



OSU
Bernadine Strik, Oregon State University Extension berry specialist, received a lifetime achievement award from the industry.

‘Berry goddess’ earns lifetime achievement award from industry

By **GEORGE PAVLEN**
Capital Press

SALEM — For her final presentation to the Oregon blueberry industry before officially settling into retirement, Bernadine Strik had one hour to condense 34 years of horticultural research that has helped the region to become a leader in global production. Strik was hired by the Oregon State University Extension Service in 1987, specializing in berry crops and winegrapes. Since 1992, she has led the berry research program at OSU’s North Willamette Research and Extension Center, where one administrator bestowed on her the title of “berry goddess.”

A lot has changed over the decades, Strik told growers Feb. 14 at the annual Oregon Blueberry Conference in Salem. Her experiments led to widespread changes in farming practices — including the adoption of raised beds, trellises and narrower spacing between plants — greatly increasing yields and harvest efficiency.

Today, Oregon produces the highest volume of blueberries in the world, with 160 million pounds from 15,000 acres in 2020.

In recognition of her work, the Oregon Blueberry Commission presented Strik with its lifetime achievement award, bidding a fond farewell to the trailblazing scientist.

“I was raised on a farm, and all I’ve ever wanted to do was to make a difference,” said Strik, who retired from OSU on Jan. 1. “I can’t think of an award that means so much to me, because it’s from the industry. It’s a big part of the job I love to do.”

Strik gave a career retrospective that highlighted key findings from her blueberry trials at NWREC, and offered her thoughts for the future.

When she first started at OSU, Strik said the standard for blueberries was to grow on flat ground, without mulch or trellises, and 4-5 feet between plants in rows. Machine harvesting was just beginning to gain steam.

Her first industry-funded proposal looked at increasing planting density to maximize yields faster during establishment years. The results showed that yields actually increased 50% planting bushes 3 feet apart, as opposed to 4 feet.

“We were having a huge impact on yield during those establishment years,” Strik said.

Higher density plantings are now common among northern highbush blueberries. “I’ve never seen anything I’ve done be adopted so quickly,” Strik commented. Most growers space plants 2.5 feet to 3 feet apart in rows.

As part of the same experiment, Strik also began studying trellises, which similarly became commonplace. Her findings showed that, without trellising, an average of 20-24% of yield was lost on the ground during machine picking. With trellises, efficiency of machine harvesting improved 4-8 percentage points.

Another project found that cumulative blueberry yields increased 22% over eight years when planted in raised beds versus flat ground.

As for organic systems, Strik found using a weed mat helped reduced weed management costs by 75% compared to sawdust or compost mulches. To avoid losing soil organic matter, she suggested a layer of sawdust under the weed mats.

Coming off the 2021 heat dome during which temperatures at NWREC soared as high as 113 degrees, Strik said more research will be needed to better understand how different blueberry varieties tolerate heat, and possibly breed new varieties better adapted for a warmer climate.

Strik said evaporative cooling systems and overhead sprinklers may also be necessary to help blueberries withstand higher summer temperatures — though she acknowledged that would be a significant investment for growers.

Following the presentation, T.J. Hafner, a certified crop adviser with AgriCare and chairman of the Oregon Blueberry Commission, presented Strik with the award.

“There is no doubt that you want to see the best for the industry, and have it be successful and thrive,” Hafner said.

The commission also showed a video tribute to Strik, with several farmers offering their congratulations.

“We are going to miss you more than you will ever know,” said Jeff Malensky, president of Oregon Berry Packing in Hillsboro.

Environmental concerns increasing in the West

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

A new survey shows growing concerns over how drought and other factors are impacting the Rocky Mountain region.

The Conservation in the West poll by Colorado College’s State of the Rockies Project showed a spike in concerns over issues such as drought, water supplies, wildfires, climate change and the loss of wildlife habitat and natural spaces.

“We are seeing a perfect storm of threats that are driving higher levels of concern than ever before for the state of lands and water in the Mountain West,” said Katrina Miller-Stevens, director of the State of the Rockies Project and an associate professor at Colorado College.

The poll surveyed 3,400 registered voters in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

The survey is increasingly getting pessimistic responses on the future of nature, defined as land, water, air and wildlife, said Lori Weigel, principal of New Bridge Strategy, an



Idaho Conservation League
A survey of residents of the Rocky Mountain region revealed growing concerns over drought and climate.

opinion research company. The new poll found 69% of voters surveyed are more worried about the future of nature. That’s up from 61% last year.

“We have fewer that are telling us that they are hopeful,” she said, adding that 28% said they were hopeful. That’s down from 36% last year, she said during a webinar Thursday on the poll results.

Climate change was the No. 1 reason people were feeling pessimistic in 2021, and that probable carried over in 2022. Concern over climate change “has really inched up quite dramatically over the years,” she said.

It’s gone from 55% of those surveyed in 2011

to 77% in 2022. In addition, those who see climate change as an extremely or very serious problem have gone from 27% in 2011 to 52% in 2022, she said.

There’s also been a dramatic increase in those saying climate change is a serious problem that needs immediate action. That went from 24% of those surveyed in 2011 to 44% in 2022. Another 21% think something needs to be done, she said.

“The vast majority say something needs to be done in this respect,” she said.

That could be related to recent events in responders’ states. Drought and reduced snowpack were listed as the strongest concerns at 86%.

More frequent and severe wildfires followed with 82%, she said.

Concerns over inadequate water supplies shot up from 40% in 2011 to 70% in 2022. Surveyors are seeing a significant increase in concern about drought and reduced snowpack, from 43% in 2011 to 74% in 2022.

The concern over low levels of water in rivers has risen from 42% in 2011 to 75% in 2022, and the concern over inadequate water supplies has gone from 35% to 70%, she said.

The survey also polled voters on a range of policy questions to address inadequate water supplies. It found 81% of respondents said water supplies should be used more wisely by encouraging conservation, reducing use and recycling, she said.

Concerns about air quality and extreme weather events also really resonated with respondents, she said.

Three-fourths of voters say they are at least somewhat concerned by wildfires, and four out of five say the lack of planning for natural disasters is a serious problem, she said.

Idaho Senate panel backs bill on post-sale water rights

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The Idaho Senate Resources & Environment Committee Feb. 16 advanced a bill that aims to make more of the state’s new residents aware of what happens to water rights when a property sells.

Senate Bill 1278 would amend the real property code to say water rights transfer to the new owner unless expressly retained by the seller — including entitlements and requirements from an irrigation district, canal company or



Paul Arrington

city irrigation system. The legislation would put into state code what is already done by common law and practice. Paul Arrington, Idaho Water Users Association executive director and general counsel, said courts have long held that water rights automatically go to the buyer unless the deed says otherwise.

The legislation “serves as a reminder,” he said.

“This is a reminder that these processes exist.”

Idaho Title 42 covers water rights and reclamation related to irrigation and drainage. Title 43 covers irrigation districts.

But it is Title 55 that SB 1278 would amend. This part of the state code covers property in general. It has a chapter on the transfer of real property.

Arrington said the legislation proposes to amend the property code “because that is the first place realtors and buyers will look.”

It is important considering that properties sell

faster amid growth and increased urbanization in much of the state, he said.

Arrington said it would help more new owners understand water rights and obligations. That in turn would benefit irrigation districts and canal companies as they address challenges related to urbanization.

The committee voted to send the bill to the full Senate with a do-pass recommendation.

Chairman Steve Vick, R-Dalton Gardens, said it is important “as we develop, and also as we drift away from common law.”

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