

## People &amp; Places

## WSU entomologist seeks biocontrol for weeds

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Washington State University entomologist Jennifer Andreas plans to soon petition the USDA to allow a non-native insect be turned loose on an invasive weed that she calls, respectfully, “a beast.”

Flowering rush, an aquatic plant native to Eurasia, has escaped in the West, presenting a choking hazard to irrigation systems. Hard to pull and tough to poison, the weed has no natural North American predator to check its growth.

For almost 10 years, Andreas and other researchers have been studying how to beat back flowering rush with “classical biocontrol,” the science of importing a foreign bug to fight a foreign weed.

It’s not done lightly. Scientists spend years studying whether introduced insects will do harm by straying off target and killing beneficial native plants. The payoff is weed control without annual herbicide applications.

“There is no zero-risk option. If you spray there’s a risk in that. If you do nothing, there is a risk,” Andreas said. “Biocontrol is quite low risk.”

Andreas said she hopes this spring to submit a petition to release *Bogous nodulosus*, a.k.a. “flowering rush weevil.” A technical panel will review the petition and advise the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. A decision is likely



Courtesy of Jennifer Andreas

**Washington State University entomologist Jennifer Andreas directs the college’s Integrated Weed Control Project and is involved in biocontrol research.**

to be years away.

With APHIS approval, the weevils could be let go, probably first at Flathead Lake in Montana, the source of flowering rush root fragments floating west into Idaho and Washington.

In Eurasia, the weevil eats flowering rush rhizomes, or rootstalks, “hitting it where it hurts,” Andreas said. She said she’s excited to see how the weevil will work in North America.

“Flowering rush is sort of a beast of a plant, and we’re kind of losing the battle to get rid of it,” she said.

Andreas, based at WSU’s research center in Puyallup, directs the WSU Integrated Weed Control Project, a program primarily funded by the U.S. Forest Service.

She also leads the international Flowering Rush Biocontrol Consortium and co-chairs the biocontrol committee of the North American Invasive Species Management Association.

For a question-and-answer session on the association’s website recently, she named flowering rush her “favorite invasive species.”

“You have to respect a weed that is besting us at almost every turn,” she said.

Andreas said the remark was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but also true.

“I would say I have a certain respect for some of these invasive species that are challenging for us,” she said.

A native of Canada, Andreas went to the University of Lethbridge in Alberta



## Western Innovator

Jennifer Andreas

Job: Director of Washington State University Integrated Weed Control Project

Positions: Biocontrol committee co-chair of the North American Invasive Species Management Association; lead of the Flowering Rush Biocontrol Consortium

Education: Bachelor’s degree University of Lethbridge (Alberta, Canada); master’s degree University of Idaho in entomology

and with the help of a “great professor” was introduced to the wonders of entomology. “I think insects are incredible,” she said.

After graduating from Lethbridge in 2000, she enrolled at the University of Idaho and earned a master’s degree in entomology in 2004.

She went to work for WSU Extension in King County in 2005 and later moved to Puyallup.

The WSU program Andreas directs promotes controlling weeds by all

means, including biocontrol.

Most biocontrol experiments fail, according to APHIS. Sometimes transplanted insects don’t reproduce in their new environment or aren’t that effective.

According to the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International, the last biocontrol agents to have notable success in the western U.S. were a wasp and a midge introduced in 2008 and 2009 to control Russian knapweed.

Recently, however, APHIS has authorized some promising releases.

“We did have a kind of quiet, nothing-happening phase, but we’re taking off again,” Andreas said. “I think we’re getting excited again.”

APHIS in 2019 permitted the release of a weevil, *Ceratapion basicorne*, to attack yellow starthistle, a weed that damages grazing lands in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California.

The prickly plant is Andreas’ least favorite invasive species. “I hate working in it. It’s so painful,” she said.

In 2020, APHIS permitted the release of a psyllid, *Aphalara itadori*, to control Japanese knotweed, as well as the related Bohemian knotweed and giant knotweed.

The insect was released last spring in Grays Harbor, King and Pierce counties. Andreas will be checking in early spring this year to see how the insect fared over the winter.

## New executive director joins Washington FFA

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

The new executive director of the Washington FFA Association is calling on farmers and others in agriculture to help grow the next crop of leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Hands-on experiences are hard to deliver in a virtual setting, so if any farmers, industry reps, or supporters have opportunities to provide awareness and an introduction to their operation ... then I ask you to contact me so that I can share your informa-

tion with the teachers,” Jason Bullock told the Capital Press.

Some programs are meeting in person, while others have not seen their students in person since March 2020, he said. The organization will follow local, state and national health and safety guidelines, he said.

Bullock says a partnership “can and should exist” between the organization, agricultural education and the industry. FFA helps to prepare students for careers



Jason Bullock

inside and outside agriculture by giving them leadership and personal development skills, he said.

Bullock began at the association Dec. 16. He replaces Abbie DeMeerleer, who left in September after six years.

Bullock worked remotely from North Carolina before arriving in Lacey Jan. 4.

Bullock was an FFA member in high school. He graduated from North Carolina State University with a bachelor’s degree in agricul-

tural and extension education and taught agricultural education for 12 years at St. Pauls, N.C., High School, his alma mater.

He also taught agricultural biotechnology at Southeastern Community College in Whiteville, N.C., then worked as a practice manager at a pet hospital and veterinary assistant.

He began pursuing his doctorate in agricultural and extension education at NCSU in 2018, and will graduate in May 2021.

He said he will continue Washington FFA’s current

strategic plan, and begin preparing for a new plan in 2023.

“Another goal is to work to ensure that the association is providing opportunities to its members, supporters and leaders that foster diverse, inclusive and equitable practices,” he said. “The vast differences in schools’ schedules and educational delivery across the state will be a challenge, but it is the goal and mission of the Washington FFA board of directors to work together to find a way to provide opportunities to the students during this unprecedented time.”

## From suffering to opportunity: Former refugee empowers people to farm

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — African refugees have started farm businesses near Portland in recent years that are growing in popularity and profit.

Much of their success, they say, can be traced to the man who trained them behind-the-scenes: Eca-Etobo Wasongolo.

Wasongolo is community organizer at Village Gardens, a nonprofit that promotes economic and food resilience. Each year, Wasongolo trains about 15 refugees how to grow and market food. Refugees start by selling produce at Village Market, a small grocery store. A few have gone on to start farm businesses, and more are considering it.

“I want people to discover they have the poten-

tial to make something, that they have a certain power inside them,” said Wasongolo.

Wasongolo’s many assets equip him for this work — university training in agriculture, science and development, and his ability to speak Swahili, Kibembe, Nyanja, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, French and English.

His greatest asset, some say, is his own story — because once, Wasongolo was a refugee, too.

It was 1996. Civil war had erupted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Wasongolo’s family lived. The bloody genocide was nicknamed “Africa’s First World War.”

Ethnic strife before and during the war propelled

a massive refugee influx as 4.5 million people from Burundi and Rwanda fled to the Congo.

Wasongolo, who at the time helped Burundian and Rwandan refugees, was seen as a trainer for this work and became a wanted man. Rebels searched for him and killed four relatives, including two brothers.

“It’s hard to talk about,” said Wasongolo.

His voice broke. As he, his wife Salome and their children fled, the streets were filled with bodies. They escaped from the Congo aided by a priest and nun and fled to nearby Zambia.

Prior to the conflicts, Wasongolo had studied social organizing and agri-

culture at the Higher Institute of Rural Development and had subsequently taught communities how to improve their profits through farming and entrepreneurship. He had also worked for Caritas International, a Catholic relief organization, and helped refugees.

Himself a refugee, Wasongolo continued teaching others to make a profit through farming and craftsmanship.

Nearly eight years passed. Wasongolo’s family grew, living in camps, before their request for U.S. asylum was granted. The family settled in Portland.

Around 2008, he became involved with Janus Youth, parent organization of Village Gardens, and in 2010, he became a community organizer.

Wasongolo said he’s particularly proud of one ref-

ugee couple he trained — Prosper Hezumuryanao and Rosata Niyonzima, from Burundi.

Under Wasongolo’s guidance, the couple learned to navigate American culture, grew a garden plot, and in 2012, started their own organic farm on Sauvie Island. This they named Happiness Family Farm, after their daughter, Happiness.

Their business is growing, and they have sold produce through farmers markets, grocery delivery services, a community-supported agriculture program, or CSA, and in local restaurants.

“You can’t imagine. From such suffering to such opportunity. They’re doing great,” said Wasongolo.

This month, Wasongolo plans to meet with other refugees who are interested in full-time farming.

## CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on [www.capitalpress.com](http://www.capitalpress.com) or by email to [newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com).

### 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>

### TUESDAY-THURSDAY JAN. 26-28

**FSCPCA-Preventive Controls for Human Food:** This FSPCA Pre-

ventive Controls for Human Food course is the “standardized curriculum” recognized by the FDA. This course covers regulation Title 21 CFR 117 – Current Good Manufacturing Practice, Hazard Analysis, and Risk-Based Preventive Controls for Human Food. The course will go in-depth with requirements for Hazard Analysis and Risk-Based Preventive Controls based food safety training. Course participants will get familiar with all requirements of Preventive Controls based food safety plan and how to design the plan, and upon successful completion of the course become a Preventive Controls Qualified Individ-

ual (PCQI). Cost: \$750 Contact: Jane Hokanson, 208-616-5191, [jane-hokanson@techhelp.org](mailto:jane-hokanson@techhelp.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 Business 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>

### WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY JAN. 27-28

**University of Idaho Bean School (virtual):** 9-11 a.m. The Uni-

versity of Idaho is taking its annual Bean School online. The Jan. 27 session will include updates by the Idaho Bean Commission and Idaho Crop Improvement Association, as well as updates on bean diseases and the Idaho State Department of Agriculture licensing program. The Jan. 28 session will include conservation practices related to bean production and seed-borne bacterial pathogens that have quarantine significance in the Pacific Northwest. Two pesticide applicator credits are available. Participants must register before Jan. 25. To register, visit: [https://uidaho.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_06cfCGLAMJF5yb](https://uidaho.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_06cfCGLAMJF5yb)



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