

People & Places

# Maple syrup industry in NW future?

By **GEORGE PAVEN**  
Capital Press

CRESWELL, Ore. — Taylor Larson got the idea to start tapping bigleaf maple trees at his family's Willamette Valley farm in 2015.

That first winter, he collected enough sap in aluminum buckets from two trees to make a few pints of maple syrup. It wasn't fancy, but it allowed him to see the potential of adding another specialty crop to the farm's repertoire.



**Eric T. Jones**

"We're always looking to add more things to what we do," said Larson, who runs My Brothers' Farm in Creswell, Ore., south of Eugene with his brothers, Austin and Ben. Together, they produce organic hazelnuts, apples, pork and bison on about 320 acres along the Coast Fork Willamette River.

Some of the land is also managed as riparian forest for fish and wildlife habitat. That allows bigleaf maples — native to the Pacific Northwest — to thrive on the property.

## Syrup industry?

While syrup production remains more of a hobby at My Brothers' Farm, researchers at Oregon State University are studying what it would take to create a larger commercial industry akin to maple sugaring in the Northeastern U.S.

Eric T. Jones, an assistant professor of practice in the College of Forestry, is leading a federally funded project working with several landowners, including Larson, providing equipment and training to tap bigleaf maples commercially.

If successful, Jones predicts the industry could become as big as Oregon Christmas trees, valued at \$106.9 million in 2020, according to the state Department of Agriculture.

"I think there's huge potential, but we have a long ways to go," Jones said.



Greg S. Jones

**Eric T. Jones installs sap collectors on bigleaf maple trees.**

"We're really just at the beginning."

## Growing interest

Funding comes from a three-year, \$500,000 grant through the USDA Acer Access and Development Program to help promote the domestic maple syrup industry.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. production of maple syrup totaled nearly 4.24 million gallons in 2019. Almost half of that syrup came from Vermont, followed by New York and Maine. Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Michigan, Wisconsin, Massachusetts and Connecticut also produced maple syrup.

Production has been slower to gain a foothold in the Northwest, though Jones said interest is growing.

"We have known for a long time you can tap bigleaf (maple trees)," he said. "We see these maples everywhere."

## A different maple

Bigleaf maples are native along the Pacific Coast, ranging from the northern tip of Vancouver Island south to California. The species differs from the more common syrup-producing sugar maples on the East Coast, with less sugar con-

centration in the sap and a more earthy flavor.

It takes about 50-80 gallons of sap from bigleaf maples to make 1 gallon of syrup, which Jones acknowledged is a large number.

The project grant, in part, covers the cost of equipment such as tubing and vacuum pumps to make harvesting sap more efficient. Jones also purchased a \$5,000 reverse osmosis unit capable of removing water from the sap to make syrup faster than boiling.

The equipment is being installed at places like My Brothers' Farm to experiment with commercial-scale production, and develop best management practices to establish the industry.

Larson said he has 250 trees on his property tapped this year. Maple syrup pairs nicely with the farm's other crops, he said, and offers the chance to add value.

"The jury is still out as to whether this will be an economically viable enterprise for us," Larson said. "We're not betting the farm on it, but we're excited about the potential."

## Unique flavor

Eliza Nelson, founder and director of the nonprofit Oregon Maple Project, describes the taste of bigleaf maple syrup as richer and

more complex than its sugar maple cousin.

Words that come to people's minds, she said, include "buttery" and "mossy," with hints of caramel and sweet potato.

"It is really the taste of the Northwest," Nelson said. "It is so much fun to give people samples."

Having grown up in New England, Nelson was already familiar with the art and science of tapping maple trees when she came to Oregon in 1996. It was part of her curriculum teaching fifth- and sixth-graders at the Arbor School in Tualatin, south of Portland.

Nelson established the Oregon Maple Project in 2020, leasing land for small-batch syrup production at Camp Colton, an 85-acre forested property in rural Clackamas County.

While the pandemic has limited some gatherings and school field trips, Nelson said families and homeschool and outdoors groups have come to learn about bigleaf maples and take home some syrup for themselves.

Last winter, Nelson said they collected 50 gallons of sap, enough to make 1 gallon of syrup.

For most people in Oregon, Nelson said making bigleaf maple syrup is still a



## Western Innovator

### ERIC T. JONES

**Age:** 56  
**Hometown:** Eugene, Ore.  
**Family:** Wife, Katie Lynch, and one daughter  
**Occupation:** Assistant professor of practice, Oregon State University College of Forestry  
**Education:** Doctorate in ecological anthropology, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001

hobby. However, she is bullish on the industry's potential for growth.

"Demand for the syrup is going to be insatiable," she said. "There's a long, long future ahead of not having enough producers to meet demand."

## Challenges ahead

Jones said the industry still faces several challenges to getting started. The Northwest's climate and microclimates can be more unpredictable, with rapidly fluctuating winter temperatures that can halt sap production.

Terrain is another hurdle, as bigleaf maples may grow on vertical slopes or other densely wooded areas that present access problems.

Finally, commercial equipment is currently not made locally, and must be ordered from manufacturers across the country. It will take a critical mass of commercial-scale producers before that infrastructure falls into place, Jones said.

Jones said he hopes his research will mitigate the risks and give the state's 100 or so hobbyists the confidence to expand.

"We just want to be there to support people and get them on the right path," he said.

# OSU research station receives largest ever private donation

By **GEORGE PAVEN**  
Capital Press

AURORA, Ore. — Facilities at Oregon State University's North Willamette Research and Extension Center are getting an upgrade, thanks in part to two large private donations.

The station received its largest ever gift last summer — \$500,000 from Carl and Kim Casale that will go toward remodeling laboratories and expanding wireless internet on the farm.

A \$250,000 donation from Northwest Farm Credit Services is also helping to build three new labs inside the Parker House, a farm house that was given to NWREC by Joan and Jack Parker in 1992 to accommodate field research and technical staff.

Mike Bondi, who until recently was the station director, said the upgrades are necessary to keep pace with changing technology and the needs of local agriculture.

"We don't have the ability within our current budgets and state budget year to year to fund major improvements like this," Bondi said. "Having gifts like this



Capital Press File

**Kim and Carl Casale at the family farm near Aurora, Ore. They have donated \$500,000 for work at Oregon State University's North Willamette Research and Extension Center.**

makes a world of difference. Now all of a sudden, we can do things we couldn't have normally done."

Bondi retired from OSU last year, but was integral in securing donations for the station. NWREC has 12 faculty members leading research programs on behalf of Willamette Valley growers to produce better, healthier and lower-cost crops.

## Bonding over tractors

It was fall 2020 when Bondi started working with Carl and Kim Casale.

The Casale family has farmed vegetables and berries in the community for generations, and Carl went on to become president and

CEO of CHS Inc., one of the country's largest agricultural cooperatives. He is now a senior partner at Ospraie Management LLC, a New York investment firm, and continues to manage the family farm in Aurora.

At the time, Carl was restoring a pair of vintage Allis-Chalmers tractors purchased by his father, Joe Jr., and grandfather, Joe Sr., nearly 70 years ago. Carl wanted to donate the tractors to OSU, where he and Kim both graduated and met as freshmen.

The Casales connected with Bondi, and after a tour of NWREC, they had further discussions about a larger donation that could advance



George Paven/Capital Press

**Mike Bondi, former station director at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, Ore.**

the station's research.

First, the couple paid \$18,000 for NWREC to complete a facilities master plan, identifying areas of need for investment. With the plan in hand, the Casales made a \$500,000 contribution.

Bondi said the bulk of the money, \$450,000, will be used to remodel two labs in the basement of the station's main building, where crop and soil samples from field trials are analyzed.

"The building was built back in the 1960s," Bondi said. "It's all old and needs to be updated."

The remaining \$50,000 will expand wireless internet across the entire 160-acre farm, allowing researchers to

control irrigation and access data from the field.

"Internet access across the entire farm is something our faculty have been asking about for quite some time," Bondi said. "The Casale gift will help make this possible, too."

## Parker House makeover

Renovations to the Parker House are slated to begin soon, Bondi said.

When finished, the house will have a soils lab, plant lab and molecular lab.

The project's budget is a combination of public and private funding, with about \$400,000 from the state and \$250,000 from Northwest Farm Credit Services, an agricultural lender.

Bondi said researchers hope to move into the new Parker House labs by summer. Faculty will then reassess what is needed for lab renovations covered by the Casale donation.

That planning will be done later in the spring by NWREC's new director, Surendra Dara, who was hired in January.

"I would hope they are going to get the construction rolling later next winter and into 2023," Bondi said.

## CALENDAR

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

### TUESDAY-THURSDAY FEB. 8-10

**World Ag Expo:** 9 a.m. International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Las Pina St., Tulare, Calif. One of the world's largest ag shows returns this year to Tulare, Calif. With hundreds of exhibitors, presentations, seminars and other events, the World Ag Expo attracts attendees from

around the nation — and the world. Website: <http://www.WorldAg-Expo.org>

### WEDNESDAY FEB. 9

**Intro to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points:** 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) is an internationally recognized method of identifying and managing food safety-related risk. Participants will receive an International HACCP Alliance seal and certificate. Website: <https://techhelp.reg>

[www.introhaccp2022](http://www.introhaccp2022)

**Horse Keeping and Land Management Masterclass Series:** The Tualatin and Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Alayne Blicke of Horses for Clean Water are presenting this masterclass series. Whether you're new to horse-keeping or have years of experience, this course will help you learn ways to simplify your chores while managing your property in a way that benefits the entire ecosystem. Free workshops will be held virtually on Wednesday nights from Feb. 9 to

March 16 at 6:30-7:30 p.m. Registration id required. Sign up at <https://bit.ly/3Km95Qd> Questions? Contact Kristina Peterson at [kristina.peterson@tualatinswcd.org](mailto:kristina.peterson@tualatinswcd.org)

### WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY FEB. 9-12

**Organic Seed Growers Conference:** Oregon State University Campus. The Organic Seed Growers Conference is the largest event focused solely on organic seed in North America, bringing together hundreds of farmers, plant breed-

ers, researchers, certifiers, food companies, seed companies, and others from across the U.S. and around the world. Farm tours and short courses are held prior to the full two-day conference. Website: <https://seedalliance.org/>

### FRIDAY-SATURDAY FEB. 18-19

**Oregon State University Small Farms Conference (online):** Everything you ever wanted to know about succeeding as a small-scale farmer. Website: <https://bit.ly/3IA8jx9>



**Capital Press**  
EMPOWERING PRODUCERS OF FOOD & FIBER  
Established 1928

### Capital Press Managers

Joe Beach ..... Editor & Publisher  
Anne Long ..... Advertising Director  
Carl Sampson ..... Managing Editor  
Samantha Stinnett ..... Circulation Manager

Entire contents copyright © 2022  
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.

### To Reach Us

Circulation ..... 800-781-3214  
Email ..... [Circulation@capitalpress.com](mailto: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 Wriughthouse ..... 800-882-6789

### To Place Classified Ads

Telephone (toll free) ..... 800-882-6789  
Online ..... [CapitalPress.com/classifieds](http://CapitalPress.com/classifieds)

### Subscriptions

Mail rates paid in advance  
Easy Pay U.S. \$4 /month  
(direct withdrawal from bank  
or credit card account)

1 year U.S. .... \$ 65

2 years U.S. .... \$115

1 year Canada ..... \$230

1 year other countries ..... call for quote

1 year Internet only ..... \$ 52

Visa and Mastercard accepted

### To get information published

#### Mailing address:

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

#### News:

Contact the main office  
or news staff member closest to you,  
send the information to  
[newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com)  
or mail it to "Newsroom," c/o Capital Press.  
Include a contact telephone number.

#### Letters to the Editor:

Send your  
comments on agriculture-related public  
issues to [opinions@capitalpress.com](mailto:opinions@capitalpress.com), or  
mail your letter to "Opinion," c/o Capital  
Press. Letters should be limited to  
300 words. Deadline: Noon Monday.

### Capital Press ag media

CapitalPress.com  
FarmSeller.com  
[MarketPlace.capitalpress.com](http://MarketPlace.capitalpress.com)  
[facebook.com/CapitalPress](https://facebook.com/CapitalPress)  
[facebook.com/FarmSeller](https://facebook.com/FarmSeller)  
[twitter.com/CapitalPress](https://twitter.com/CapitalPress)  
[youtube.com/CapitalPressvideo](https://youtube.com/CapitalPressvideo)

### Index

Dairy ..... 8  
Markets ..... 12  
Opinion ..... 6

### Correction policy

Accuracy is important to Capital Press  
staff and to our readers.

If you see a misstatement, omission or  
factual error in a headline, story or photo  
caption, please call the Capital Press news  
department at 503-364-4431, or send  
email to [newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com).

We want to publish corrections  
to set the record straight.