

People & Places

Brothers' invention solves dad's irrigation irritation

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

BOW, Wash. — Skagit Valley potato grower Tim Wallace asked his sons to fix a problem. David and Connor did and started a company to fix the same problem for other farmers.

The trouble is that irrigation reels break down and stop retracting the sprinkler. One spot gets watered over and over until someone comes along and turns off the pump. This can go on for hours, or all night.

Water and fuel are wasted. The overwatered ground gets so compacted that harvesting potatoes means digging up dirt, too.

"I think David got sick of listening to me complain about that," Tim Wallace said.

He had the right sons to gripe to, apparently.

David Wallace, 33, has a doctorate in solid state chemistry from Johns Hopkins University. Connor Wallace, 30, has a degree in physics from Reed College. Together, they invented FarmHQ.

The high-tech device attaches to the irrigation reel and monitors rotating magnets. If the magnets stop turning, the reel has stopped retracting. The FarmHQ then signals its companion device at the pump to shut off the water.

Meanwhile, the farmer gets a text message, alerting him that irrigation has stopped. An advantage is that farmers don't wake up in the morning to a super-soaked half acre.

"I don't miss that at all," Tim Wallace said.

A company is born

To develop and sell their product, the Wallace brothers formed CODA Farm Technologies, a name that came from combining Con-



David Wallace, right, and his brother, Connor Wallace, talk about their invention, FarmHQ, lower left, at the family's potato farm in Skagit County, Wash.

nor and David.

Dan Oschir, a computer programmer and former math teacher, and Gabe Martin, who has a master's degree in robotics from the Colorado School of Mines, are on the development team, too.

Several farmers in the Skagit Valley, where irrigation reels are common, tried FarmHQ last year. The pandemic has slowed marketing and production this year — computer chips are in short supply.

The company hopes to go full bore next year, and David Wallace knows where he wants to go.

"I want our device on every reel in the United States," he said.

The company named its product FarmHQ, indicating that it will do more than monitor the retracting reel. Farms can track the sprinkler's progress and flow rate, and compile season-long irrigation records.

Skagit Valley vegetable seed grower Sean Galbreath



Connor Wallace pulls out an irrigation hose as his brother, David Wallace, checks the device they invented to monitor the reel at the family's farm in Skagit County, Wash.

was one of the farmers who bought units in 2020.

Because workers were able to track the irrigation remotely, they didn't waste time returning to a field early and waiting for the sprinkler to retract, he said. "It saved us a ton of time," he said.

In one case, the reel broke down, and the device saved red kale seed from being soaked and ruined. "We figured it paid for itself right there in one shot," Galbreath said.



Western Innovator

CODA FARM TECHNOLOGIES

David Wallace

Occupation: Inventor, co-founder of CODA Farm Technologies

Age: 33

Education: Doctorate, Johns Hopkins University; bachelor's degree, Whitman College

Connor Wallace

Occupation: Inventor, co-founder of CODA Farm Technologies

Age: 30

Education: Bachelor's degree in physics, Reed College

"I was constantly feeling the pull back," he said. "Almost immediately my dad brought this problem to me."

After graduating from Reed College, Connor worked as a software engineer for companies in Portland and San Francisco. He said the farm project sounded cool and more fun, so he came home to work with his brother.

"It's really exciting to build a company with him," Connor Wallace said. "It feels like we've done so much already. I feel pretty confident about this year."

Their father endorses FarmHQ.

"It works really well," Tim Wallace said. "It's one of the best improvements we've done on the farm in years."

Back on the farm

The Wallace family farm traces its origins back more than 100 years to Irish immigrants.

David and Connor's grandfather George and great-uncle Dick combined their initials in the 1950s and founded G&D Wallace, also known as Wallace Farms.

After graduating from Johns Hopkins, David Wallace worked as a data scientist for Amazon in Seattle. He returned to the farm in 2019.

County's tree farmers of the year transform forest

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

OAKLAND, Ore. — A poison oak and blackberry infested forest has been transformed into a timbered park of Douglas fir, oak and madrone trees through the efforts of Richard and Donna Rawson.

The Rawsons were recently honored as the Douglas County Small Woodlands Association's 2020 Tree Farmers of the Year, for their stewardship work on their 66-acre property in the Metz Hill area north of Oakland.

The couple purchased the land in 1981 and through the years, either by hiring out the work or doing it themselves, have slowly renovated the acreage.

"It's an entirely different place than what it was 40 years ago," Richard Rawson said. "I've gotten more than my money's worth from the enjoyment of working on this land. It's been worth it. It's in better shape than when we bought it."



Richard and Donna Rawson after receiving the plaque that honors them as the Douglas County Small Woodlands Association's 2020 Tree Farmers of the Year. Roy Brogden, left, president of the association, made the presentation.

Rawson led a tour of the property on May 1 for members of the small woodlands association.

The land was heavily logged in 1949 with the logs milled on site into railroad ties. Sawdust was scattered around the property and because the land was left to regenerate on its own, poi-

son oak and blackberries had a strong presence along with a mixture of young trees.

But that brush along with Scotch broom, hawthorn and thistle have been cut down and sprayed, ponds were developed for wildlife and for use in case of wildfire, and roads were constructed around the property for work

and access in case of fire.

Several piles of woody debris were left to provide habitat for smaller wildlife.

In 1992 and 1994, some trees in the forest were thinned, but there was no major logging until an ice storm, drought and a major snow storm in the past five years impacted the trees. Following those events, the Rawsons had professional help in making decisions since they had begun working with Barnes & Associates, a Roseburg-based forestry consulting business, in 2016 to develop a land management plan.

"I've never regretted investing in consulting foresters," Rawson said. "I wish I had earlier."

Roy Brogden, president of the Douglas County Small Woodlands Association, explained that in selecting a Tree Farmer of the Year, such factors as harvesting, thinning, vegetation control and fire prevention management are considered. He complimented the Rawsons on how they have dealt with those

factors on their property.

"They've done what is best for the land and the forest," Brogden said.

Richard Rawson has been a board member for the small woodlands association for the past three years and has helped the association organize Fire Season Preparedness workshops and other field tours. The mission of the association, which has 200 members, is to assist small landowners in managing their resources.

Rawson completed the Oregon State University Extension Master Woodland Manager volunteer program training in 2019. His forest is also certified by the American Tree Farm System.

Rawson said his property has produced approximately 260,000 board-feet of timber, 125 cords of firewood of both Douglas fir and oak, and many family Christmas trees.

"The work out here helps keep me healthy," he said. Both Richard and Donna are now 75. "It has satisfied my inner need for nature. I'm pleased with what I see now."

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

THURSDAY-SATURDAY MAY 13-15

Washington FFA Convention (virtual): The convention will maintain its traditional agenda, with one session streamed on Thursday and Friday evenings and two on Saturday. The new state officers will be announced Saturday evening. Website: www.washingtonffa.org/91st-convention

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

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY MAY 18-19

Oregon Board of Agriculture Meeting (virtual): The Oregon State Board of Agriculture will hold its quarterly meeting on May 18-19 by video/conference call. To attend you must join the meeting remotely. Call in details are available on each agenda. The meeting agendas and pre-meeting materials are available on the State Board of Agriculture webpage, <https://bit.ly/3xkoNDX>. Resolutions under

WEDNESDAY MAY 19

Manure Matters — Keeping Poop Out of the Water (virtual): 6-7:30 p.m. Have you ever wondered what effect your critters' poop is having on our watersheds? Join Clark Conservation District to learn about the monitoring Clark County does on bacteria in our waterways. Experts Brent Davis and Eric Lambert from Clark County will present on county regulations and cover what you can be doing to keep our local watersheds

free of your livestock and horse manure. This is the third of a three-part webinar series, Manure Matters. Contact: Sam Frundle, sfrundle@clarkcd.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/

WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY JUNE 9-11

World Pork Expo: Iowa State Fairgrounds, Des Moines. The world's largest pork industry-specific 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/#>

TUESDAY-THURSDAY AUG. 10-12

2021 Cattle Industry Convention & Trade Show: Gaylord Opryland Resort, Nashville, Tenn. The convention will include educational seminars, exhibits and networking. Website: <http://convention.ncba.org>



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To Reach Us

Circulation 800-781-3214
Email 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
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