

People & Places

A sensor that can’t be knocked

By DIANNA TROYER
For the Capital Press

To test its durability, potato farmers kicked and dropped the Soiltech Wireless, a sensor that looks like a lemon-yellow, 8-inch tall thermos and provides field data about soil moisture, temperature and humidity. The plump hard plastic device can be buried with potatoes and provide immediate information through cell phones or tablets to help farmers maximize tuber growth.

Ehsan Soltan, chief executive officer of Soiltech, built the sensor to have at least a five-year life span.

“I wanted to make it comprehensive, so it can be used not only in fields but also in storage and when crops are in transit,” he told farmers who stopped at his booth at the Eastern Idaho Ag Expo in Pocatello last winter.

In the fall, it can be dug up and provide bruise spot analysis. In storage cellars, it continues to monitor its surroundings.

An electronic manufacturing designer who splits his time between American Falls, Idaho, and Taiwan, Soltan said he collaborated with potato farmers to design it.

“I’ve been testing it in the field for two years,” he said. “The battery lasts a year and can be recharged with a USB cord.”

Brad Nielson, agronomist for Walters Produce in Sugar City, Idaho, said, “At \$350, it’s a lot cheaper than bruise balls we’ve used, which are easy to lose because they’re the same color as a potato. I’m intrigued enough to try some.”

Kevin Burgemeister, farm manager at Driscoll Brothers Potatoes in American Falls, dropped the Soiltech on the floor



An electronic manufacturing designer, Ehsan Soltan built a sensor to provide temperature, moisture and humidity data in fields as well as in storage.



Brad Nielson, agronomist for Walters Produce of Newdale, Idaho, right, talks about the Soiltech with Ehsan Soltan, chief executive officer of Soiltech. Kevin Burgemeister, center, a farm manager in American Falls, Idaho, listens.

and kicked it without obviously damaging it. “It’s impressive,” Burgemeister said.



Western Innovator

EHSAN SOLTAN
Age: 32
Education: Law degree from the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom
Family: Wife
Website: <http://soiltech-wireless.com/>

Soltan said growers at ag shows have shown interest in the Soiltech because it provides immediate data about soil conditions. “We had an overwhelmingly positive reception in the Potato Expo in Las Vegas a week before the Pocatello

show and the Ontario onion show a week after,” Soltan said.

Growers like that multiple Soiltechs can be planted in a field based on the different soil types.

“It’s programmed with the NRCS soil data and GPS software, so it knows what type of soil it’s buried in,” Soltan said. “Based on the information it transmits, you can irrigate specific amounts in real time.”

The data is accessible immediately via the Soiltech app on cellphones, tablets or PCs where users can customize safe zones and receive alerts when any of their parameters are breached.

Besides customizable alerts, the software was also programmed for multiple soil calibrations, post-harvest field analysis, pre-set safe zone suggestions and historical data logging.

The data is automatically tabulated and stored in users’ accounts for post-harvest analysis.

Oregon Ag Fest awards \$2K to groups for agricultural education

Lost River FFA, Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassadors, Hermiston FFA honored

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon Ag Fest has announced the winners of the organization’s annual Agricultural Education Awards, recognizing groups and individuals working to bridge the urban-rural divide by teaching communities about farming and ranching.

Lost River FFA, of Merrill, Ore., won first place and a \$1,000 prize. The Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassador program won second place and \$600, and Hermiston FFA in Eastern Oregon took home third place and \$400 for its Agricultural Literacy Program.

“Oregon Ag Fest is ded-



Two Oregon FFA chapters and the Oregon Dairy Women were honored by Oregon Ag Fest this year.

icated to educating the public about the importance of agriculture, and we see this award as a way to encourage and support student groups and nonprofit organizations that have programs and activities aimed to accomplish the same thing,” said Macey Wessels, Ag Fest chairwoman.

Members of the Lost River FFA chapter have

participated in numerous local events teaching kids about agriculture, Wessels said. That includes hatching 120 fertilized chicken eggs for elementary school students, and participating in the annual Oregon Agriculture in the Classroom literacy project — leading a lesson plan based on an agriculture-themed book for kindergartners

through fifth grade.

Most recently, FFA members also began raising and harvesting steers to provide beef for their school cafeteria, in addition to eggs from their hens.

The Dairy Princess Ambassador program was created by Oregon Dairy Women in 1959 to promote and provide outreach on behalf of the dairy industry. Last year, the ambassadors reached more than 10,000 students statewide at county fairs and other school and community events.

Finally, Hermiston FFA coordinated 33 events for local elementary schools through its Agricultural Literacy Program, reaching 4,800 students and teaching agriculture through hands-on activities.

“There are a lot of kids in this state who think their meat, milk and vegetables come from the grocery store,” Wessels said. “Pretty much everything begins on a farm.”

This year’s awards come as, for the first time in 33 years, Oregon Ag Fest will not host its signature two-day event held during the last week of April due to the coronavirus pandemic. More than 20,000 people were expected to attend at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem.

Hundreds of volunteers pull together to make Ag Fest happen, Wessels said. Unfortunately, it was not possible to schedule another weekend that would work for everyone, given the lingering uncertainty around business closures and social distancing requirements.

Activities at Oregon Ag Fest typically include pony rides, toy tractor races, crafts and other hands-on projects learning about where food and fiber comes from.

“I think that there is such a huge disconnect between urban and rural right now,” Wessels said. “We want to help educate.”

CALENDAR

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 solutions within the global food-supply chain. More than 40 topics are slated for discussion. Website: <http://one.alltech.com>

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 mannandrea@aol.com, or Beth Robinette 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>

SATURDAY, SEPT. 26

Women in Ranching WIRED Program: 7:30 a.m. Yolo Land and Cattle Co., Woodland, Calif. The Northern California Women in Ranching WIRED symposium will be held on Sept. 26 at Yolo Land and Cattle Co. in Woodland, Calif. Speakers who are experts in their field have agreed to share their knowledge with participants. Several event sponsors have been engaged in order to keep the participant’s registration fee low. Cost: \$50 per person. Website: <http://www.ancw.org>



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