

Startup connects farmers with project financing

By GEORGE PLAVER
Capital Press



Sami Tellatin

During her years working for the USDA, Sami Tellatin heard from farmers about the barriers to adopting innovative soil health management practices such as no-till and cover cropping.

The biggest challenge, despite high demand, was finding the money to help pay for projects, Tellatin said.

Last year, Tellatin co-founded a startup company called FarmRaise, a web-based platform that assesses whether producers are eligible for federal grants and loans, and provides "success teams" to assist with applications.

Switching farming practices can be expensive. Farmers may need to buy new equipment, such as no-till seed drills, that can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Though the investment does pay off over time — requiring fewer fertilizer and

pesticide applications — it can take five years or more before farmers see any return.

“Funding through grants and other mechanisms is important to surmount that barrier,” said Tellatin, the chief operating officer of FarmRaise.

To date, FarmRaise has helped growers from across the country submit more than 100 applications seeking \$3 million for stewardship projects. More than 10,000 farmers have taken the company's eligibility quiz, tapping into a database of 1,000 state and federal funding programs.

“It's mostly planning and accountability,” Tellatin said. “We'll manage all of the deadlines for you, and keep you up to date on different opportunities.”

Tellatin, 29, grew up in the Ozarks of southern Mis-

LEARN MORE ONLINE

To learn more about FarmRaise, or to take the funding eligibility survey, visit www.farmraise.com

souri, where she developed a love of the landscape with its rolling hills, caves and lush deciduous trees.

She fondly remembers visiting her family's cabin at Bull Shoals Lake, a 45,150-acre reservoir straddling the Missouri-Arkansas border that is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The lake's heavily forested shoreline is undeveloped and protected as a buffer zone for 400 feet, which left it undisturbed for Tellatin to explore.

“That really instilled in me an appreciation for public resources, the land and land management,” she said.

Tellatin studied biological engineering at the University of Missouri, with the intention of pursuing a career in the renewable energy sector.

Instead, she fell in with the farm crowd while working on a project turning agricultural waste into energy by capturing methane emissions through anaerobic digestion.

“There is something about farms that sucks people in, in a wonderful way,” Tellatin said. “It takes a really creative, gritty and entrepreneurial person to be a farmer. Working with those people is really fun and rewarding.”

That led to a job after graduation with the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, or SARE. Tellatin joined the agency as a project manager and extension associate, conducting outreach with growers.

Though her primary focus was serving farmers

in the Midwest, she worked remotely in Corvallis, Ore., after her husband landed a fundraising job with Oregon State University.

Tellatin spent two years in Corvallis, inspired by the vibrancy and diversity of Willamette Valley agriculture. “Oregon was such a cool place to live,” she said.

In 2018, Tellatin enrolled in the Emmett Interdisciplinary Program in Environment and Resources at Stanford University. There, she met Jayce Hafner, the now-CEO of FarmRaise. They shared an interest in agricultural sustainability and soil health, with Hafner having grown up on her family's cattle farm in Virginia.

Wanting to start their own company, Tellatin and Hafner came up with the idea for FarmRaise to streamline the process of applying for farm financing.

Including Tellatin, Hafner and the company's third co-founder, Albert Abedi,

FarmRaise now has 12 employees and is looking to grow.

“The acute need for funding is there,” Tellatin said. “The more interest we can get ... the more we might be able to engage them and get some funding available.”

Producers who visit the FarmRaise website are prompted to take a two-minute quiz to determine which programs they might be eligible for, filling out basic information about their farm or ranch. From there, they can sign up for a premium account to work directly with the company's “success teams.”

“The people we can actually do the most for today are those farmers who are established, but they're not huge,” Tellatin said. “They've been at it for several years. They have production and sales, and control land. They're looking to invest and grow the operation.”

FDA proposes to tighten water quality testing

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Water-testing requirements under the federal Produce Safety Rule would change under a new U.S. Food and Drug Administration proposal.

FDA Dec. 2 proposed a new rule that would require comprehensive assessments of water quality. The agency at the same time gave states that administer and enforce the Produce Safety Rule, including Idaho, discretion in enforcing the current rule's water requirements.

The Produce Safety Rule applies to produce that is eaten raw and is tied to the Food Safety Modernization Act. FDA's introduction of the new proposed standard means water-related compliance deadlines will be extended from Jan. 26 to a yet-to-be determined date.

“The Idaho State Department of Agriculture will continue their inspection frequency for covered farms and, as we have done in the past, will apply enforcement discretion on the current water requirements of the rule,” said Pamm Junker, the department's produce safety administrator.

She said the department will enforce any new final rule.

Meanwhile, representatives of Idaho farms and facilities the Produce Safety Rule covers can

weigh in during a 120-day comment period that began Dec. 6.

FDA plans virtual public meetings at 9:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. Mountain Time Feb. 14 and at 6:45 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. Feb. 25.

FDA said the assessments required under the proposed rule would help identify and mitigate hazards in water used to grow produce. A goal is to avert outbreaks of food-borne illnesses linked to pre-harvest water, including water coming from nearby land.

Junker said that under the proposed rule, covered farms would be required to conduct pre-harvest water assessments once a year, and whenever a change occurs that may introduce contamination risk to produce or food contact surfaces.

The assessments would address water-quality factors including the agricultural water system and practices, crop characteristics and environmental conditions.

Junker said the state Department of Agriculture since 2019 has inspected all farms and facilities covered by the Produce Safety Rule. The state began inspecting large farms in 2019, small farms in 2020 and very small operations this year.

The state has about 85 covered farms and facilities. The number varies because of crop rotations.



Pamm Junker

Researcher: Grasshoppers bear watching in years to come

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Farmers should keep a close eye on grasshoppers as weather conditions become more favorable for them in the future.

“There's no reason to panic,” Arash Rashed, associate professor of ecological entomology at the University of Idaho. “We just need to be more aware of factors that could influence (an) outbreak and address them as they come — at least know what our resources are.”

Grasshoppers prefer warm springs and light rains over extended cool and wet weather, and a warmer fall for extended egg-laying. They like the sun and don't like dense plant canopies.

Rashed spoke Dec. 17 during the Idaho Wheat Commission's virtual “From the Field” farm chat webinar.

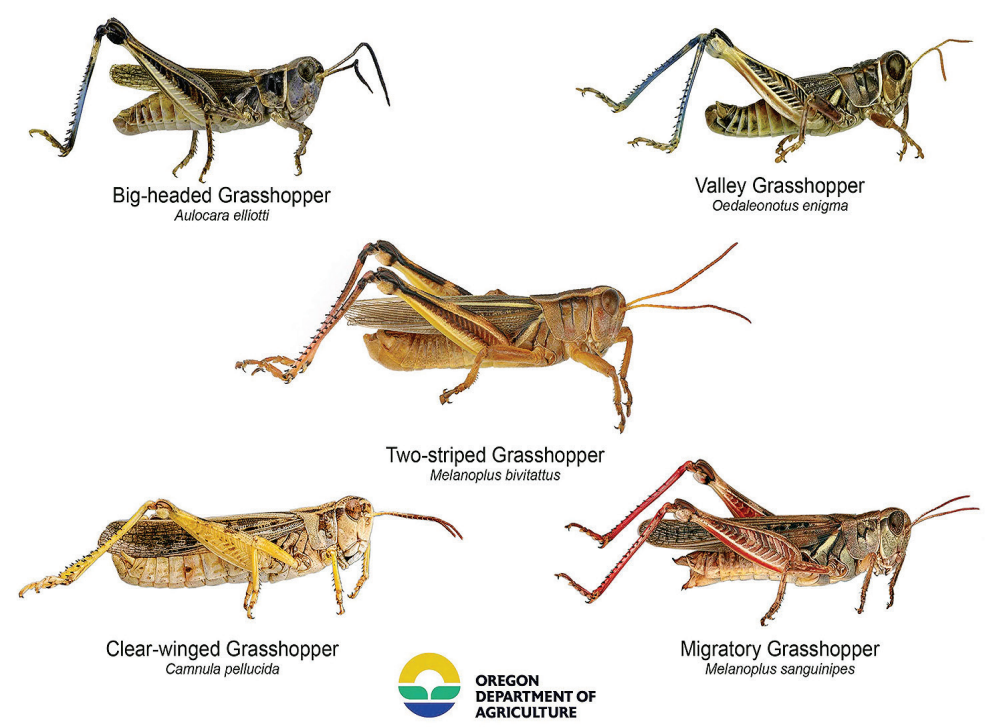
The USDA Agricultural Research Service offers an annual grasshopper hazard map.

Some of the most common grasshopper species are the differential grasshopper, red-legged grasshopper, two-striped grasshopper and migratory grasshopper.

Grasshopper outbreaks are sporadic, but the insects are highly mobile, he said.

“If you see them one day in one location, it doesn't mean the population is there, and the next day, it doesn't mean the population won't appear somewhere else,” he said.

Damage is expected when large numbers of grasshoppers are present.



Pest species of grasshoppers

The most damage is likely to occur along the edge of fields.

Insecticide applications should only be done when large numbers of grasshoppers are present, Rashed said. That would be greater than seven grasshoppers per 10 square feet in a field or 12 grasshoppers per 10 square feet in the natural vegetation around a field.

“If you have 15 grasshoppers per square yard, it's a large population,” he said. “That would basically translate into 100 pounds of grasshoppers for an acre. One hundred pounds of grasshoppers is almost the size of a sheep.”

Three to four grasshoppers per square yard would require management in a newly planted field.

Grasshoppers have small

mouths, snapping the plants at the base instead of leaving a part that could recover, as in the case of a larger grazing animal, he said.

Seedling damage is the most critical, but damage to crop heads may occur at later crop developmental stages.

Rashed recommends farmers inspect vegetation about 10 days before planting.

Management includes early spring seeding or late fall seeding, crop rotations, tillage and trap strips around a field.

Female grasshoppers will lay 20 to 100 eggs in late summer.

“The individual that comes out of those eggs looks exactly like the adults, with the exception that they are small in size

and they don't have wings,” Rashed said.

As the nymphs molt, they grow larger and their wings develop. The insects molt five or six times before reaching full adult stage. They live two to three months as an adult.

One concern is that as current grasshopper experts reach retirement age, a new generation of researchers is needed to take over and address the complex systems of pests that could cause widespread outbreaks, Rashed said.

“At least five years of overlap is needed” between current and new researchers, he said. “So all this experience is being transferred into the next generation of these people who are addressing grasshopper and katydid outbreaks.”

Oregon Wheat Growers League's Maney looks to boost farmer messages

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Ben Maney, new president of the Oregon Wheat Growers League, wants to

improve the way farmers tell their story.

He wants to let “people know just how valuable we are, what our farmers do on a daily basis,” he said.

“What our improvement in technology has been, allowing farmers to be more efficient.”

A fifth-generation farmer, Maney raises dryland wheat

north of Pendleton in Umatilla County on about 4,000 acres.

His father was also a county president. When he returned to the farm, Maney wanted to follow his dad's example.

“I knew that farming and working the tractor were only a part of it,” he said. “A lot of times, unfortunately, there's decisions made in Salem and Washington, D.C., that affect you on the farm. You've got to have a voice, you've got to tell your story. If you don't, no one knows and they'll start making decisions for you.”



Ben Maney

He's also advocating for the next generation, he said, noting that he and his wife, Julie, had a son, Rhett, in March.

“These last couple of years have been challenging for wheat farmers, with the drought, heat, change in weather and policies,” Maney said.

Maney encourages farmers to keep engaged and informed.

“But we also want our growers to tell us what they're doing right — what have they been successful at on their farm? What are some of the challenges?” he said. “The more we get that out there for our grower base, it helps everybody. Guaranteed, if one guy's having a challenge or a little bit of a struggle on his field, his neighbors may also be having that same challenge and not sure how to go about it.”

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FARGO AUTO

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