

Siskiyou Seeds builds 'Noah's ark of agro-biodiversity'

By ALIYA HALL
For the Capital Press

At Siskiyou Seeds in Southern Oregon, owner Don Tipping said they don't actually grow seeds, "We grow people."

"We only farm about 10 acres ... and we can only grow so much food, but in seed, we magnify that out so much greater," he said. "Through our company we're able to touch tens if not hundreds of thousands of people to help them grow better food and connect them with family, their environment and health."

Although Siskiyou Seeds was established in 2009, Tipping started growing seed in 1996 when the farm was called Seven Seeds Farm.

At the time, Tipping was producing varieties for national-scale seed companies. Now they grow about half the seed themselves and work with other organic growers, offering a diverse selection of vegetable, flower, grain and herb seed that is open pollinated and grown using biodynamic methods.

The transition to owning a seed company wasn't intentional, Tipping said,



Siskiyou Seeds
Don Tipping, center, talks about his operations. He is the owner of Siskiyou Seeds in Southern Oregon, which was established in 2009.

but when a friend who owned another seed company died, he was given those seeds.

"I got the seeds and realized what a treasure trove it was," he said. The buckets contained 300 varieties of seed that have been grown in Southern Oregon since the '70s.

"There were things that worked for this area. Not just anything will grow, especially organic," he said.

As a student of permaculture, he sees

the farm as an ecosystem.

"The different categories (of seed) is like having Noah's ark of agro-biodiversity," he said.

Tipping described his farm as a research and development facility, where they trial different crops to see how they perform, because there isn't a long agricultural history in the area.

"We're still in the pioneer phase of learning what crops work for the area. Every year we're experiment-

ing with new crops and seeing how they do here," he said, adding that the foodie culture has impacted this as well because there are more opportunities to grow more varieties of species.

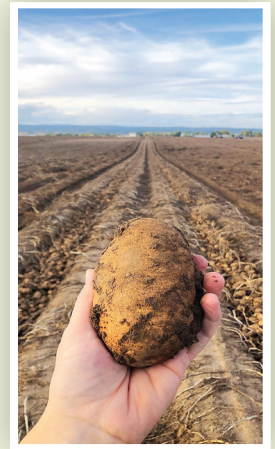
Tipping's interest in seeds started with learning how to save seed, and he still encourages his clients to save their seeds, which is part of why open pollination is so important. He is also offering seed cleaning screens that they make on the farm to

help people in that journey.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Tipping has benefited from the increase in gardening, with sales growing three times from what they were the previous year. To help maintain this growth, he is designing a job for managing social media and customer service.

"The direction moving forward is nourishing," he said. "It's like putting compost down before you plant. You can't harvest fruit until you plant a tree."

ON THE COVER



Seed potatoes are the main crop at Steinmann Farms near Ashton, Idaho. For more on the Steinmann operation, go to Page 7. Photo courtesy of Steinmann Farms.

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