

Oregon FFA officers reflect on chaotic tenure

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

Under normal circumstances, the 2020-21 Oregon FFA state officer team would have traveled thousands of miles around the state last fall, leading workshops and meeting with fellow “blue jackets” at more than 100 local chapters.

But 2020 was far from a normal year.

The coronavirus pandemic forced high schools to adopt remote learning, thwarting in-person gatherings. For FFA officers like Grace Adams and Jenna Wallace, that meant finding new ways to connect with their peers.

“I think it was hard at first,” Adams said. “We came to the realization that our team was going to have a unique experience that nobody else could relate to.”

Adams, of Dayton, was elected Oregon FFA president during last year’s virtual state convention in



Vice President Jenna Wallace

March, and Wallace, of Hermiston, was elected vice president. Nobody could have predicted then just how long the crisis would last, or how disruptive it would be.

As the first day of the 2021 convention began Tuesday — it was streamed online — Adams and Wallace reflected on their team’s unprecedented tenure, how they were able to adapt and ultimately prevail through difficult times.

“Instead, we thought more of how can we make this better? What can we do to move onward?” Adams said. “I think we’ve grown the most, because we faced a lot of struggles.”

Rather than hitting the road for their regular leadership tour, the six-member Oregon FFA state



Oregon FFA President Grace Adams

officer team was forced to hunker down for three months, living in the dorms at Oregon State University in Corvallis. Every day, they would arrive at Strand Agriculture Hall on campus to facilitate workshops with students online via Zoom.

The challenge, Adams said, was figuring out how to make the presentations engaging and interactive over a computer screen. They made use of video clips, chat features and breakout rooms, encouraging members who might already feel burned out with online classes to participate.

“Traditionally, in order to get them engaged, you’d do something hands-on or turn to a partner. We couldn’t really do that,” Adams said.

Adams joked the team has now perfected the art of the “awkward Zoom conversation.” In addition to daily workshops, the team also held four virtual leadership camps for chapter officers, with several hundred students registered for each.

While online meetings can be tedious, both Adams and Wallace said they were able to connect with more students than ever before.

“It was tough, to say the least,” Adams said. “Every day for three months, we got up and it was the same thing. It was 100% the students who made me feel like it was worth it.”

Wallace said the team was able to hone a new skill set that will only become more valuable in the future.

“I feel like we’ve just added a whole bunch more tools to our tool belt this year,” she said.

The 2020-21 Oregon FFA state officer team also included Raimey

Brown, of Baker, as secretary; Celilo Brun, of Hood River Valley, as treasurer; Alivia Robbins, of Burns, as reporter; and Colby Fairbairn, of Roseburg, as sentinel. They handed over the reins to a new team of officers that were elected at this year’s convention.

Adams has received a scholarship to attend Oklahoma State University, where she plans to pursue a degree in agriculture business and communications.

Wallace said she is waiting to hear back from the colleges where she’s applied, and will study political science.

Wallace said she was initially worried about her year as an FFA state officer, but the challenges helped them to grow as leaders.

“I think that a really awesome part of our year is that new family we now have,” she said. “The connections we’ve built is something I really value.”



ODA

Elise Higley owns and operates Oshala Farm near Grants Pass, Ore., with her husband, Jeff. Higley was one of 20 women accepted in the first Women’s Farm2Food business accelerator, established by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Foundation.

Business accelerator will help women farmers in Oregon and Washington

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

Women farmers in Oregon and Washington will receive training and expertise in delivering their products to market as part of a new business accelerator established by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Foundation.

The Women’s Farm2Food Accelerator began earlier this month in partnership with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Oregon State University Food Innovation Center and Union Kitchen, a food and beverage business incubator based in Washington, D.C.

Twenty women — 10 from Oregon, 10 from Washington — were accepted into the program. Courses began March 3, spanning four main sessions including product launch, marketing, lab testing and development, and pricing and pitching to buyers.

In its first year, the accelerator is focused on women who grow specialty crops for value-added ingredients. It is designed to support small farms with less than \$500,000 in annual gross sales and fewer than 20 employees.

“The women chosen come from all over the state, producing everything from herbal teas, liquors and pot pies,” said Alexis Taylor, ODA director. “I think this is an exciting opportunity where we as a state department of agriculture can help a group of Oregon women make their farm businesses more profitable and succeed.”

The year-long accelerator aims to connect women with other farmers and local

experts, along with hands-on experience in researching and one-on-one marketing assistance.

Applicants accepted into the 2020 program include:

- Alicia Leonhardt, Rochester, Wash.
- Angela Cordiano, Kitsap Farms, Hansville, Wash.
- Aurora Ashkar, Pleasant Valley Organics, Gresham, Ore.
- Caroline Barnes, La Grande, Ore.
- Camille Layton, Friday Harbor, Wash.
- Diane Fish, Poulsbo, Wash.
- Elise Higley, Oshala Farm, Grants Pass-Applegate, Ore.
- Elizabeth Miller, Minto Island Tea Co., Salem, Ore.
- Gabrielle Hall, North Star Farm, Lopez Island, Wash.
- Jennifer Skouras, Elysian Acres Family Farm, Jefferson, Ore.
- Kate Tossey, Kate’s Herbs, Olympia, Wash.
- Kristen Lyon, Jefferson Farm Kitchen, Jacksonville, Ore.
- Margaux Muller, Margalaxy, Portland.
- Maria Rice, Chow This!, Milwaukie, Ore.
- Meg Depew, Sequim Bee Farm, Port Angeles, Wash.
- Minid Miller, Corvallis, Ore.
- Monica Burnison, Twinkle Toes farm, Enumclaw, Wash.
- Reeba Daniel, Portland.
- Rose Smith, Stratton Brothers Cider, La Center, Wash.
- Shaelee Evans, Goodness Tea, Sequim, Wash.

Liberty Orchards, maker of Aplets & Cotlets candy, to close after 101 years

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**
Capital Press

CASHMERE, Wash. — After more than 100 years in business, Liberty Orchards Co., the Washington state maker of Aplets & Cotlets fruit candies, has announced it will permanently close June 1.

Company president Greg Taylor, 72, grandson of Liberty Orchards co-founder Armen Tertsgian, said the family business has been seeking a buyer for several years with no luck. Taylor, who’s run the company 43 years, said he’s “very, very ready” to retire and the younger generations of the family are not interested in keeping the operation going.

“It’s bittersweet, but definitely more sweet than bitter. Obviously, we’re disappointed it can’t continue, but it’s time for us all to move on,” Taylor told the Capital Press Friday. “We’re so appreciative of all those who have supported our company.”

Liberty Orchards will continue to seek a buyer for its assets.

Through the decades, the company has bought ingredients — concentrates, purees and freeze-dried fruit — from processors worldwide. Apple concentrates were mainly sourced from Washington state apples.

The company’s closure will impact around 55 full-time employees.

“We’re proud to have provided employment for thousands of families over the past more than 100 years,” said Taylor.



Capital Press File

Greg Taylor, president of Liberty Orchards of Cashmere, Wash. He has announced the company’s closure.

The closure will mean people can no longer buy Aplets & Cotlets candies after this June.

When the company released news of its impending closure, the community of Cashmere, Wash., near Wenatchee, was shaken.

“Liberty Orchards is part of Cashmere’s identity,” Cashmere’s mayor, Jim Fletcher, told Eater Seattle, a food publication.

In a statement, the Cashmere Chamber of Commerce said that Liberty Orchards has made Cashmere “a traveler destination.”

On Aplets & Cotlets’ Facebook announcement about closing, hundreds of people commented, many calling the upcoming closure “heartbreaking” and “sad.” Many shared memories about touring the factory.

“I have been enjoying Aplets & Cotlets for over 50 years. I truly hope someone buys the business and

continues the tradition,” said one comment.

Liberty Orchards was founded in 1920 by two Armenian immigrants, Mark Balaban and Armen Tertsgian.

The two started their venture by buying a small orchard, but times were tough, and they searched for ways to make use of surplus fruit. After research and development, they launched their first candy line, an apple and walnut confection based on the famous Near Eastern candy known as Turkish Delight.

This they called Aplets, the “confection of the fairies.”

A few years later, they created a second product, Cotlets, made with apricots and walnuts.

Over the decades, the company expanded its product line to include Fruit Delights, Dessert Delights, Fruitlets, Orchard Bars and other offerings.

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- June 3 – 4 to 5:30 p.m.

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