

# Koch Legacy Farms: Discovering the benefits of organic ag

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**  
For the Capital Press

CANBY, Ore. — Becoming a certified organic farm was a steep learning curve for Koch Legacy Farms, but its benefits have extended across the entire operation.

The Canby, Ore., farm got its start in 1900 when George and Conrad Koch made their way from Wisconsin to Oregon. They farmed and built barns and houses in the area.

Their third- and fourth-generation descendants now have charge of the farm: Ryan Koch and wife Holly and Ryan's parents, Steve and Mary Jane Koch.

Mary Jane runs the office and Holly, a crop and soil science major from Oregon State University, provides input on the science behind farming.

"Having a resident scientist and a top-notch book-keeper really helps," Ryan

Koch said.

The family grows a combination of conventional and certified organic crops, and the rest of the farm is in conventional grass, wheat and sugar beet seed with a few acres of hazelnuts in the mix.

The farm has continued to expand the acreage allocated to organic crops since getting certified 20 years ago, but it hasn't come easy.

"There's a big learning curve to growing organic and doing it well and we've learned a lot over the years," Koch said. "We've made quite a few investments in new cultivating equipment, including the RTK GPS which has been a huge game-changer for us."

The accuracy of GPS — the acronym for global positioning system — allows them to cultivate much closer to the row, allowing the operator to do the same quality job at the end of the day as at the



Koch Legacy Farms

**Ryan and Holly Koch, of Koch Legacy Farms near Canby, Ore., with their daughter, Edith. With Ryan's parents, Steve and Mary Jane Koch, the family grows a combination of conventional and certified organic crops.**

beginning. They had an "Aha! moment" when they realized the importance of soil health and have delved into cover

crops. "We've seen huge benefits," Koch said. "It's more expensive than conventional fertilizer but you get the benefits of soil health, which

closes that gap and makes it a beneficial process on both sides. We're also learning that by pushing soil health on our organic ground we hardly have any disease, and pests are minimal.

"We treat our cover crops like crops and take good care of them," Koch said. "Cover

crops get your water into the ground better; they make nutrients, pull nutrients up from down below and pull nitrogen out of the air.

"We used to look at them as an expense and now we look at them as an investment," Koch said. "More and more, we're relying on them to carry our crops through the season."

This year they're experimenting with their own blend of crimson clover, buckwheat, sunflowers, vetch and oats, with promising results.

"We no-tilled it into a green bean field and it looks really nice," Koch said. "That field probably won't need any added fertilizer this year."

For Koch, farming is more than an occupation.

"Farming just kind of came natural to me; I can't imagine doing anything else, and for me the fun part about the organic business is con-

tinuously pushing the limits and stressing the crop to find ways to make it work for us," he said. "Our goal is to grow crops without any added fertilizer and avoid irrigation wherever possible because each irrigation brings weeds."

"Organics has really changed the way we farm and with every year that goes by we get a little better," Koch said. "We're in a challenge-rich environment right now and having organic on the farm also gives us a good hedge against input costs."



Koch cannot think of a better place to farm than Oregon.

"We're proud to farm in Oregon; we can grow just about anything in the Northwest and the quality is higher than most," he said. "We have great personal relationships with our employees and I feel like I'm friends with everybody I work with in this industry."


# Valley

## Ultimate Flexibility<sup>®</sup>

Meet irrigation challenges head-on with greater water efficiency.

Consider what new low-pressure sprinkler technology can do for your operation. With today's crop values and increasing energy cost it's more important than ever to have a precise, uniform and efficient sprinkler package on all your irrigation equipment.



So call your Valley, dealer today to learn how you can maximize yields and minimize energy cost.

**20179 Main St.**  
**St. Paul, OR 97137**  
**503-633-1111**  
**www.ErnstIrrigation.com**

ERNST IRRIGATION

5272948-1



WESTERN  
PACKAGING

Your Future is Our Future...





WE SPECIALIZE IN BULK BAGS!

**BAGS:**

- Seed Bags
- Fertilizer Bags
- Feed Bags
- Potato Bags
- Printed Bags
- Plain Bags
- Bulk Bags
- Totes
- Woven Polypropylene
- Bopp
- Polyethylene
- Pocket Bags
- Roll Stock & More!

**HAY PRESS SUPPORT:**

- Hay Sleeves
- Strap
- Totes
- Printed or Plain
- Stretch Film  
(ALL GAUGES)

**WAREHOUSE PACKAGING:**

- Stretch Film
- Pallet Sheets
- Pallet Covers

**LOCATIONS:**

Albany, Oregon (MAIN OFFICE)  
Ellensburg, Washington

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Phone: 855-928-3856  
Fax: 541-497-6262  
[info@westernpackaging.com](mailto:info@westernpackaging.com)

CUSTOMER SERVICE  
IS OUR TOP PRIORITY!

www.westernpackaging.com

5274194-1