

People & Places

Unique crop adds spice to farm

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

KELSEYVILLE, Calif. — When Simon Avery and Melinda Price were considering going into farming, they wanted to find a unique crop, not one that hundreds of other farms across California were already growing.

The pair met in 2016, and their conversation had turned to farming and finding that niche crop.

They ruled out several options.

Mushrooms were eliminated because they involved working inside a dark warehouse. Hops need too much water, and vanilla was not suited for the Northern California climate.

But saffron checked all the boxes. The rare and expensive spice needed relatively little water, making it perfect for the Mediterranean climate, and no one in the region was growing the crop.

They founded Peace and Plenty Farm near Kelseyville, Calif., and soon had what they call the largest organic saffron farm in North America.

Saffron is used as a seasoning and as a fragrance. It is also known as the “sunshine spice” not only for its golden color but for its mood-boosting qualities. It is grown along the north shore of the Mediterranean Sea and in Turkey and southern Asia, but only a few farms in the U.S. raise the spice.



Simon Avery and Melinda Price of Peace and Plenty Farm in Kelseyville, Calif.

“Simon (Avery) and I purchased the 7.3-acre property in 2017, and had our first saffron harvest that year, said Melinda Price. “We opened the farmstand in 2018.”

The property was once known as “Gaddy Ranch,” and had been homesteaded in the 1800s.

Here’s the growing cycle of saffron:

Saffron corms — a bulb-like structure — remain dormant through the summer and are planted in late August and early September. They “wake up” in response to falling autumn temperatures. The corms send up shoots in October, and bloom from mid-October

through mid-November.

That’s when the saffron is harvested by hand and the stigma — the saffron spice — is separated by hand.

The bloom is over by November, when the corms put their energy into growing leaves and roots through winter and spring. “Mother corms” planted deeper yield higher-quality saffron.

By late spring or early summer, the leaves begin to yellow, eventually turning brown and dying back, indicating that the corms have gone back into dormancy for the summer. Each corm forms new bulbs. This is how the plant multiplies.

“We sell our saffron at our on-site farmstand, on our website and to stores and boutiques across the country,” Price said. “All the packaging and processing is done in a specially built facility on the farm.”

On their website, 1 gram of saffron sells for \$75. One ounce is equal to 28.3 grams. They also sell 4.6 ounces of saffron-infused raw honey for \$20.

The price is so high because picking the flowers and obtaining the saffron “threads” is all done by hand. One flower produces about 7 milligrams of dried saffron. That’s equal to about 0.0002 ounces.



Western Innovator

MELINDA PRICE AND SIMON AVERY

Owners: Peace and Plenty Farm.

Location: Kelseyville, Calif.

Occupation: Farmers

Education: Melinda has a bachelor’s degree from University of the Pacific in Stockton; Simon has a bachelor’s degree from the University of London.

Website: www.peaceplentyfarm.com

Personal quote: “At Peace & Plenty Farm, our goal is to build a thriving organic farm that creates a place for the community to gather, a place for children to learn and to contribute to an economy of local and sustainable agriculture.”



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Index

Dairy 9
Opinion 6

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Rural fire districts could change under proposed law

By ALEX WITTMER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE, Ore. — Rural residents outside city limits may be brought into a city’s fire district under a bill before the Oregon Legislature, resulting in increased taxes to pay for the service.

Senate Bill 1582 would allow rural fire districts to annex areas within 7 road miles of a fire department. That means residents who might have forgone paying taxes for fire protection services could see an increase to help fund the departments. The Senate on Feb. 17 passed the bill 18-8.

For some fire chiefs, the legislation would give their departments the option to increase taxes. La Grande Rural Fire District Chief Craig Kretschmer said his department is not keen on making property owners



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group File
Pilot Rock Rural Fire Protection District crews and firefighters from other departments extinguish a fire last year in Pilot Rock, Ore. Senate Bill 1582 in the Oregon legislature would allow rural fire districts to annex areas within 7 road miles of a fire department.

pony up for the service.

“Essentially, it would give fire protection districts the right to annex folks 7 miles from their station into your district,” he said. “It’s not

something we really want to do, to force people, right?”

Instead, Kretschmer said his department would focus on using the legislation as a tool to educate residents not

covered by the district about their options, and give them the ability to join if they choose.

According to Kretschmer, more than 40,000 acres in Union County is not covered by the fire district.

“We’ve been looking at ways to let people know, because not everybody in the valley knows they don’t have fire protection,” he said. “This would be just another tool that could be used. Now, you never want to force anybody to do anything, right, so our goal is to let people know that hey, your house is not protected so there’s a good chance that you won’t have a fire department response.”

Kretschmer said dispatch in Union County can see whether a house is covered by the district, and whether they pay into the essential fire service. In Umatilla County, it’s not as clear cut, accord-

ing to Umatilla Fire District 1 Chief Scott Stanton. That leads to issues when some fire threatens homes and firefighters scramble to fight a fire, leaving little time to discern whether that home is covered.

“Imagine going to a fire scene,” Stanton said, “whether it’s here or Douglas County or wherever, and you go up to a subdivision and you know that there’s two homes maybe in there that have chosen not to pay the fire district. You may not know in an emergency situation which one is paying and which one isn’t, so you’re just going to do your work and then all of the sudden they find out they’re not paying.”

Stanton also said the discrepancy between who does and doesn’t pay for fire services can create inequalities.

Major renovation of Oregon Trail Interpretive Center starts soon

By JAYSON JACOBY
EO Media Group

BAKER CITY, Ore. — The biggest project at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center near Baker City since it opened almost 30 years ago began on March 2.

The \$6.5 million makeover is designed to turn the center, which has attracted almost 2.4 million visitors, from an energy hog to a building with a more modest appetite for electricity.

Achieving that will entail much more than cosmetic work.

The Bureau of Land Management, the federal agency that operates the Center on Flagstaff Hill about 5 miles east of Baker City, has hired Hess Contracting of Preston, Idaho, to replace most items attached to its frame.

That includes installing new cement board siding, insulation, roofing, windows and doors.

The contractor will also replace the heating and cooling system for the all-electric building.

The Interpretive Center, which has been closed since November 2020 due to the pandemic, will remain closed during the remodeling. Work started in October to remove exhibits and other items in preparation for the project.

The work is slated to be finished in the spring of 2023, but the Center will stay closed for several more months while exhibits and fixtures are reinstalled.

That’s a shorter duration than BLM originally expected, said Larisa Bogardus, public affairs officer for the BLM’s Vale District.

Initially the agency expected the remodeling would take more than 2 years.

The impetus for the project was a nationwide survey comparing the energy efficiency of BLM buildings, Bogardus said.

That survey, which included an inspection of the Interpretive Center in May 2018, earned the Center the “dubious distinction” of being the agency’s least efficient building, Bogardus said.

Among the findings is that the Center’s “Energy Use Intensity” — a measure of its inefficiency — was 170 kilo-British Thermal Units per square foot. The average for BLM facilities is 84, according to the survey.

The Center when operating had a monthly power bill averaging \$10,000.

The remodel is estimated to reduce the Center’s energy use by 73%, according to a press release from the Vale District.

“We want to be good stewards of our natural resources,” said Vale District Manager Wayne Monger, whose office oversees the center. “This design utilizes high thermal insulation value materials and high efficiency heating and cooling technology to counter summer and winter

energy demands of the site.”

Approximately 16% of the project is funded through the Great American Outdoors Act, which allocates up to \$1.9 billion annually for maintenance and improvements to critical facilities and infrastructure in national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, recreation areas and Tribal schools.

During the extended closure, a new exhibit at the Baker Heritage Museum in Baker City, scheduled to open in May 2022, will serve as an Oregon Trail Experience, with BLM park rangers on site to provide interpretive programs.

A series of living history demonstrations and other events will take place across Grove Street from the Heritage Museum at Geiser-Pollman Park.

“We recognize the important role the center plays in telling the history of Eastern Oregon and the settlement of the Pacific Northwest,” Monger said.

CALENDAR

**TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY
MARCH 8-9**

Oregon Wine Symposium 2022:
Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE
Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland.
The Oregon Winegrowers Association
will host an in-person event and
trade show March 8-9 at the Oregon
Convention Center. The live event
attracts industry owners, directors,
academics, winemakers, viticulturists,
and sales and marketing professionals.
Website: https://www.oregon-
winesymposiumlive.com/

**SATURDAY
MARCH 12**

Tour of Sheep Farm and FAM-

ACHA Training: 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Grand Ronde, Ore. OSU Extension
and Polk SWCD bring this workshop
for sheep and goat producers
who would like to be FAM-
ACHA certified and learn more
about small-scale sheep production
from expert farmers. FAM-
ACHA is a technique used to detect
the signs of barber pole worm, the
most common and costly internal
parasite in sheep and goats.
This technique can be used as
part of your animal health protocol
to identify animals that should
be dewormed. FAMACHA can help
you save on dewormer costs and
help to reduce parasite resistance
over time. This workshop includes

training by Dr. Chuck Estill, Carlson
College of Veterinary Medicine at
OSU and participants will receive
a FAMACHA certification and card.
Contact: Hayley White, 971-612-0027,
Hayley.white@oregonstate.edu

**THURSDAY-SUNDAY
MARCH 17-20**

Oregon FFA State Convention:
Deschutes County Fair and Expo
Center, 3800 SW Airport Way, Red-
mond, Ore. Oregon FFA members
from around the state will gather to
compete and to learn during their
annual convention in Redmond.
Website: https://oregonffa.com/
state-convention/

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events on www.capitalpress.com
or by email to newsroom@capital-
press.com.

**SATURDAY-SUNDAY
MARCH 5-6**

**Linn Benton Beekeepers
Association Bee School:** Day
1: March 5, 9 a.m. to noon, virtually
online via Zoom, basic
beekeeping, bee biology, over-
view of beekeeper’s year. Day 2:
March 6, 1 to 3 p.m., hands-on
at Corvallis Waldorf School,
3855 NE Highway 20, covered
outdoor location, bee-
keeping equipment and basic
tasks. Free to paid LBBA mem-

bers. Non-members \$25, which
includes membership. To regis-
ter or for more info email, info@
LBBA.us or http://www.LBBA.us/
beeschools/

**MONDAY-TUESDAY
MARCH 7-8**

**Oregon Dairy Farmers
Association Convention:** Salem
Convention Center, 200 Com-
mercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. The
convention is the time each
year for our members to net-
work, participate in association
discussions, and learn about
new technology and research
advancements. Website: https://
bit.ly/3GP6AIV