

People & Places

# Next generation organic farmer spreads wings

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Growing up on a dairy farm that transitioned to organic production in 2006, Spencer Mallett wanted to pursue a venture of his own — organic eggs.

“I was born and raised in ag life, dairy life and thought I’d diversify and get into chickens,” he said.

He could have continued his studies in sustainable food and farming at the University of Massachusetts but was ready for the real-world trials and errors of raising chicks.

“I learned leaps and bounds out on the farm,” he said.

He had planned to raise his own chicks from eggs, but realized it was more work, requiring more equipment and costs than he anticipated. Instead he ordered them from a hatchery in Oregon.

This year, he expanded the operation from 1,200 hens to 3,000 — with a lot of learning curves along the way. The additional 1- to 2-day-old chicks to triple his operation were flown in Thanksgiving week, and he raised them over the winter in a 10,000-square-foot barn.

It takes 5 months for the chicks to reach laying age, and production drops off after two or three years, he said.

“Then you’re just keeping them for fun,” he said.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Harmony Hens co-owner Spencer Mallett with a hen by a mobile coop.

When production tails off, the hens are butchered and new chicks are brought in. He hasn’t butchered many hens yet in his young operation, and is trying to firm up buyers — maybe dog food manufacturers since the meat will be older and tougher than chicken sold at retail.

Hens lay an egg about every 30 hours, about five a week per hen. His flock can produce 10,000 to 15,000 eggs a week, but production has slowed with the high temperatures experienced this summer. He’s currently delivering 6,000 to 7,000 eggs per week to customers.

“I’m still trying to build up the market and customers,”

he said. He currently sells to retailers and restaurants in the Wood River Valley, including the Sun Valley Resort. He’s also talking with grocery chains and potential buyers in Boise.

USDA allows eggs to be held four to six weeks before they’re sold, and they can be on shelves two to three weeks, he said.

“The quality of eggs I have could last three to four months, but I try to keep it under four weeks,” he said.

He gives any excess production to friends, family, churches or other organizations. In the future, he’d like to work with soup kitchens, food pantries and other char-

itable organizations.

Harmony Hens, like the family’s Harmony Organic Dairy, is certified annually.

“We get a pretty lengthy inspection. Sometimes it can last multiple days for the chickens and dairy,” he said.

Everything has to be certified organic, including bedding and feed. The hens have to be on organic pasture more than half a year. Housing has to be large enough, antibiotics can’t be used and the chickens and feed can’t be exposed to pesticides or fertilizer — and there’s plenty of recordkeeping, he said.

The hens are rotated to new pasture every day, with access to 8 acres at a time —

**Western Innovator**

**SPENCER MALLET**

**Age:** 23

**Company:** Harmony Hens

**Operation:** Certified organic

**Location:** Twin Falls, Idaho

**Founded:** 2018

**Co-owners:** Sean and Staci Mallett

**Flock:** 3,000 laying hens, Novogen Brown

**Production potential:** 10,000 to 15,000 eggs a week

**Education:** Associate’s degree, sustainable food and farming, 2017, University of Massachusetts

**Affiliations:** Idaho Preferred and Sun Valley Institute’s Local Food Alliance

although they typically like to stay close to their mobile coops. The pasture has a variety of 20 to 30 plants and an array of tasty bugs.



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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  
Sierra Dawn McClain ..... 503-506-8011

**Designer**  
Randy Wrighthouse ..... 800-882-6789

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**Index**

Dairy ..... 9  
Markets ..... 12  
Opinion ..... 6

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# M.V. Stampede promises big-name riders, ropers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The COVID-19 pandemic took a bite out of the Twin Falls County Fair and Magic Valley Stampede last summer, but organizers are hoping this year’s attractions will bring folks back.

The fair is set for Sept. 1-6, and the Stampede will run Sept. 2-4.

Fair attendance fell 42% last year, leaving a \$95,000 shortfall. Fortunately, there was enough in cash reserve to cover it, John Pitz, fair manager, said during a press conference on Aug. 3.

“We definitely can’t do that more than one year in a row,” he said.

To get folks back to the fair, the fair board beefed up the offerings this year with



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Bill Jensen, center, Gold Buckle Club president, talks with John Pitz, right, fair manager, and Steve Cowger, fair board member, during a press conference on this year’s fair and stampede on Aug. 3 at the Twin Falls County Fairgrounds.

new attractions, including a Ninja Nation Challenge and the All American Throw-down Demolition Derby.

And the annual Magic Valley Stampede PRCA Rodeo, a premium three-day

event, will be back.

“It was tremendous last year,” he said.

With numerous rodeos shut down because of the pandemic, the Stampede drew 460 entries, he said.

That was up from about 300 in 2019, and the rodeo went to a four-day event to accommodate the extra riders and ropers. But seating was limited to 50% of capacity to allow for social distancing, and Stampede revenue took a hit.

But the rodeo will be back to capacity this year, and Pitz is expecting some big names.

The Stampede is one of the top 50 rodeos in the country for purse payout, with \$10,000 added to the purse for each event, he said.

In addition, competitors are wanting to score points for the National Finals Rodeo — trying to make the top 15 to ride for the big money in Vegas, he said.

Yet another Stampede draw is that PRCA rodeos are also taking place in Walla Walla and Ellensburg, Wash.,

the same week, and all three rodeos have an added purse payout of \$10,000 or more, he said.

“If they can schedule it, they will show up at all three,” he said.

Rodeo fans who want to enjoy the Stampede in style with other rodeo enthusiasts should check out the Magic Valley Stampede Gold Buckle Club.

Membership provides VIP parking, special seating with theater stadium chairs and free dinner and drinks in the Gold Buckle tent all three nights of the rodeo.

The Gold Buckle Club’s tent and social area beneath the bleachers alongside the arena floor are also the only places on the fairgrounds allowed to serve hard liquor, Bill Jensen, the club’s president, said.

# Steam-Up celebrates equipment that built the West

By MIA RYDER-MARKS  
Capital Press



Mia Ryder-Marks/Capital Press  
Bill Boyce stands on a wheel of his family’s Russell 15815 steam tractor at the Great Oregon Steam-Up.

BROOKS, Ore. — As a thin blanket of steam floats in the humid air, Debbie Hegr tips a milk jug filled with corn kernels into a red burr mill.

A soft hum follows, as the grinder spits out the pale golden-orange flecks into a bucket below.

Beside her, her cousin Brad Beverly, feeds a couple of corn cobs into a McCormick Deering Corn Sheller, which separates kernels from the cobs.

The area around them is electric with pops, sizzles

and hums — welcoming chaos that is all familiar for visitors to the Great Oregon Steam-Up.

Since 1970, the annual event has been a magnet, attracting thousands from across the West Coast and beyond, celebrating the vast assortment of steam-powered agricultural and construction machines that helped build the state and region.

On two recent weekends, Powerland Heritage Park in Brooks, Ore. — the host of the Steam-Up — celebrated its 50th year. Hegr is one of the many people who have attended the event since it started. Her grandfather,

Chuck Kinkaid, was a founding father.

“This is home,” she says with a smile.

Across the 62-acre park, a cluster of antique steam engines pop in invitation; the mechanics and owners of the tractors are eager to educate visitors.

“The fire heats water up ... about 100 gallons ... where it goes through the tubes and heats all the water up to make the steam,” Bill Boyce says, jumping off his Russell 15815 steam tractor. The collection of buttons attached to his hat, one being “Best Steam Engineer of 2009,” rattled slightly with

the movement.

The tractor, named the Boss, belongs to his brother, but the 74-year-old Boyce travels from Grande Ronde every so often to keep it up. Boyce has attended the Steam-Up for 45 years.

“I have never missed a weekend,” he said.

A few minutes past 9 a.m., after honoring the veterans and “those who came before us,” Paul Finster, a long-standing volunteer of the Steam-Up, invites the crowd to a day of fun.

“If you told me this would be here today ... I would have thought you were dreaming,” he tells the Capital Press.

# Oregon Cattlemen raise money for ranchers impacted by fires

Capital Press

As wildfires continue to spread across the state, the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association is seeking donations to its Wildfire Stewardship Fund.

All donations will go to Oregon ranchers impacted by wildfires this year. The association will also distribute funds to rangeland fire protection agencies and volunteer firefighters.

In addition to financial donations, the association is also seeking medical supplies and nutritional supplements for cattle, especially for those in the Klamath area, where the Bootleg Fire

has done massive damage.

Supplies to rebuild fences are also needed, said OCA communications director Robyn Smith.

Those who wish to receive funding can complete an application — scheduled to be released on the OCA website this fall.

Grange Co-op has also pledged to match up to \$5,000 in relief funds raised by its customers. At any of the Grange Co-op retail stores, customers have the opportunity to “round up” their transactions. All round-ups will be donated to ranchers devastated by the Bootleg Fire. Find a local Grange Co-op at https://

www.grangecoop.com/store-locator/.

Smith said the fund is an important opportunity for the association to help those most impacted by the wildfires.

The effort is part of “anything that we can do to help put funds together to support them, especially since there are so many other things going on in the ranchers’ world right now,” she said.

Donations can be made online at orcattle.com or mailed to the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association office: 1320 Capitol St. NE, Suite 150, Salem, OR 97301, payable to the Stewardship Fund.

**CALENDAR**

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

**MONDAY-TUESDAY  
AUG. 16-17**

**Idaho Water Users Association Water Law and Resources Issues Seminar:** Sun Valley Resort, Sun Valley, Idaho. The seminar will provide updates on important issues to water users, including wildfire, water supply and the future of irrigation systems. Website: www.iwua.org

**TUESDAY AUG. 17**

**Intro to Experimental Statistics:** 8:30 a.m. This course will teach statistical thinking concepts that are essential to learning from data and communicating key insights to your organization, clients, or suppliers. Join Catherine Cantley, extension professor at the University of Idaho and TechHelp University specialist, as we explore the fundamentals of “storytelling with data” in a practical industry-based approach. Website: https://bit.ly/3AF17f3

**WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY  
AUG. 18-20**

**Farwest Show:** Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland. The Farwest Show, the biggest green industry trade show in the West, is produced by the Oregon Association of Nurseries, a trade organization that represents and serves the interests of the ornamental horticulture industry. For more information, go to www.FarwestShow.com

**R-CALF USA 2021 Convention and Trade Show:** Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, S.D. The convention will feature industry speakers and networking opportunities. Website: www.rcalfconvention.com

**THURSDAY AUG. 19**

**Miller Research Potato Pest Management Field Day:** 10 a.m.-noon. Miller Research field, 225 N 350 E, Rupert, Idaho. Presentations cover potato pest and disease research, management strategies. Website: https://millerresearch.com/events/ Contact: 208-431-4420