

People & Places

# Dry-farmed tomatoes a specialty

By JULIA HOLLISTER  
For the Capital Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. — When Joe Schirmer took over ownership of 3-acre Dirty Girl Produce near Watsonville 22 years ago, stewardship was his mission.

“Joe Schirmer farms with the sustainability and care of water, land and workers in mind,” Brie Mazurek, communications director of CUESA, said.

His mission has met with success.

“I began extending the traditional market garden organic crops and today we farm four sites and 40 acres,” he said.

Dirty Girl Produce is well loved among San Francisco Ferry Plaza Farmers Market shoppers and chefs for their diversity of produce, such as chicories, alliums, heirloom beans, strawberries, and of course, their famous dry-farmed Early Girl tomatoes, all grown with a priority for peak flavor and organic practices.

With dry farming, the plants are not irrigated. They get only the water that is available in the soil. The Early Girl variety does especially well with dry farming. The resulting tomatoes are dense with flavor.

The only down side is sometimes yields can drop to about one-third a normal crop.



Joe Schirmer operates Dirty Girl Produce in Watsonville, Calif. He started with 3 acres and now farms 40 acres.

Other crops at Dirty Girl run the gamut from beans — green, shelling and dried — and broccoli to four varieties of onions. Five types of lettuce are planted year-round.

The farm uses overhead and drip irrigation on those other crops and rotates crops because of the tight water supply.

Dirty Girl sells its produce to customers and restaurants at 10 farmers markets in Santa Cruz, Berkeley and San Francisco.

As to passing along the

mantle of organic farming to his children, Schirmer says his children — ages 12, 10, and 7 — probably don’t want to go into farming.

“It’s too early to tell, but they already know too much!”

A “No Pests Allowed” sign stands out front at the farm. Schirmer explains the reason.

Treating the soil as though it is an organism with an immune system makes it healthy. As a result, pest problems are few, and they are controlled primarily by cov-

ering vulnerable plant starts with Reemay cloth and rotating crops.

Farming is a vulnerable industry not free of challenges. Small farmers, who operate on slim margins, are affected by the state-mandated minimum wage increase, and most counties are in a water crisis, he said.

“I have learned a lot since I began farming Dirty Girl,” Schirmer said, “but the most important is ‘Do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do, and don’t expect



**Western Innovator**

**JOE SCHIRMER**  
Age: 49  
Residence: Watsonville, Calif.  
Education: University of California-Santa Cruz.  
Occupation: Owner and farmer, Dirty Girl Produce.  
Family: Wife and three children.  
Quote: “The more rigid you are, the more breakable you are. You must be ready to adapt.”

anything in return.” Mazurek, of CUESA, points out the importance of farms such as Dirty Girl Produce.

“With drought now the new normal in California and beyond, it is even more critical to support small organic farms like Dirty Girl, which are farming to protect our precious resources and adapt for a water-resilient future,” she said.

# Century farms, ranches to be honored at state fair

Twelve farms and ranches from six counties will be honored this year as official Oregon Century Farms or Ranches, bringing the total number of Oregon Century Farms and Ranches to 1,247.

One Sesquicentennial Century Farm recipient from 2020 — a family that has reached the 150-year mark — brings the total of Sesquicentennial honorees to 47.

The 2020 families will be honored with the 2021 families at this year’s awards ceremony at the Oregon State fair on Saturday, Aug. 28.

“Every Oregon farm and ranch has a unique history and special family story. The Oregon Century Farm & Ranch program encourages agriculture families to share, with a broader audience, these stories,” said Program Coordinator Andrea Kuenzi in an Oregon Farm Bureau press release. “By promoting family stories, our rich cultural heritage is passed down to future generations while educating Oregonians about the social and economic impact of Oregon agriculture.”

The Century Farm and Ranch families being honored are:

### 2021 Century Farm & Ranch Families

- Alderson Farms: Founded in Polk County in 1921 by Richard Alderson. Applicant: Dennis & Ron Alderson.
- Barnett Farm: Founded in Polk County in 1921 by Martin and Tressa Conger. Applicant: Linda M. Barnett.
- Cruickshank Brothers Farms: Founded in Polk County in 1920 by David and Annie Cruickshank. Applicant: John W. Cruickshank.
- Norman Farm: Founded in Clackamas County in 1921 by John and Anna Norman. Applicant: Shirley Norman.
- Ogle Ranch: Founded in Lake County in 1919 by Clarence Wilson (C.W.) “Jim” Ogle. Applicant: James W. Ogle.
- R.T. Gilliland Farm: Founded in Umatilla County in 1914 by Robert T. and Willie Gilliland. Applicant: Donald H. Bensel.



- Rueck’s Grandview Farm: Founded in Washington County in 1921 by George Sr. and Anna Marie Rueck. Applicant: Marvin C. Rueck.
- SC Ranch LLC: Founded in Lake County in 1918 by S.B. (Sol) Chandler. Applicant: Lytle and Tamara Ann Simms.
- Timber Hill Farm: Founded in Polk County in 1920 by David and Annie Cruickshank. Applicant: Kenneth David Cruickshank.
- Welter Family Farm LLC: Founded in Marion County in 1919 by Albert F. and Mary B. Welter. Applicant: Welter Family Farm LLC (Tom Welter).
- Tucker Ranch: Founded in Umatilla County in 1916 by Eugene “Eaph” Tucker. Applicant: Samuel E. Tucker.
- Von Derahe Orchards: Founded in Umatilla County in 1914 by A.A. & Lois E. Bixby. Applicant: Von Derahe Orchards LLC (Mike and Chuck Von Derahe).

### 2020 Century Farm & Ranch Families

- Blackman Ranch: Founded in Klamath County in 1919 by Thomas Walter Blackman. Applicant: Rod-

- ney and Virginia Blackman.
- Marx Farm: Founded in Polk County in 1920 by Julius and Luise Marx. Applicant: Merle Marx.
- Paysinger Family Farm: Founded in Yamhill County in 1920 by George and Lizzie Shelburne. Applicant: David and Theresa Paysinger.
- Starvation Farms: Founded in Morrow County in 1918 by Chris Moehnke. Applicant: Chris and Kathy Rauch.
- Roy Family Farm: Founded in Yamhill County in 1920 by Alfred Luke Roy. Applicant: Carol A. Roy.
- Ward Ranches: Founded in Baker County in 1919 by Levi “Clyde” Ward. Applicants: Craig, Mark, Kathy, and Ralph Ward.
- JW Ranch: Founded in Marion County in 1920 by John Calahan. Applicant: John W. Wells.
- Fir Villa Farm: Founded in Polk County in 1911 by Solomon S. and Susan Ediger. Applicants: Melvin & Esther Ediger.

The Sesquicentennial Award program began in 2008 in honor of Oregon’s 150th birthday celebration. Sesquicentennial awards recognize Oregon families who have continu-

ously farmed portions of their original family acreage for 150 years or more.

### 2020 Sesquicentennial Family

- Cooper Family Orchards: Founded in Wasco County in 1870 by Robert and Mary Cooper. Applicant: David Cooper.

The narratives of the 2020 and 2021 families can be found at [www.centuryfarm.oregonfb.org](http://www.centuryfarm.oregonfb.org).

The Oregon Century Farm & Ranch Program began in 1958 to honor farm and ranch families with century-long connections to the land. To qualify for a century or sesquicentennial award, families must follow a formal application process.

Members of the Application Review Committee review each application. Qualifications include continuous family operation of the farm or ranch; a gross income from farm use of not less than \$1,000 per year for at least three years out of five prior to application; and family members must live on or actively manage the farm or ranch.

Application documentation includes photos, original deeds, personal stories or other historic records. These records help support Oregon’s agricultural history by providing information about settlement patterns or statistics on livestock and crop cycles. Documents are archived for public access.

Award recipients receive a certificate signed by the governor and director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Historic roadside signs are imprinted with the founder’s name and the year the ranch or farm was established.

The application deadline for 2022 is May 1.

The program is administered by the Oregon Agricultural Education Foundation. It is supported by a partnership with the Oregon Farm Bureau, the State Historic Preservation Office, OSU University Archives, and by generous donations from Oregonians.

For more information, contact Kuenzi, program coordinator, at 503-400-7884, [cfr@oregonfb.org](mailto:cfr@oregonfb.org).

## CALENDAR

### 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://funat-thefair.com/>

### SEPT. 3-26

**Washington State Fair:** Washington State Fair Events Center, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. Open Labor Day weekend. Closed Tuesdays and Sept. 8. Website: <https://www.thefair.com/>

### TUESDAY SEPT. 7

**NRCS Idaho State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (virtual):** 9 a.m.-noon. Group meets three times per year to

advise NRCS and other USDA agencies on carrying out Farm Bill conservation provisions. Includes representatives of various natural resource and agricultural interests such as agencies, ag producers and tribes. Website: <https://bit.ly/3fUnorS> Contact: [mindi.rambo@usda.gov](mailto:mindi.rambo@usda.gov)

### WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY SEPT. 8-10

**Public Lands Council 53rd Annual Meeting (live and online):** Best Western Ocean View Resort, 414 N Prom, Seaside, Ore. The meeting provides a forum for producers to discuss current and emerging issues with federal agencies, industry partners and law-

makers. Website: [www.publiclandscouncil.org](http://www.publiclandscouncil.org)

### WEDNESDAY SEPT. 15

**OSU Extension’s Seed and Cereal Crop Production meeting (online):** 8:30 a.m. Agenda: agronomic updates for grass seed from OSU south valley field crops Extension agent Christy Tanner; updates on slug control strategies from OSU Extension slug expert Rory McDonnell; and new technologies for weed control in grass seed from OSU assistant professor Caio Brunharo. One Oregon Department of Agriculture credit offered for each session. The session is free but you must register to get the credit. Register: <https://beav.es/39d>

Submit upcoming ag-related events on [www.capitalpress.com](http://www.capitalpress.com) or by email to [newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com).

### THROUGH SUNDAY AUG. 19-22

**Wasco County Fair & Rodeo:** Noon-11 p.m. Wasco County Fairgrounds, 81849 Fairgrounds Road, Tygh Valley, Ore. Website: <https://bit.ly/3ipAmnM>

### AUG. 20-29

**Western Idaho Fair:** Expo Idaho, 5610 Glenwood St., Boise. Website: [www.idahofair.com](http://www.idahofair.com)

### MONDAY AUG. 23

**Intro to HACCP and Food Safety (live online):** 9 a.m. The Hazard Analy-

sis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system is a logical, scientific approach to controlling hazards in food production and is a preventive system assuring the safe production of food products. The principle of HACCP can be applied to production, meat slaughter and processing, shipping and distribution, food service and home preparation. Successful completion of this course will result in an Introduction to HACCP Certificate with the International HACCP Alliance seal of approval. Website: <https://bit.ly/3AAMsFY>

### AUG. 27-SEPT. 6

**Oregon State Fair:** Oregon State Fair & Exposition Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. We’re looking forward to welcoming you back to the fair. Website: <https://oregonstatefair.org/>



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