

# Berger keeps family, business in focus



By **BENNA WIEGAND**  
For the Capital Press

In a bustling family business, relationships can easily fall by the wayside.

With seed planting, cleaning, bagging, storing and shipping, Becky Berger, owner and CEO of Berger International Seed, is as intentional about growing strong family relationships as she is about the business.

“We formed a family council,” Berger said. “Twice a year we sit down with a consultant and work through family and business issues.

“I’ve got children that are in the farming business and children that

Berger International

**Becky Berger of Berger International farms 3,200 acres in three counties. Known for producing some of the finest grass seed in the world, the farm also offers custom seed cleaning and produces red clover seed, grass straw, hazelnuts, red clover silage and hayage.**

are not,” Berger said. “I want to make sure my values are passed on to them

— and keeping this business going is very important to me.”

Berger has worked in the turf grass seed business since marrying into the Berger Seed family 45 years ago. After her husband, Keith, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at 30, he suffered a gradual decline until his death in 2011.

Berger kept taking on more and more responsibility and by the time her father-in-law and husband both passed away, she ran the show with her brother-in-law, whom she eventually bought out.

Berger International spans 3,200 acres in three counties. While the bulk of the land is in tall fescue — Berger is known for producing some of the finest grass seed in the world — the farm also produces wheat, red clover and hazelnuts.

The company owns two proprietary tall fescue varieties — Xtreme Green and Integrity — and has a third variety coming online. It sells a substantial amount into China and is celebrating the first European sale.

“Having open market grass can be a very good thing or not,” Berger said. “You have to be able to sit on it so it’s riskier for sure. It’s been a good thing for us overall and we’re building a reputation for providing quality seeds.”

Their seed processing plant in Carlton, Ore., allows them to control the cleaning process and the timing, affording greater responsiveness to buyers.

In addition to grass seed, the farm offers custom seed cleaning.

Berger has planted 250 acres of hazelnuts over the last five years. She likes the crop because, while expensive to plant, the orchards lend themselves well to adjustments if the price drops.

“It’s also a very friendly industry where people come around you and really help you learn,” she said.

In addition to the Hazelnut Marketing Board, Berger serves on the Oregon Seed Council, Oregon State University’s Austin Family Business Program Advisory Board and the Oregon Tall Fescue Commission.

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