

People & Places

Flower farm grows sustainability

By ALIYA HALL
For the Capital Press

NEWBERG, Ore. — When John Peterson and Jeremi Carroll first moved to this Willamette Valley town in 2012 to grow their farming dream, they started with one shovel.

Now, eight years later, they have created a permaculture oasis through regenerative farming, which focuses on conservation and rehabilitation of the soil and ecosystem, as well as increasing biodiversity.

“This has always been my dream to have a crazy secret fairy garden,” Peterson said. “So there’s that part that’s cool and turning that into a business.”

They own Pollinate Flowers, whose ethos hinges on regenerative farming and sustainable floral design. They started with produce but pivoted in 2018 to concentrate on the fresh and dry flower market. Smaller amounts of produce are also still available for purchase.

Carroll described Peterson as a “plant nerd” whose focus is on the farming, while Carroll focuses on the floral design. The bouquets are made using the 1,000 species of plants they grow.

Although COVID-19 has heavily impacted the floral



Aliya Hall/For the Capital Press

John Peterson and Jeremi Carroll are the owners of Pollinate Flowers in Newberg. Peterson specializes in farming and Carroll focuses on floral design.

industry, where large producers outside the country have no market, it has given local florists a chance to shine.

“We’ve done better than previously because people and florists are looking to us,” Peterson said. “They’re more interested in local flowers than in grocery store flowers.”

In June, Pollinate opened its first retail location in Newberg, Ore., although customers can purchase online, too. Peterson said that last year most of their income was coming from wineries and other large venues, but they’re still seeing an “upward trend.”

“We’re more profitable this year than last year,” Peterson said. “Growth is happening, so despite everything people still want flowers.”

He said that instead of selling a couple hundred dollars worth of flowers per order they’re selling closer to \$50 at a time.

“Our business has grown but we’ve worked a lot harder for it,” Carroll explained.

COVID-19 has also allowed them to give more time to different aspects of their business such as their dried flowers and wreath kits. They were able to experiment and set up the infrastructure that will allow them to extend their work season into the holidays.

Pollinate uses plants at different stages, like using seed pods. Carroll said that for arrangements there are always certain elements that

are needed like big focal flowers, secondary flowers and fillers.

When it comes to planting, they coordinate with the trends in the floral industry and plant the color schemes they want for the upcoming year.

“I accommodate that with things I like,” Carroll said. “I’m big on natural, organic design and interesting green foliage and textures.”

Beyond everything that’s above ground, Peterson also makes sure protecting and amending the soil is important. They add limestone or kelp meal, as well as test their soil every year so they can make a custom blend for their soil.

Pollinate is planning on



Western Innovator

JOHN PETERSON AND JEREMI CARROLL

Ages: Peterson is 35, Carroll is 38

Location: Newberg, Ore.

Size of farm: 2.5 acres

Years in business: Farming for 6 years with the last 3 focused on cut flowers

Website: <https://pollinateflowers.com/>

branching into making essential oils from its plants, as well as starting a flower co-op. As the business continues to grow, Peterson said it’s rewarding to be sustainable economically as well.

“You have to make enough to not just keep it going but pay yourself so you have an income to have a comfortable life, or you won’t be able to do it very long,” he explained. “It’s rewarding to see it come to fruition.”

FFA food collection effort overcomes COVID-19 challenges, totals 190 tons

By GEOFF PARKS
For the Capital Press

PERRYDALE, Ore. — Food For All, the Perrydale FFA-led effort to collect, package and deliver this year nearly 190 tons of farm-grown fresh fruits and vegetables to 8,000 needy families statewide, had a new challenge this year — COVID-19.

Coronavirus concerns have kept students away from the seven Lower Willamette FFA District schools involved in the Food For All packaging efforts.

At Central High School in mid-December, two of the school’s custodians, two ag teachers and two English teachers were among a group of 10 or so who were sorting large donations of onions and apples into family-sized net bags for delivery to families throughout the state.

“We’re doing pretty well with no students this year, where we usually have over 200 students a day at this time,” said Abby Chase, one of Central’s ag teachers.

Food For All, now in its 22nd year, was begun at Perrydale by Kirk Hutchinson, then the school’s ag adviser, with one donated 1,000-pound bag of spuds from a potato chip producer in Salem.

Hutchinson now acts as the coordinator of the program and is aided by Perrydale’s current ag adviser,



Geoff Parks/For the Capital Press

Abby Chase, an ag instructor at Central High School in Independence, Ore., packages onions for the Food For All program headed by Perrydale FFA.

Christina Griffin, and by the ag staff and FFA students in the other six district schools — Willamina, Dayton, Sheridan, Yamhill-Carlton, Central and Dallas.

“Businesses, some students, teachers, community members, FFA alumni — all these groups are coming together to make Food For All work this year,” Hutchinson said. “That is so amazing, especially in the political climate that we’ve been through in the last few months, that all the people have forgotten about their differences and come together

for a common cause.

“Nobody’s thinking anything but ‘People need food, and what can we do to make things happen?’” he said.

Perrydale’s FFA members are the mechanism that keeps the machine running, as they start each Food For All yearly drive in mid-November and work through Dec. 23 on the various tasks necessary for a successful drive.

The members give presentations each year to community members and businesses to solicit help with the program. Sixteen-year-old Cora

Gleason, a Perrydale FFA member, related some of the pitch they made to locals they hoped to enlist in the effort.

The three legs of the program, she explained to them, are “collection, packaging and distribution” of fresh food.

After contacting businesses and farms that have donated to Food For All in the past, she said, food is picked up and dropped off at one of the partner schools.

Packaging the fresh produce into smaller bags takes place immediately, “and we then haul it to food banks, churches and other organizations so it is able to go directly to families,” Gleason said.

“Most of the people we give food to cannot access the food bank system,” Hutchinson said, “Elks Clubs, Eagles Clubs, Knights of Columbus and churches just adopt these families and get food from the Oregon Food Bank. So our little niche is giving these fresh fruits and vegetables that we have access to as agriculturalists.”

In all respects, and despite the pandemic, lack of a large workforce and other challenges, this still will be a successful year, Hutchinson said.

“We have more food packed right now than we’ve ever had on this date (Dec. 11) in the history of Food For All,” he said.

Maine farm no one has heard of received \$1.2M PPP loan

Portland Press Herald

BRIDGTON, Maine (AP) — A Paycheck Protection Program loan for nearly \$1.2 million issued to an organic farm operator allegedly located in western Maine has raised suspicion after a massive disclosure of federal records about the small business relief program.

According to records released by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Common Ground Organic Farm LLC, based in Bridgton, received the loan. The records show the company claimed to have 91 employees.

There is no company by that name registered in Maine and the

local insurance firm that owns and operates the business address used by Common Grounds said it has never heard of the company, the Portland Press Herald reported.

The loan raised suspicion when it was discovered in a database of Maine companies that received loans larger than \$150,000. Members of the Maine organic farming community noticed the large staff and its address that corresponded to an office building far from the regions best known for large-scale agriculture.

An SBA spokesperson said that the agency could not provide any additional details regarding the reported loan.

“The agency isn’t able to pro-

vide a timeframe on the resolution of many identity theft complaints,” SBA spokeswoman Elizabeth Moisuk said in response to an email. “Evidence of waste, fraud and abuse with any of SBA’s loan programs is not tolerated and should be reported.”

A small business in DeLand, Florida, was found in an online search that was formerly called Common Ground Organic Farm LLC.

In a phone interview with the newspaper, that business’ co-owner, Pat Joslin, said that she and her husband not only dropped “organic” from the company name in 2011, but her company is not eligible for PPP because of the way they do their taxes.

Joslin said that the couple runs the farm themselves, does not have full-time employees and does not have any substantial debt.

“We couldn’t have even applied,” she said. “There is no way — I do not have payroll.”

The couple received a notice from the SBA last month indicating that starting next September the farm would need to start repaying \$730 per month on its loan.

“We have never as a farm taken a loan on anything,” Joslin said. “We have been here 12 years, then we get this. We went, ‘Holy crap.’”

The couple immediately contacted the SBA and are awaiting a response.

CALENDAR

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

SUNDAY-WEDNESDAY JAN. 10-13
American Farm Bureau Annual Convention (virtual): The convention will focus on top issues including the impact of COVID-19, sustainability and the future of the supply chain. Website: <https://www.fb.org>

THURSDAY, JAN. 14
Create a Plan for Your Land Workshop (virtual): Learn from experts about soil, water and wildlife conservation. Classes are geared toward small farms and rural properties, but anyone is welcome. We will provide technical assistance to

complete conservation plans and potentially find funding for conservation projects on your land. Plan to attend all four free sessions, which will be from 5 to 8 p.m.:

Jan. 14: Conservation planning — Soil.
Jan. 21: Water and vegetation.
Jan. 28: Streamsides and woodlands.
Feb. 4: Working lands — Putting it all together.
Contact: Marion Soil and Water Conservation District, 503-391-9927. Registration: <http://virtualpl-fyl.eventbrite.com>

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY JAN. 19-20
Dairy Strong Annual Conference (virtual): The annual conference is organized by the Dairy Business Association. More details to

come. Website: <https://www.dairystrong.org>

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY JAN. 20-23
41st EcoFarm Conference (virtual): Save the date for the 41st EcoFarm Conference Jan. 20-23. Building upon its farmer-to-farmer education model, EcoFarm is an essential networking and educational hub for ecologically minded farmers, ranchers and all who work to support their success in growing a healthy food system and world. Mark your calendars for Jan. 20-23 and get ready for an EcoFarm Conference unlike any before as we will convene online for our 41st event. Phone: 831-763-2111 Email: info@eco-farm.org. Website: <https://eco-farm.org/conference>

MONDAY-THURSDAY JAN. 25-28

Dairy Forum 2021 (virtual): Presentations will focus on leadership, technology, global trade, sustainability, product innovations and navigating the political landscape. Website: <https://www.idfa.org>

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 27
Farm Transition Planning Four-Part Workshop (virtual): It’s never too early — or too late — to begin securing your farm’s future. A farm transition plan is essential to protecting your interests and minimizing attorney fees, taxes, and family stress. This free workshop series will help you understand your options and navigate the planning process. All classes are 1-4 p.m. In partnership with the Small Busi-

ness Development Center at Clackamas Community College, Tualatin SWCD will host four workshops covering the following topics:

Jan. 27: The estate planning process and options.
Feb. 10: Strategies for having difficult conversations.
Feb. 24: Organizing your finances and business structure.
March 10: Preparing your operation and heirs for transition.
Information: <https://bit.ly/3gxXD4r>

MONDAY-FRIDAY FEB. 1-5

Spokane Ag Show (virtual): Currently, we are finalizing the latest technology in virtual conferences and trade shows and expect recording breaking attendance at our virtual show in 2021. Website: <https://www.agshow.org/>



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