

## People &amp; Places

## Just add water buffaloes

By JULIA HOLLISTER  
For the Capital Press

TOMALES, Calif. — In 2014, Audrey Hitchcock and her husband, Craig Ramini, were living their dream of making mozzarella cheese from their small herd of water buffaloes. Their budding business was growing and life was good.

But their dream was shattered when Ramini was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Nine months later he was gone. "I reopened a month later at the request, and with the support, of our customers," Hitchcock said.

They didn't originally set out to raise water buffalo, she said.

"Craig always wanted to do something creative, contribute to society and to leave something for his family," Hitchcock said. "There were five things that were required for a happy career: to be an entrepreneur, to work outdoors, to be unique, to work with animals and to work with food."

Cheese seemed to be the common denominator. But Hitchcock and Ramini had to decide what kind of cheese to make.

Most cheese was not unique, and they were not interested in raising cows, goats or sheep.

They settled on a rare type of mozzarella cheese — the kind made in Italy using milk from water buffaloes.

They opened their unique



CUESA

**Audrey Hitchcock, owner and cheesemaker at the Ramini Mozzarella Ranch. She makes the cheese with water buffalo milk.**

dairy in 2009. "We began with 5 water buffalo, a shoe string budget and a big dream," she said. "By 2012 we were successfully selling out of all the cheese we could produce."

Water buffalo milk is richer in protein, higher in butterfat and lower in cholesterol than cow's milk, she said.

All the buffaloes on the farm have names, and each cow is milked once a day for six days. Those no longer needed are given to various sanctuaries with greener pastures.

"The margins for mozzarella are tough to meet, but I

am happy that I have water buffalo," she said. "I am happy I have a cheese that is hard to find and there is not much competition, and I am happy that I have found other ways to make money because mozzarella does not make money."

To supplement her income, she offers tours of the farm and does online fund-raisers.

"In addition to our Saturday tours where people can experience this relationship first hand and taste the cheese we also host private tours to culinary students who want to learn more about ranching and cheese making," she said.

Hitchcock said her business continues to grow.

In 2015, she had 30 animals and 6 restaurants as customers, 1 part-time employee and 1 wheelbarrow.

In 2021, she has 66 animals and 6 restaurants, 12 grocery stores and 6 farmers markets as customers, 6 part-time employees, an ATV, a truck and gives Saturday tours.

Other ideas are in the planning stage: expanding the visitor options and making other products such as yogurt, butter and ice cream.

"I don't see the business like most people in cheese do," she said. "I see the ani-

## Western Innovator

### AUDREY HITCHCOCK

**Owner:** Ramini Mozzarella Ranch

**Location:** Tomales, Calif.

**Education:** University of Massachusetts and the Architectural Association School of Architecture in England

**Occupation:** Cheesemaker, water buffalo rancher

**Website:** <https://ramini-mozzarella.com/>

**Quote:** "Our company is not just about mozzarella ... it's about the animal. Water buffalo are loving, healing, magnificent animals."

mal and experience as a market for us to make money and allow people to enjoy the buffalo as much as I do. They are humbling and healing creatures."

Hitchcock has some simple advice for anyone considering cheesemaking as a life's work: "Make sure it's a decision based on passion and lifestyle, not money."

## Demand has remained high at WSU creamery despite COVID

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Demand for the popular cheeses produced by Washington State University's creamery has remained strong during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the program has had to make adjustments to comply with new state regulations.

Among other requirements, that meant employees and customers have to wear masks and remain 6 feet apart, said John Haugen, creamery manager.

Production was initially reduced from eight to five batches of cheese per week, as the creamery learned how to spread jobs out and have less people in the building. A batch produces 800 cans of cheese, Haugen said.



John Haugen

That was "significant," Haugen said. "We ramped back up to seven per week as summer went on and we learned how to work within the guidelines laid out. We just got back to eight here in the

spring."

In the ice cream shop, Ferdinand's, complying with the regulations was "fairly doable," as things weren't too busy, Haugen said.

The creamery made 12,000 gallons of ice cream last year compared to 24,000 the year before. No large events such as football games, other sporting events, new student orientation, camps or tours were held.

During the off-season, January through August, the direct market-

ing department has a fairly small staff, but it was kept busy as people were ordering more online than in past years.

Direct marketing sales made up for reduced counter sales in Ferdinand's, Haugen said.

"We ended up with 41,000 hours of student labor compared to 46,000 the year before, mostly due to decrease in production for a few months," Haugen said.

The program had planned to ramp up production to 300,000 cans of cheese in 2020, but wound up making just over 250,000 cans, nearly as much as in 2019, Haugen said. They have reset the goal for 2021.

"The student employees have been resilient struggling through all this," Haugen said. "We are proud of their hard work and quality products they produce."



WSU

**Washington State University's ice cream shop is a popular stop among students and visitors to campus.**

## OSU receives federal grant to study hemp as animal feed



George Plaven/Capital Press

**Jersey cows at the Oregon State University Dairy Farm in Corvallis will be fed hemp biomass as part of a research study, and their meat and milk will then be tested for residual cannabinoids such as CBD or THC.**

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Hemp is already touted for its healthful and therapeutic benefits in humans.

Researchers at Oregon State University are now studying whether the plant could also be part of a nutritious diet for livestock.

The project, which received a nearly \$300,000 USDA grant in February, aims to determine whether "spent hemp biomass" can be fed to animals including lambs, chickens and dairy cows, and whether any residual cannabis compounds are present in the meat and milk.

Spent hemp biomass is the leafy byproduct left over after processing hemp for cannabidiol, or CBD, oil, which makes up the vast majority of Oregon hemp production.

The research team, led by Massimo Bionaz, has found this material is similar in both appearance and chemical composition to alfalfa hay, long considered the gold standard of animal forages, especially for dairy cows.

"Personally, when they told me

about hemp, I didn't even know what the plant looked like," said Bionaz, an associate professor of dairy nutrigenomics at OSU. "The more we analyzed, we were really amazed by the nutritive value."

Rich in protein, fiber and minerals, hemp biomass appears to have promise as a cheaper alternative animal feed. It could also provide hemp farmers with an added revenue stream, turning what was a waste product into a cash crop.

But therein lies the challenge, Bionaz said — hemp is not currently approved for animal feed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. He hopes their research will generate the data needed for the FDA to take that next step.

"The more I study the plant, the more I see data, I get more enthused about it," Bionaz said.

The idea for the study traces back to 2019, when OSU first established the Global Hemp Innovation Center.

Jay Noller, the center director, approached Serkan Ates, an assistant professor specializing in sustainable pasture management, to discuss

whether processed hemp byproducts could be fed to animals. Ates said he was intrigued, and partnered with Bionaz to examine the product's nutritional content.

What they found was hemp biomass has roughly the same protein content as alfalfa, and roughly the same fiber content as barley. In some attributes, Ates said hemp was nutritionally superior to the traditional feeds.

"There was this great potential," Ates said. "Many of the livestock farmers, they are interested in some sort of cheaper feed source."

With those traits in mind, the team worked up several proposals and received more than 10 tons of donated biomass from two Oregon-based extractors.

Last year, Ates fed the material to lambs for two months. Their diets included a mix of 10% and 20% hemp, along with a control group.

One question, Ates said, was whether the animals would even eat hemp. Not only did they eat it, but he said the group that was fed 10% hemp ate more than any other group.

## 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).

### TUESDAY-FRIDAY APRIL 6-9

**Idaho FFA State Convention (online):** This year's convention will be online. It is a four-day celebration of members' leadership, personal growth and career success. Details will be available online at [www.idahoffa.org/](http://www.idahoffa.org/)

**SATURDAY APRIL 10  
101st Annual California Ram Sale:** 9 a.m., 4500 S. Laspina St.,

Tulare, Calif. The California Wool Growers Association will host the 101st Annual California Ram Sale on Saturday, April 10, at the International Agri-Center in Tulare, Calif. Ram sale information, including the sale catalog, schedule, lodging information and directions are available on the CWGA website at [www.californiawoolgrowers.org](http://www.californiawoolgrowers.org). To request a Ram Sale Catalog, contact the CWGA office at 916-444-8122 or [info@woolgrowers.org](mailto:info@woolgrowers.org)

**FRIDAY, APRIL 16  
AgForestry Leadership Class  
41 Graduation:** 5 p.m. Red Lion Hotel, Wenatchee, Wash. Cele-

brate the graduation of AgForestry Leadership Class 41. This celebration was rescheduled from its original April 10 date. Table sponsorships are available. Cost: \$60/adults, \$20/child. Website: <http://agforestry.org/graduation-class-41/>

### FRIDAY-SUNDAY APRIL 23-25

**Oregon Ag Fest (drive-thru):** 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Clackamas County Event Center, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. Join us for the Drive Thru Ag Fest to experience the incredible world of Oregon agriculture, in a fun-filled, drive thru environment, and leave our event with

an "Ag-venture" kit filled with activities, seedlings and more to continue the fun at home. The three-day event, aimed to help families better understand where their food, fiber and flora come from, is a unique learning experience, where drive-by exhibits make learning about Oregon's vast agricultural industry educational and entertaining. Tickets are \$22 per vehicle and are available online at <https://orag-fest.com/>

**FRIDAY-SUNDAY  
MAY 14-16  
California FFA's 93rd State Leadership Conference (online):**

This year California FFA members from all corners of the state will have access to the premier leadership event offered by our association as it will be delivered through a multi-faceted online platform. The conference will be three days jam packed with learning, growth and inspiration. Website: [www.cal-agg.org](http://www.cal-agg.org)

### MONDAY-THURSDAY MAY 24-27

**Natural Products Expo West (online):** Virtual presentations and an online trade show focusing on natural products and foods. Website: [www.expowest.com/](http://www.expowest.com/)

Established 1928

### Capital Press Managers

Joe Beach ..... Editor & Publisher  
Anne Long ..... Advertising Manager  
Carl Sampson ..... Managing Editor  
Jessica Boone ..... Production Manager  
Samantha McLaren ..... Circulation Manager

Entire contents copyright © 2021  
EO Media Group  
dba Capital Press

An independent newspaper  
published every Friday.

Capital Press (ISSN 0740-3704) is  
published weekly by EO Media Group,  
2870 Broadway NE, Salem OR 97303.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, OR,  
and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to  
Capital Press, P.O. Box 2048 Salem, OR  
97308-2048.

### To Reach Us

Circulation ..... 800-781-3214  
Email ..... [Circulation@capitalpress.com](mailto:Circulation@capitalpress.com)  
Main line ..... 503-364-4431

### News Staff

#### Idaho

Carol Ryan Dumas ..... 208-860-3898

#### Boise

Brad Carlson ..... 208-914-8264

#### Western Washington

Don Jenkins ..... 360-722-6975

#### Eastern Washington

Matthew Weaver ..... 509-688-9923

#### Oregon

George Plaven ..... 406-560-1655  
Mateusz Perkowski ..... 800-882-6789  
Sierra Dawn McClain ..... 503-506-8011

#### Designer

Randy Wriughthouse ..... 800-882-6789

### To Place Classified Ads

Telephone (toll free) ..... 800-882-6789  
Online ..... [CapitalPress.com/classifieds](http://CapitalPress.com/classifieds)

### Subscriptions

Mail rates paid in advance  
Easy Pay U.S. \$4/month  
(direct withdrawal from bank  
or credit card account)

1 year U.S. .... \$55  
2 years U.S. .... \$100  
1 year Canada ..... \$275  
1 year other countries ..... call for quote  
1 year Internet only ..... \$49.99  
1 year 4-H, FFA students/teachers ..... \$30  
9 months 4-H, FFA students/teachers ..... \$25

Visa and Mastercard accepted

### To get information published

#### Mailing address:

Capital Press  
P.O. Box 2048  
Salem, OR 97308-2048

**News:** Contact the main office  
or news staff member closest to you,  
send the information to  
[newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com)  
or mail it to "Newsroom," c/o Capital Press.  
Include a contact telephone number.

**Letters to the Editor:** Send your  
comments on agriculture-related public  
issues to [opinions@capitalpress.com](mailto:opinions@capitalpress.com), or  
mail your letter to "Opinion," c/o Capital  
Press. Letters should be limited to  
300 words. Deadline: Noon Monday.

### Capital Press ag media

CapitalPress.com  
FarmSeller.com  
MarketPlace.capitalpress.com  
[facebook.com/CapitalPress](https://facebook.com/CapitalPress)  
[facebook.com/FarmSeller](https://facebook.com/FarmSeller)  
[twitter.com/CapitalPress](https://twitter.com/CapitalPress)  
[youtube.com/CapitalPressvideo](https://youtube.com/CapitalPressvideo)

### Index

Markets ..... 12  
Opinion ..... 6

## CORRECTION

An article in the March 19 edition of the Capital Press included an incorrect figure for the increased cost of shipping per container for agricultural goods heading for Shibushi, Japan. The cost is \$1,500, or a 50% increase since December. The Capital Press regrets the error.

### Correction policy

Accuracy is important to Capital Press  
staff and to our readers.

If you see a misstatement, omission or  
factual error in a headline, story or photo  
caption, please call the Capital Press news  
department at 503-364-4431, or send  
email to [newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com).

We want to publish corrections  
to set the record straight.