

# Boosting Kentucky bluegrass seed yields

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Xin Xin hopes to help Kentucky bluegrass farmers increase seed yields through her groundbreaking genetic research.

Xin, a Chinese Ph.D. student at Washington State University, is studying how Kentucky bluegrass genes respond to vernalization, the process of boosting flower development.

Warmer winters can delay or reduce flowering, which decreases the production of seeds and their quality.

Xin works with professor Michael Neff in WSU's grass breeding program. The Washington Turfgrass Seed Commission funds their research.

Xin's work led to a collaboration with USDA Agricultural Research Service geneticist Shaun Bushman, who sequenced the Kentucky bluegrass genome. Bushman's information is a "game changer" for WSU's breeding program, Neff said.

"If (Xin's) work does not have an immediate impact on yield, the genetic information she is learning is likely to improve our breeding efforts," Neff said.

Xin and other researchers are studying plant growth regulators as a potential solution for the lack of vernalization. They want to find the best application rates and timing.

## 'Obsessed' with biology

Xin grew up in China, with little farm experience. Her "obsession" with biology in high school led her to



**Xin Xin, a Washington State University Ph.D. student, works on the molecular side to improve Kentucky bluegrass vernalization for farmers.**



**Washington State University Ph.D. student Xin Xin studies vernalization in the genetics of Kentucky bluegrass under professor Michael Neff, right.**

choose agriculture as a major in college. Her undergraduate research project was the tissue culture of a Chinese herbal medicine.

"Working at our grass farm is my first field experience, and surprisingly I think I adapted to it well," Xin said. "I am lucky to have a great team working with

me and teaching me all the techniques."

Xin first became aware of WSU when USDA ARS plant pathologist Xianming Chen spoke to her college class. A cousin in Seattle also recommended WSU to her.

She received a four-year scholarship from the Chinese Scholar Council. The coun-

cil works with universities worldwide to provide opportunities for Chinese students who are interested in studying abroad. Students must first receive the conditional offers from the overseas universities and then qualify to apply for the council scholarship.

"The selection was competitive and I appreciate this opportunity," Xin said.

## 'Revolutionary' research

"A lot of the research she's working on is revolutionary, in that it's never been done before in this species," said Jonathan Schnorr, a fellow Ph.D. candidate.

Xin hopes to continue working in the grass industry, although she hasn't decided whether she'll return to China or remain in the U.S.



**Western Innovator**

**XIN XIN**  
**Age:** 26  
**Title:** Ph.D. student, Washington State University, Pullman  
**Hometown:** Henan province, China  
**Education:** Master of science degree, Northwest A&F University, China  
**Family:** Married

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# Oregon Ag Fest returns as drive-thru

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**  
Capital Press

SALEM, Ore. — Oregon Ag Fest will resume its annual three-day educational festival this spring, but with a twist.

Because of COVID-19, the festival will have a drive-thru format.

The event will kick off Friday, April 23, and continue through Sunday, April 25, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. The festival this year will take place at the Clackamas County Fairgrounds, 694 NE Fourth Ave. in Canby, where guests can drive through various educational farm exhibits.

The hosts say they're thrilled to renew the event, which was canceled last year for the first time in 33 years due to the pandemic.

"It was such a bummer to cancel last year," said Michele Ruby, a dairy farmer and the executive director of Oregon Ag Fest. "I think people are excited we're bringing it back, even with it being the first-ever drive-thru Ag Fest. We're already getting super positive feedback."



Courtesy of Michele Ruby/Oregon Ag Fest  
**Oregon Ag Fest, which was canceled last year due to COVID-19, has announced it will resume its annual three-day educational festival, this time in a drive-thru format. The event will be April 23-25.**

In 2019, the event drew about 20,000 people.

Oregon Ag Fest is a nonprofit run by Oregon farmers, farm equipment manufacturers, feed store owners and others connected to agriculture. The purpose of Ag Fest is to highlight the importance of agriculture,

teaching kids and families about where their food and fiber come from.

"Our goal is to help kids gain a better understanding of the importance of agriculture to Oregon's rural landscape, and to emphasize that most food starts on a farm somewhere," said Macey Wessels, Oregon Ag Fest chair, who also represents Boshart Trucking and Whitehead Farms.

Tickets — \$22 per car — are already selling online and at about a dozen Wilco stores across the Willamette Valley.

The event planners encourage people to buy tickets online in advance at [www.orafest.org](http://www.orafest.org) or at their local Wilco store because space is limited.

Ruby said the drive-thru version of the event will look different and be a little less hands-on than previous years. Nevertheless, Ruby said she believes it will be a fun, educational activity for kids and families.

This year, visitors can see farm animals, equipment, plants and a variety of special exhibits, including

a reforestation exhibit, from the comfort of their car.

The festival will have a series of animal-related activities on rotation throughout the day, including llamas, sheep shearing demonstrations and herding dogs at work.

Another special addition this year is that kids will leave the event with an "Ag-venture" kit filled with seedlings to plant, activity booklets to fill out, models to build and special farm treats.

The festival will also offer drive-thru food options, including Oregon Dairy Women's ice cream and grilled Tillamook cheddar cheese sandwiches. Proceeds from concession sales will go toward college scholarships for agricultural students, the Oregon Dairy Princess Ambassador Program and similar programming.

2021's Ag Fest will feature products and demonstrations from more than 20 farms and farm partners.

Farmers and others in the agricultural industry interested in participating in 2022's Ag Fest can contact the nonprofit in advance at [info@orafest.com](mailto:info@orafest.com) or 503-508-2868.

# GS3 Quality Seed purchases KB Seed Solutions

By **MITCH LIES**  
For the Capital Press



**Garth Mulkey**

according to Garth Mulkey, who founded the company with his wife, Susan, in 2009, and transformed

it into one of the biggest cover crop seed providers on the West Coast.

Mulkey added that GS3 has worked closely with Nick Bowers and Wayne

Kizer, owners of KB Seed Solutions, for the past 10 years. KB Seed for many years marketed one of GS3's products, NitroRadish, to the more than 150 dealers it formerly worked with in the Midwest. Bowers and Kizer will continue to consult with GS3 under the acquisition agreement.

Asked why he and Kizer decided to sell, Bowers said: "Wayne and I were just both getting to places in our lives where we were starting to

think about retiring, and this opportunity came up to kind of pass the baton, and it was a good fit for us.

"Wayne and I have worked very closely with Garth over 10 years," Bowers said. "He knows our customers and has been involved in the cover crop industry. We wanted to see KB Seed Solutions move forward with the same integrity we put into promoting covers."

Bowers will continue

operating Tydan Farms with his wife, Donna, while Kizer will continue operating Kizer & Son. Kizer produces annual ryegrass, orchardgrass, wheat and meadowfoam, among other crops.

Tydan Farms, a fourth-generation family farm, grows annual ryegrass, meadowfoam and clovers. The farms plan to continue to grow cover crop seeds, but now under contract with GS3 Quality Seed.

## 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).

### 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://orafest.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.calaged.org](http://www.calaged.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/)

### WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY JUNE 9-11

**World Pork Expo:** Iowa State Fairgrounds, Des Moines. The

world's largest pork industry-specified trade show brings together pork producers and industry professionals from around the world for three days of education, innovation and networking. Website: <https://worldpork.org/>

### THURSDAY-SATURDAY JUNE 24-26

**United Fresh Convention and Expo (in person and online):** Los Angeles Convention Center. Whether online or in person, United Fresh is your partner connecting the global fresh produce industry. Sponsored by the United

Fresh Produce Association and the Fresh Produce and Floral Council. Website: <https://www.unitedfresh.org/united-fresh-convention-expo-2021/#>

### AUG. 20-29

**Western Idaho Fair:** Expo Idaho, 5610 Glenwood St., Boise. Check back later for more information. Website: [www.idahofair.com](http://www.idahofair.com)

### SEPT. 3-11

**Eastern Idaho State Fair:** Eastern Idaho Fairgrounds, 97 Park St., Blackfoot, Idaho. The daily schedule and entertainment line-up will be published in June. Website: <https://funatthefair.com/>