

People & Places

Shedding light on mushrooms

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

MOSS LANDING, Calif. — Far West Fungi production manager Kyle Garrone wants to clear up a couple of misconceptions the public has about exotic mushrooms.

First, they do not grow on a manure-based substrate.

Second, they do not grow in total darkness.

The mushrooms Garrone and his crew produce grow on a wood-based substrate and require some light.

“The mushrooms we grow are primary decomposers that grow on logs and require a small amount of light compared to the compost decomposers that need darkness,” he said.

Far West Fungi, founded by the Garrone family 35 years ago, grows more than 12 varieties — Shiitake; Pink, Yellow and Blue Tree Oyster; King Trumpet; Lion’s Mane; Wood-dear; Pioppini; Cinnamon Cap; and Reishi mushrooms.

The family grows the crop in 80,000 square feet of indoor mushroom houses on 8 acres near Moss Landing in California’s Monterey County.

The growing process is complicated.

The mushrooms are wood decomposers, so the farm has large piles of hardwood sawdust that is mixed with other ingredients such as rice bran, milo and small amounts of calcium. This is mixed with water and the mixture is put in special bags.

The bags are put on carts and placed into an autoclave, where it is cooked at 250 degrees to sterilize the growing medium. The bags are then moved to a clean room where the substrate is inoculated with mycelium of the specific species of mushroom. Mycelium is the vegetative part of a fungus.

Garrone said the inoculated substrate is placed in “grow rooms”



Far West Fungi

Kyle Garrone, production manager at Far West Fungi in Moss Landing, Calif., says the 35-year-old company sells its mushrooms at farmers markets around the state.

where the mycelium will spread through the medium. When the mycelium has fully colonized the substrate, the bags are moved to “fruiting” rooms where they are opened so that mushrooms can grow and later be harvested.

The process takes 3-12 weeks for most varieties, but some medicinal varieties — particularly Reishi — take 6 months or longer to incubate.

Many of the medicinal mushroom varieties have been around a long time. For thousands of years they have been used to treat health conditions and symptoms, from altitude

sickness and high cholesterol to colds and flus.

Far West Fungi also sells “Mini Farms” designed to be grown indoors. A “farm” can produce about 1 1/2 pounds of mushrooms.

California is the second largest mushroom-producing state after Pennsylvania. There is an increased interest in mushroom production so more farms are popping up.

Each variety of mushroom grows on different materials and has different needs. They also vary greatly in their taste and texture.

“The most popular mushroom we



Western Innovator

KYLE GARRONE

Age: 36.

Occupation: Production Manager, Far West Fungi.

Residence: Moss Landing, Calif.

Personal quote: “Our aim is to produce high-quality, organic, exotic mushrooms for our consumers.”

grow is shiitake,” he said. “The hardest to grow is maitake.”

The rarest mushrooms are the foraged varieties like morel, porcini and truffles, he said.

The biggest challenge in the growth process is keeping the environmental and sterilized conditions consistent.

Foreign competition is a worry, too. Garrone said that in spite of the popularity and growth of California mushroom farms, competing with mushroom substrate imported from China is a big problem. The product is completely assembled in China, meaning the substrate and mycelium is all Chinese, but they are shipped to the U.S., where they are fruited and labeled a product of the U.S.

Despite the China situation, Garrone says the market is, well, mushrooming.

“We’re glad there is a growing interest in mushroom production,” he said. “It is exciting to see how many more people are eating mushrooms and getting involved in the process.”

Deadly rabbit disease spreads to wild

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

CHRISTMAS VALLEY, Ore. — A wild black-tailed jackrabbit collected near Christmas Valley, Ore., has tested positive for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2, or RHDV2, raising concern among state wildlife officials trying to curb the disease’s spread.

While not harmful to humans, RHDV2 is highly contagious and deadly to rabbits and hares. It can spread through contact with other infected animals or contaminated food and water, causing sudden death.

The jackrabbit was one of several found dead in the area of south-central Oregon with signs of the disease, according to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

ODFW collected the animal on May 20, sending it to



Washington State Dept. of Agriculture

The USDA Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory last week confirmed rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 in a wild black-tailed jackrabbit collected near Christmas Valley, Ore.

the USDA Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory for testing. Results came back positive for the disease last week.

RHDV2 was also confirmed March 14 in eight feral domestic rabbits in the Portland metro area.

ODFW says it will continue to collect and sample rabbits throughout the state to keep the disease from spreading to other wild rabbit populations. The public should also report rabbit mortalities to help the agency track the virus.

Colin Gillin, ODFW state wildlife veterinarian, said hunters should take extra precautions handling rabbits, especially if they have pet or domestic rabbits at home.

“If you have pet rabbits, do not handle dead wild rabbits in the field and then go home and handle your own pet or domestic rabbits as you may spread the disease,” Gillin said. “Wear nitrile gloves when handling, and then shower and wash clothes before getting near any other rabbits.”

Disease symptoms may include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, lack of coordination, excitement or nervousness, difficulty breathing, congested membranes around the eyes or bloody, frothy nasal discharge at death.

There is no licensed vaccine for the disease in the U.S., though there are two vaccines licensed by the

European Union, Eravac and Filavac, which may be imported under a special USDA permit in states with confirmed cases.

A veterinarian can request to use the unlicensed vaccines only for individually identified rabbits, and only with permission from the state veterinarian. The USDA says it has limited information about the EU vaccines, and no supporting data for recommended usage.

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease was also discovered in two wild jackrabbits in Ada County, Idaho, earlier this year. The disease was previously confirmed in a New Mexico rabbit in March 2020, and has since been spreading in other states including Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada and Texas.

To report dead rabbits in Oregon, call 1-800-347-7028 or visit www.oda.direct/RHD.

Koenig steps in as interim CAHNRS dean at WSU

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Rich Koenig will take over as interim dean of Washington State University’s College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences on July 1.

He replaces Andre-Denis Wright, who resigned effective June 30 to be the new provost of the Norman campus for the University of Oklahoma. Wright joined WSU as CAHNRS dean in 2018.

Koenig said Wright’s exit was “a bit of a surprise.”

It was a whirlwind for the long-time WSU soil researcher. “I went from not even thinking about this to being



Rich Koenig

named in the position in probably two weeks,” he said. “It happened very quickly.” Koenig has held various leadership positions throughout the college, including interim horticulture department chairman and associate dean and director of WSU Extension. He has also served as chairman of the department of crop and soil sciences several times.

WSU will begin the search for a new dean as soon as possible in the fall, Koenig said. A new dean is slated to be in

the position by June 30, 2022.

Will Koenig apply for the job?

“At this point, I’ll say I don’t know,” he said. “I’m going to see how the next few months go in this interim role.”

Koenig has bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and earned his Ph.D. in soil science at WSU in 1993. He joined WSU in 2003.

Drew Lyon is filling in for Koenig as interim chairman of the crop and soil science department, beginning June 16. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic is a challenging time but also an opportunity for WSU and

CAHNRS, Koenig said.

“When we all went out, it was really abrupt — we were all sent home and there was really no time to adjust,” he said. “So now we have a bit of an opportunity to plan for the return to work. We’re all looking forward to it, I think.”

Koenig expects that return to be relatively quick once the state reopens.

The university will require proof of COVID-19 vaccination for all students engaging in activities at a WSU campus or location. Exemptions will be allowed for medical, religious or personal reasons.

The college is reaching out to returning and incoming undergraduate students.

“We’re looking forward to their return, we’re planning to be open and face-to-face to the maximum extent possible,” Koenig said. “We’re really excited. We’ve all missed the students here in Pullman and the other campus locations.”

The demolition of Johnson Hall and the construction of a new USDA Agricultural Research Service building will occur in the next year during Koenig’s interim term.

“That’s big, because it impacts major departments within the college and major USDA ARS units that touch every aspect of agriculture in the state,” Koenig said.

CALENDAR

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

THROUGH SATURDAY JUNE 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 Pro-

MONDAY-TUESDAY JUNE 28-29

Idaho Cattle Association Summer Round-Up: Stagecoach Inn, Salmon, Idaho. The conference will include updates from the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, Idaho Beef Council, Idaho Department of Agriculture and Idaho Departments

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY JUNE 30-JULY 1

Western Governors’ Association 2021 Annual Meeting (virtual): The event will feature governors in roundtable discussions on topics such as energy response, public lands challenges, shared

stewardship, infrastructure and workforce. Website: www.westgov.org

WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY JUNE 30-JULY 4

St. Paul Rodeo: 7:30 p.m. nightly, with a 1:30 p.m. matinee Sunday at the St. Paul, Ore., rodeo grounds. Tickets are \$16 to \$26, not including a convenience fee, and can be purchased online at StPaulRodeo.com. For more information, visit the

rodeo’s website or call 800-237-5920. Covid guidelines will be in place during the rodeo. Tickets purchased earlier in the year will be honored.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY JULY 9-10

100th Annual Idaho Ram Sale: Gooding County Fairgrounds, Gooding, Idaho. Lamb viewing and a lamb barbecue dinner will start at 6 p.m. July 9. The sale begins at 10:30 a.m. July 10. Website: www.idahowoolgrowers.org



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