

People & Places

Longtime OSU Extension administrator and research station director to retire

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

AURORA, Ore. — It doesn't take long to glean the diversity of crops at Oregon State University's North Willamette Research and Extension Center.

The 160-acre farm 20 miles south of Portland is a microcosm of the high-value agriculture found throughout the Willamette Valley — everything from berries, hazelnuts and fresh vegetables to Christmas trees and ornamental plants grown in nurseries.

Mike Bondi has been the station's director since 2011, overseeing dozens of faculty and projects to help producers thrive economically.

Under his leadership, NWREC has added several new initiatives to keep pace with the changing needs of agriculture.

On June 30, 2020, Bondi announced his retirement from OSU Extension Service but has remained at the station while the university continues to hunt for his replacement. A search is currently underway, and could wrap up by the end of the year.

After 43 years with OSU, Bondi, who turned 70 in October, said the thing he will miss most is the people.

"Just the partnerships, creativity and support they've provided has made it an amazing and worthwhile career for me," he said.

'Last man standing'

By his own admission, Bondi never intended to be an administrator.

He was originally hired in 1978 as an extension forestry agent on the North Oregon Coast, and focused on helping small woodland owners to better manage their trees and property. Seven years later, Bondi transferred to Clackamas County in the same role.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Mike Bondi, station director at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center, announced his retirement from OSU Extension Service last year, but has stayed on at NWREC while the university searches for his replacement.

Bondi is perhaps best known for establishing the Clackamas Tree School in 1991. It has grown into the largest one-day educational event for private forest owners in the U.S., with registration capped at 600 attendees.

"Their needs are so diverse," he said. "That's one of the things that was really fun working with that group of people."

In 2010, OSU Extension Service underwent a reorganization. Instead of having individual staff chairs at each county office, management was split into a dozen regions statewide.

Bondi was appointed manager of the Clackamas Region, overseeing the extension office in Oregon City as well as NWREC.

"I was, frankly, kind of the last man standing," he remembers. "My colleagues had all either retired or were on their way out the door."

Key additions

Within a short distance of NWREC is about 40% of the state's \$5 billion in total value of agricultural products.

"The Willamette Valley is the most diverse part of Ore-

gon agriculture in terms of crops that are grown," Bondi said. "And, that's where all the high-value crops are."

Established in 1957, NWREC primarily serves growers in Clackamas, Marion, Polk, Yamhill, Washington, Multnomah and Columbia counties. The original three pillars of research were greenhouse and nursery crops, berries and commercial vegetable production.

Today, Bondi said the station has 10 programmatic areas. "It is without a doubt, of all the research centers in the state, the most diverse," he said.

Even before taking over as manager, Bondi was influential in bringing the Small Farms Program and Christmas tree research to NWREC in the mid-2000s. In 2015, the station hired Nik Wiman to study hazelnuts and orchard crops, followed by Nicole Anderson to study field crops including grass seed and legumes.

More recently, the Oregon Legislature approved funding in 2019 for organic research at NWREC, Bondi said, which grew out of the Small Farms Program.

The station has also dedicated 5.5 acres to a new agri-voltaics experiment, known as the Staterra Center, studying how agriculture may be combined with renewable energy production to create more sustainable farms in the future.

Today, NWREC has 35 full-time faculty members and last summer hired 28 college and high school students to support expanding research programs.

While the station remains committed to its core industries, Bondi points out several projects committed to evaluating new crops not yet commercially grown in the Willamette Valley — such as olives, almonds, cider apples and quinoa.

"We've made some key additions, but it's all about serving the needs of agriculture," he said. "That's what I feel best about. We're better positioned to meet the needs of the agricultural community in this valley."

Public outreach

Demonstrating the value of farming is particularly important in the Portland metro area to help bridge the urban-rural



Western Innovator

MIKE BONDI

Age: 70

Hometown: Lake Oswego, Ore.

Family: Wife, Connie, and adult son Aaron

Occupation: Director, North Willamette Research and Extension Center

Education: Bachelor's degree in forest management, Iowa State University, 1973; master's degree in forest science, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1975

divide, Bondi said.

Every year, NWREC hosts a community open house in July (excluding the pandemic) to show the public what is happening in their fields and laboratories. A harvest dinner also highlights the region's bounty, and underscores how food makes it from farm to table.

"It's all about building community," Bondi said. "I think that's a lot of what the university does."

Looking ahead to retirement, Bondi said he plans to spend more time with his grandkids and volunteering with the nonprofit group Forests Forever, which he co-founded in the early 1990s. The organization manages nearly 500 acres of working forests for public education about timber resources.

"I've always loved what I do," he said. "If you can make your avocation your vocation, that's how I always thought it should be."

Wheat industry remembers USDA ARS quality lab director Morris

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Members of the Northwest wheat and pulse industry remember Craig Morris for his many contributions to crop quality research, and for his "nice sense of whimsy."

Morris, director of the USDA Agricultural Research Service Western Wheat and Pulse Quality Laboratory for 32 years, died Oct. 25 of natural causes at his home in Pullman, Wash. He was 64.

Morris grew up on a farm in Winterset, Iowa. He obtained a bachelor's degree in agronomy and seed science from Iowa State University and a master's degree and Ph.D. in agronomy from Kansas State University.

In 1987, he moved to Pullman as a postdoctoral research associate at Washington State University and then was hired by USDA-ARS as director of the quality lab in 1989.

"Craig will be remembered by all who knew him as an outstanding and caring person and mentor," a USDA ARS release states. "He had a deep love for his family and friends, particularly his two daughters, who were his pride and joy."

"Through his work, Craig greatly facilitated and improved international col-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Craig Morris, director of the USDA Agricultural Research Service Western Wheat and Pulse Quality Laboratory, holds up an example of a good-quality cookie made using Pacific Northwest wheat in 2016. Morris died Oct. 25 at the age of 64.

laboration among wheat geneticists and the cereal industry and leaves a lasting legacy of wheat improvement," the release stated.

Longtime lab technician Art Bettge, now an industry consultant, called Morris "one of the most genius cereal chemists" contributing to the development and use of soft white wheat in the Pacific Northwest.

He developed an entirely new class of wheat, soft durum, and discerned the fundamental DNA difference between soft and hard wheat, as well as some of the genes responsible for flavor and aroma in wheat and baked products, Bettge said.

"He was really good at coming up with slightly off-beat looks at the way wheat worked," Bettge said. "It was a pleasure to work with him, because he always maintained a nice sense of whimsy and really made lab work fun."

During Morris' tenure, the industry, USDA and WSU worked together to develop and adopt the framework for the preferred wheat varieties brochure, "a revolutionary idea to advance wheat quality, and (a) model for the rest of the country," said Rich Koenig, interim dean of WSU's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences. "His

reputation as a scientist and collaborative nature largely made this possible."

Morris "never wavered" from the core quality mission and never compromised, said Mike Miller, a Ritzville, Wash., wheat farmer, Washington Grain Commission board member and a former U.S. Wheat Associates chairman.

"Craig actually had the ability to understand and be curious (about) the production side of things ... all the other things we farmers deal with," Miller said. "He was definitely always asking questions, interested in answers, he'd allow you to ask questions and he'd give you his honest answers."

Morris was also instrumental in the establishment of the first-ever USDA ARS Pulse Quality Network in 2019, said Tim McGreevy, chief executive officer of the USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council.

"The (lab) he directed was recognized around the world as a leader in wheat and pulse quality research," McGreevy said. "He was beloved by the farmers, processors, flour millers and food manufacturers he worked with. He was a great researcher, a good man and a wonderful friend to all he touched. He will be missed."

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

THROUGH SATURDAY NOV. 6
Farm and Food Conference: Centennial Hotel, 303 W. North River Drive, Spokane Wash. The two-day in-person event will focus on regenerative farming. Sponsored by the Spokane Conservation District. Soil scientist Ray Archuleta is the keynote speaker. Website: <https://bit.ly/3vgZC4C>

FRIDAY NOV. 12
Food Regulations and Labeling (online): 10 a.m.-noon. Product claims are advantageous to a com-

pany because they signify a higher perception of quality. However, such claims can have profound legal implications that a company should be aware of. Learn about the requirements necessary to add these essential marketing claims on sales material, a website and product labels. Our presenter will also compare certifying bodies to help navigate certification for specific claims. Website: <https://bit.ly/3hBM4uV> Contact: 208-426-2181

MONDAY-WEDNESDAY NOV. 15-17
Idaho Cattle Association Convention: Sun Valley Inn, Sun Valley, Idaho. Topics will include market-

ing and policy, sustainability, public lands, animal health and drone technology. Website: <http://www.idahocattle.org>

TUESDAY-THURSDAY NOV. 16-18
Washington Farm Bureau Annual Meeting: Yakima Convention Center, 10 N Eighth St., Yakima, Wash. Washington Farm Bureau members will get together for their annual meeting. Website: <https://wfbannualmeeting.com/>

Willamette Valley Ag Expo: Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. Exhibitors, equipment, seminars, classes, food and fun. In addition to the exhibitors and

classes, attendees can enjoy other attractions such as "Dine Around Oregon," an antique farm equipment display and an educational area from Oregon Women for Agriculture. Website: www.wva-expo.com

FRIDAY NOV. 19
Denim and Diamonds Dinner and Auction: 5 p.m. Salem Convention Center 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. Oregon Aglink hosts Denim & Diamonds, an awards dinner and auction, which raises funds for the Oregon Aglink Foundation, supporting programs like Adopt a Farmer. In addition to dinner, there will be an online silent auction at aglink2021.ggo. bid and an in-person auction.

The annual Ag Connection and Agriculturist of the Year awards will also be presented. Website: <https://aglink.org/events/denim-diamonds/>

FRIDAY-SUNDAY NOV. 19-21
Tilth Conference (live and virtual): 7 a.m. Lynnwood Convention Center, 3711 196th St. SW, Lynnwood, Wash. This year's conference is held in-person with virtual options available. Farmers, food system professionals, researchers and educators will learn from one another and share best practices, catch up with old friends and make new connections. Website: <https://bit.ly/3jkLAKy>



Capital Press

EMPOWERING PRODUCERS OF FOOD & FIBER
Established 1928

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EO Media Group
dba Capital Press

An independent newspaper
published every Friday.

Capital Press (ISSN 0740-3704) is
published weekly by EO Media Group,
2870 Broadway NE, Salem OR 97303.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, OR,
and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to
Capital Press, P.O. Box 2048 Salem, OR
97308-2048.

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Mailing address:
Capital Press
P.O. Box 2048
Salem, OR 97308-2048

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