People & Places

Researcher brings kiwi production to Oregon

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Bernadine Strik with a cluster of kiwiberries at her trial vineyard in Aurora, Ore. The fruit will be ready for harvest in September or October.

AURORA, Ore. — Bernadine Strik had a dream. It was 1990, and she was working as a professor and berry crop researcher at Oregon State University, where she still works today.

Her dream was to add another berry choice for growers in the Pacific Northwest. Today, she's watching that dream unfold. And the berry of choice? Kiwis.

Kiwifruit, a type of berry, is a climbing vine native to Asia. The most common kiwifruit species is *Actinidia deliciosa*, or the "Hayward" cultivar, an egg-sized fruit with brown, fuzzy skin and green flesh. A smaller, olive-sized variety is called the *Actinidia arguta*, or "kiwiberry." Its interior looks like a miniature Hayward, but its exterior is smooth and often blush-colored.

Strik planted both varieties in the 1990s. The kiwiberry was more successful.

"It's been really exciting," said Strik. "It's an amazing fruit."

She ducked under a canopy of trellises to escape the midday sun. Strik was standing in her trial vineyard at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora.

Growing kiwis in Oregon has proved to be a steep learning curve, said Strik. For years, she has experimented with cultivars, irrigation methods, storage and pruning techniques.

The Hayward variety comes from Southeast Asia, and California leads in U.S. production, so it's been challenging to grow the variety through Oregon's winter cold snaps.

Kiwiberries, which originate from colder Northeast Asia, have fared better through frost. Strik has been perfecting her technique of overhead irrigation for frost protection.

Despite challenges, Strik said the industry is picking up momentum, and she sees "huge potential" for expansion if growers set up contracts in advance.

It can cost more than $30,000 per acre in cumulative establishment costs to break into the industry, but growers who have are "tasting the fruits" of their labors.

A Hayward kiwifruit, left, next to a Ananasnaya kiwiberry, right.

Oregon only has about 25 acres of Haywards but is now the nation's No. 1 producer of kiwiberries, with about 250 acres.

Kiwiberries can be eaten in their entirety. Their flavor is sweet and strong, with floral notes.

The main downside is, in contrast to Haywards, which store well for six months, kiwiberries are seasonal. They are harvested September through October and last 4 to 8 weeks.

The industry is already worth at least $2 million in Oregon.

Mark Hurst, co-owner of Hurst Berry Farm and managing director of HBF International in McMinnville, Ore., said he gets a much better return on kiwiberries than blueberries.

He was first exposed to Strik's experimental kiwiberries in the early 1990s, and recalls thinking: "This is a pretty awesome piece of fruit."

Hurst planted vines on his own property and contracted with several other growers.

HBF International continues to expand its kiwiberry operation. Hurst started with a variety called "Ananasnaya." To extend the season, Hurst recently added about 65 acres of a new variety with longer shelf life, called "Hortgem Tahi," licensed from New Zealand.

Hurst said he couldn't have done it without Strik.

"She's awesome," he said. "She did so much to get this industry going."

Strik plans to retire Dec. 31, but growers say the innovations she's left are just the beginning of Oregon's kiwi industry.

Western Innovator

BERNADINE STRIK

Age: 59

Hometown: Born in Holland, raised in Australia and Canada, career and family in Oregon

Education: B.S. in Botany, University of Victoria, B.C., Canada, 1983; Ph.D. in Horticulture, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, 1987

Occupation: Professor and North Willamette Research and Extension Center berry crop research leader

Dairy farmer headed to Olympics

By MIA RYDER-MARKS
Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — On June 21, during one of the hottest days in Eugene this year, Elle Purrier St. Pierre, a dairy farmer from Vermont, set her own record.

Clad in spandex and yellow reflective sunglasses, the 26-year-old swept across the finish line ahead of her competitors, finishing first in the 1,500-meter run, with an Olympic-trial record time of 3 minutes, 58.03 seconds — surpassing the previous record set by Mary Decker Slaney over three decades ago.

"She's in a league of her own in this race and she is going to become an Olympian," said one of the event's moderators in sync with the cheering crowd as she finished.

In a month, Purrier St. Pierre will head to this summer's Olympics set in Tokyo to compete, but her journey started on a dairy farm in Montgomery, Vt.

Before Purrier St. Pierre's feet smacked across the burnt orange track at the University of Oregon's Hayward Field, they walked on her family's farm in northern Vermont. Purrier St. Pierre grew up tending to her family's farm, primarily by helping raise the cows and pigs. One of her chores included waking up at 5:30 each morning before school to milk the family's 30 cows.

Purrier St. Pierre attributes growing up on a farm and learning the value of working hard to her success on the track.

Instagram

Elle Purrier St. Pierre is sponsored by Cabot Creamery Cooperative.

"It's a skill that I learned from an early age and it's just ingrained in me. And so I can't just fake that. That's something that has helped me so much in my career," she said on "Dairy Defined," a podcast produced by the National Milk Producers Federation.

Purrier St. Pierre's dairy farming lineage dates back decades, and she continued her family's generations-long occupation by owning a dairy and maple farm with her husband, Jamie St. Pierre. The two married in September of 2020 but have been together since high school. They even offered a glimpse into their future farm life by riding a tractor to their high school prom.

Brian Carpenter, chairman of the Vermont Dairy Producers Alliance, said the members are ready to cheer on one of their own. "We're all excited to see not just the local lady, but a local farm girl head off to represent our community," he said.

The Vermont native trains with a team sponsored by the athletic brand New Balance and is personally sponsored by the Cabot Creamery Cooperative in Waitsfield, Vt.

Amber Sheridan, Cabot's director of corporate communications, told Capital Press that Purrier St. Pierre had shown support for Cabot, dairy, and the agricultural industry for years, so the partnership was a "natural progression."

Amanda St. Pierre said her daughter-in-law authentically represents who the dairy-producing community is.

"The stories that she tells are real. What you see is what you get — from kissing a cow, to being in the barn with her dad, sister and her mom, to helping us on our farm — that is the real Elle and she's sharing that with the world," she said. "I think it just validates what we do."

E. Oregon woman hopes to make cut for timbersports competition

By ANNIE FOWLER
EO Media Group

HEPPNER, Ore. — Kate Page is no Paul Bunyan, but the Oregon woman can swing an ax and use a saw with the best of them.

A native of John Day, Ore., Page has been competing in lumberjack sports since 2014, and competed in the West Coast qualifier June 6 in Centralia, Wash., ahead of the STIHL Timbersports Series July 23-25 in Little Rock, Ark.

"This year was different because of COVID," Page said. "We have to apply to get into the STIHL series. Normally, the women have three qualifiers and one wild card that qualifies. On paper, they created pools. We compete at our nearest qualifier. There were five at our qualifier."

With four qualifier competitions throughout the country, Page still is waiting to hear if her time gets her to the U.S. Championships in Arkansas. She should know by the end of the month.

"The anticipation is killing me," Page said. "I set a personal record in one of my events (single buck, with a cross-cut saw), so that was a positive."

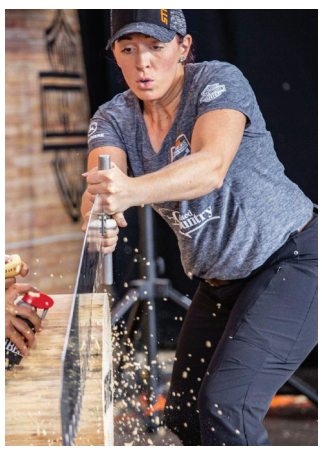
The first year women were included in the Timbersports Series was 2017, and they went to Cherry Valley, N.Y. In 2018, the qualifier for the women was in Cherry Valley, and those who advanced competed alongside the men in Milwaukee, Wis. Page finished eighth that year.

In 2019, Page finished seventh at the U.S. Championships.

"This year, I want to be in the top five," Page said.

Page and her husband, Camron Tack, returned to Eastern Oregon in April to be closer to her parents. She works in the Heppner Ranger District in the Umatilla National Forest for the U.S. Forest Service.

"I'm on a fire crew right now," Page said. "We live at the Tupper Guard Station."



Kate Page/Contributed Photo

STIHL Timbersports Series competitor Kate Page of Heppner, Ore.

CALENDAR

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

THROUGH SUNDAY 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

FRIDAY-SUNDAY JULY 9-11

Marion County Fair: 10 a.m. Oregon State Fair and Expo Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. We are planning on the best live fair possible.For more details go to our website: https://marioncountyfair.net/

MONDAY, JULY 12

Applied Pathogen Environmental Monitoring (live online): Foodborne illnesses and recalls can put a company out of business. A pathogen environmental monitoring (PEM) program is one way of mitigating that risk and ensuring a strong sanitation program. In this course, participants will understand how to create a successful environmental monitoring program. Participants will learn how to implement, manage, and continually improve the PEM program to mitigate inherent food safety risks. The class repeats July 26. Cost: $495 Contact: Bill Mullane, 208-426-2266, williammullane@techhelp.org Website: https://bit.ly/3xt9FTM

THURSDAY-SATURDAY JULY 15-17

Linn County Fair: 11 a.m. Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. Giant elephant ears, fluffy colorful clouds of cotton candy, live music nightly, carnival rides from mild to wild and of course, cattle, pigs and chickens galore will fill the Linn County Fair & Expo Center July 15-17 as the Linn County Fair returns live. Website: https://linncountyfair.com/

SATURDAY, JULY 17

Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association Summer Farm Tour: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. The farm tour will be held at Furrow Farm and Windy Acres Tree Farm. For more information, visit our website at https://bit.ly/3gAXIVy or contact Kari Puffer, 503-364-2942, pnwchristmastree@gmail.com

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