

People & Places

Sweet potatoes gain ground

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

Eric Buhrmann, general manager of Mininger Foods in Merced County, Calif., says sweet potatoes have everything a body needs.



Sweet potatoes ready for harvest.

“Sweet potatoes are a well-rounded food that contains vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and is loaded with potassium,” he told the Capital Press.

That, in large part, is why they have gained in popularity over the years as a healthful alternative to potatoes. In 2009, 5.9 million hundred-weight of sweet potatoes were raised in California, according to the USDA. By last year, the state’s sweet potato crop had grown to 8.1 million hundred-weight, an increase of 37%.

Overall, California’s production of sweet potatoes and yams has nearly quadrupled since the late 1970s and is second only to North Carolina in annual volume, according to the USDA.

Nathan Mininger, president of Mininger Foods, said there is a secret to growing beautiful sweet potatoes: the sand.

“Heavy, rocky soil can hinder growth and form crooked



Courtesy of Nathan Mininger

Nathan Mininger, president and owner of Mininger Foods in Merced County, Calif., grows six varieties of sweet potatoes. He says the public is beginning to eat more sweet potatoes because of their good taste and health benefits.

or ugly sweet potatoes; but there is a sand belt here in Merced County where our pretty sweet potatoes grow without resistance,” Mininger said.

The difference between yams and sweet potatoes probably goes back to early marketing.

A yam is orange inside and out, sweet and has lots of vitamin A and beta carotene.

A sweet potato has white flesh on the inside when baked or boiled. They hold their texture and are higher in potassium.

Basically, though, both are sweet potatoes.

Mininger worked for years at A.V. Thomas Produce before going out on his own in the early 1990s, according to the company website.

Mininger grows six varieties of sweet potatoes — Covington (traditional), Diane, Burgundy, Bonita, Mura-saki and Stokes Purple — on about 1,000 acres with A.V. Thomas, a California-based grower and packer.

“I enjoy row crops because every year you start from the beginning,” he said. “Each

variety matures differently, from 90 days to 120 days.”

Around the middle of February and into March, workers cover seed potatoes in plastic-covered hotbeds.

In April and May, the potatoes are transplanted into the fields.

Harvest lasts from August through the end of October. Because of the sandy soil, curing is not necessary. The sweet potatoes are stored year around.

The increase in the volume of sweet potatoes grown serves as a beacon for the



Western Innovator

NATHAN MININGER

Hometown: Atwater, Calif. (Merced County)

Family: wife, Debbie, and five adult children

Occupation: Sweet potato grower and founder, Mininger Foods

Quote: “I enjoy row crops because every year you start from the beginning.”

increase in consumption, and that’s a good sign.

“I do think people are beginning to understand the health benefits of eating sweet potatoes on a regular basis,” Mininger said. “There are many, many ways of eating sweet potatoes today: in pies, casseroles, fried, hash browns, soups, salads and baked, of course.”

That is a break in tradition, he said, adding that “in the past, many people seemed to think Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas was the only time you were supposed to enjoy sweet potatoes.”

Klamath Water Users offer scholarship drawing

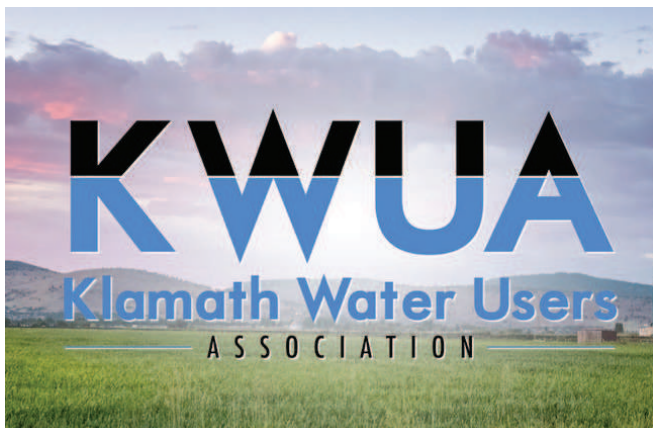
By HOLLY DILLEMUTH
For the Capital Press

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — All high school students in their senior year in Klamath, Modoc, and Siskiyou counties are eligible to enter a drawing to win a scholarship from the Klamath Water Users Association.

The association, which represents irrigation districts throughout the Klamath Basin, started the initial fund with a contribution of \$500. The more individuals and businesses that contribute, the more scholarships can be awarded to seniors through the fund.

The deadline for seniors to enter for a chance to win a scholarship is midnight on June 7.

The effort has so far collected \$1,500 — enough to award three scholarships, said Chelsea Shearer, administrative assistant to KWUA Executive Director Paul Simmons. Shearer, whose daughter is a



The Klamath Water Users Association has set up a scholarship fund for graduating seniors.

2020 Henley High graduate, pitched the concept to the board of directors.

“It’s just a way to let (the students) know that we’re all thinking of them and we stand behind them and their goals,” Shearer said.

Shearer said to enter, seniors must send a senior photo with their first and last name (to be used in KWUA’s social media campaign), the name of their

high school and one sentence describing their plan for what they will do after high school.

Shearer said she will post a photo of a student who has entered the scholarship contest on KWUA’s Facebook page every day as a way to show the association is behind them.

Those still working to complete their graduation requirements are welcome to enter to win a scholarship.

“It’s not about who’s better,” Shearer said. “It’s about, ‘Hey, you did this, you made it this far, and we’re here to support you.’”

Ben DuVal, vice president of KWUA, said he and other producers can empathize with seniors under the current circumstances that ended their school year.

“Ag producers right now in the Klamath Basin — we definitely understand uncertainty, the disappointment of working hard and making plans to see them fall apart,” DuVal said. “So we can empathize with the seniors and saw that we could hopefully improve the future for them.”

Tricia Hill, president of KWUA, also acknowledged that the association wants to do what it can to support the class of 2020 in light of current events.

“There’s an excitement to the end of your senior year and a camaraderie with your classmates that you’ve been going

to school with, and all of that they’re never going to get,” Hill said. “They’re going to miss out on it.”

“In a year that everything is just so grim ... it was something that we could do that was positive and uplifting.”

Every senior who enters will have their name entered into a drawing to receive a scholarship. All donated funds will go toward a scholarship.

Shearer encourages donations from individuals, groups, or businesses of any amount toward the scholarship fund through June 7. Checks can be made payable to: KWUA Senior Scholarship, 2312 S. Sixth St., Suite A, Klamath Falls, OR 97601.

To enter a drawing for the scholarship, seniors must submit required information to chelsea@kwua.org by June 7. The recipients of the scholarships will be chosen at random and will be announced on KWUA’s Facebook page on June 9.

Spokane Junior Livestock Show goes virtual

Show managers look to connect youth sellers with buyers

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press



Lynn Cotter

Judges will watch the video for quality and whether animals are market-ready as best they can, she said.

“It’s a learning year for all of us,” she said. “Our biggest thing is we wanted to give the kids the opportunity to do something with these animals. They’re home from school, they still have these animals, they’re going to the barn, feeding them every day.”

Results will be posted following the show.

Participants have the option

ONLINE
<http://www.juniorshow.org/>

of participating or getting their entry fees returned, Cotter said. About 550 youths were slated to show 700 animals during the show.

She’s hoping at least 200 to 300 youths will still participate.

There will be no livestock sale in conjunction with the show.

Cotter said the show has encouraged youths to pre-sell their animals. She’s put the word out on social media to

youths to let her know if they don’t have their animal sold.

She currently has a list of roughly 12 lambs and goats still to be purchased, and will also take names of potential buyers for steers and hogs, she said.

Holding a virtual show may help with the show’s budget, Cotter said. There won’t be the cost of renting the Spokane County Fairgrounds, for example.

But there are still the costs of putting on the event, including prize money for the hog carcass contest, the ambassador program to promote next year’s show and more funding in senior scholarships.

But what the next year will

hold for the show’s funding is an unknown, she said.

“...Who knows what will happen next year after all of this,” she said.

Right now, though, she said, the biggest need is for the youths to sell their animals. For example, a youth will purchase a pig for \$200 and invest \$300 in its care and feeding. When the animal is sold, the youth will hopefully make that money back and more.

“As the meat prices are rising in the store, I think it’s gonna be a heck of a deal to buy from these kids,” she said.

FFA members must wear official dress in their videos. The entry deadline is May 5.

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.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 solutions within the global food-supply chain. More than 40 topics are slated for discussion. Website: <http://one.alltech.com>

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY, MAY 20-21

AgTC Virtual Annual Meeting: 9-11 a.m. Pacific each day. Online. An amazing line up of speakers.

fastest paced Annual Meeting ever, tackling the challenges facing shippers, carriers, ports, all others, right now. Website: <https://agtrans.org/events/>

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@lazyr-beef.com

CALENDAR 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@4mlive-stock.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 non-profit, 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>

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/>

SATURDAY SEPT. 19

Small Farm School 2020: Clackamas Community College, Clairmont Hall, 19600 S Molalla Ave., Oregon City, Ore. Small Farm School is a full-day event with hands-on workshops and classroom sessions for beginning and small-scale commercial farmers. Subscribe to the mailing list for updates. The school is a collaboration between OSU Extension, Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District and Clackamas Community College. Fee: \$75 Contact: Clint Taylor, 979-820-3980 or clint.taylor@oregon-state.edu



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