruiter.

Jensen pointed to her experience in sales, networking and politics — all of which will serve her as executive director.

“A lot of boxes were

checked that made it seem like a good fit,” she said. “I’ve loved the organization, I’ve loved agriculture — I’ve been in it my entire career.”

Asked about the biggest needs she sees in the industry, Jensen said COVID-19 and the impacts that will percolate through the industry are at the top of people’s minds right now.

Jensen said Fitzgerald leaves big shoes to fill.

“We still have three more weeks of him available to us, and I plan on utilizing that three weeks very well, in picking his brain,” she said.

Jensen said her goals are for the organization to be healthy and thriving, for its members to feel like they’re

getting their money’s worth, and to build membership.

“Margaret’s enthusiasm and energy are just what the FWAA needs as we move forward in these challenging times,” association president Don Kirkwood said in a press release. “Her passion for the ag industry and stellar track record are indicative of the many talents she will bring to the table.”

Jesnsen said she will have an open door policy. She will maintain the Spokane office and an office in Weiser, Idaho.

“All the experiences I’ve had over the last 30-plus years in the industry, I hope I can bring all of that to the table and be a very successful person in this role,” she said.

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

THROUGH SUNDAY, APRIL 19

Shepherd’s Extravaganza

Canceled: All day, Spring Fair, Washington State Fairgrounds, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. There will be top quality fleeces and sheep for sale, demonstrations, classes, fiber vendors, and sale of used equipment. Contact: Lin Schwider, 425-432-3455. Email: lin@shepherds-extravaganza

THURSDAY-SUNDAY, APRIL 23-26

California FFA State Convention Canceled: Anaheim Convention Center, 800 W Katella Ave., Anaheim, Calif. California’s FFA members will meet and compete and demonstrate their knowledge of agriculture. Website: <http://www.calaged.org/stateconvention>

FRIDAY, APRIL 24

Women in Ranching WIRED

Program: Yolo Land and Cattle Co., Woodland, Calif. The Northern California Women in Ranching WIRED symposium will be held on April 24 at Yolo Land and Cattle Co. in Woodland, Calif. Speakers who are experts in their field have agreed to share their knowledge with participants. Contact: Leanne Brown, 530-598-4444, sisgbrown@gmail.com

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, APRIL 25-26

Oregon Ag Fest Canceled: A family-oriented weekend full of fun-filled activities that will help children — and their parents — learn about Oregon agriculture. See you next year — April 24-25, 2021. Online: <http://oragfest.com/>

SUNDAY-TUESDAY, MAY 17-19

The Alltech Ideas Conference: Central Bank Center, 430 W. Vine St., Lexington, Ky. The 36th Alltech Ideas Conference will explore innovative

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY JUNE 3-4

Stockmanship Clinic

8 a.m. Pendleton Convention Center, 1601 Westgate, Pendleton, Ore. This hands-on clinic will focus on practical applications of various livestock handling techniques, why low stress handling is important and helping to design a livestock handling facility for a local ranch. Sponsored by Roots of Resilience and Oregon State University Extension. Contact: Andrea Mann at 509-670-7743 or mannaandrea@aol.com, or Beth Robinson at beth@lazyrbeef.com

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

Goat and Lamb Clinic:

9 a.m.-2 p.m. Red Pavilion, Scio, Ore. Join us for a practice showmanship contest and some hands-on learning on how to get your animal showing ready. Contact: Teri McKenzie, 503-302-9901, teri@4Mlivestock.com

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, JUNE 20-21

Glenwood Ketchum Kalf

Rodeo: 12:30 p.m. Glenwood, Wash. The 86th Annual Ketchum Kalf Rodeo will be held in Glenwood, Wash. The Glenwood Rodeo Association is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization. Contact: Mary L. Pierce, 509-364-3427

MONDAY-TUESDAY, JUNE 22-23

Idaho Cattle Association Summer Roundup

Burley Convention Center, Burley, Idaho. The annual summer conference includes presentations on topics of interest to cattle producers, as well as social events and a golf tournament. Agenda to be announced. Website: <http://www.idahocattle.org>

TUESDAY-FRIDAY, JUNE 23-26

Agriculture Transportation Coalition Annual Meeting

Greater Tacoma Convention Center, 1320 Broadway, Tacoma, Wash. This is the

largest gathering of agriculture and forest products transportation professionals in the U.S. Website: www.agtrans.org

FRIDAY, JULY 24

16th Annual AgForestry Golf Tournament

9:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Apple Tree Golf Course, 8804 Occidental Ave., Yakima, Wash. Join the AgForestry network of alumni and supporters for an afternoon of golf, camaraderie and supporting future AgForestry Leaders. Contact: Melissa Skomer-Kafton, 509-926-9113, melissa@agforestry.org Website: <http://agforestry.org/golf-tournament-2020/>

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, SEPT. 25-26

Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association Trade Show

Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 NE Airport Way, Portland, Ore. This is the annual meeting and trade show of the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association. Contact: <http://www.pnwcta.org>



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