

People & Places

Researcher aims to lengthen Oregon's strawberry season

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

Oregon's strawberry season is short, typically lasting from late May or early June through September.

Oregon State University researcher Erica Chernoh is trying to change that. Her work aims to lengthen Oregon's strawberry-growing season. Early results from trials are promising, showing the season can be extended by at least 2 months.



Erica Chernoh



Low tunnels for strawberries.

Courtesy of Erica Chernoh

Historically, Oregon's industry has been focused on growing strawberries for processing rather than the fresh market, but experts say there's demand for fresh Oregon strawberries and potential for that sector to expand.

"People love fresh fruit and fresh berries, and so we do believe the market is there for fresh-market production," Chernoh said.

In a 2016 study from Oregon Tilth, a nonprofit focused on organic food and farming, retailers and distributors said Oregon farmers could be growing more strawberries — a crop for which there was "unmet demand."

When there aren't enough Oregon-grown strawberries to meet demand, the gap is filled by strawberries grown

in California or elsewhere.

"At a supermarket, oftentimes what you see are strawberries from out of state, you know. So, we're hoping to kind of fill that niche and void," Chernoh said.

Chernoh has a long history with strawberries. From 2010 to 2012, she worked with Sacramento County strawberry growers through the University of California Cooperative Extension.

After some time doing integrated crop management work internationally, she moved to Oregon.

Starting in 2018, Chernoh worked as research assistant for Javier Fernandez-Salvador on a program called the Oregon State University Berry Initiative at the North

Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora. The initiative is funded by the Oregon Legislature and Northwest Center for Small Fruits Research.

In 2019, Chernoh started her current position as an assistant professor of practice. She now has a split role as a researcher and educator — working on strawberry trials in Aurora and as an Extension Service agent in the Southern Willamette Valley.

When Fernandez-Salvador left to become director of the UC-Davis Olive Center in 2021, Chernoh became the OSU Berry Initiative's new leader.

To lengthen the timeframe during which strawberries can be grown, Cher-

noh has been experimenting with a variety of techniques, including growing berries in "tunnels" that resemble small greenhouses.

Growing strawberries in tunnels, Chernoh said, can extend the season up to about a month earlier and later — meaning high-quality strawberries can grow from early May through late October.

This year, Chernoh is running a trial to compare low-tunnel to high-tunnel production. She will be comparing the two systems in many ways: looking at yield, fruit quality, production timeframe and comparing labor efficiencies.

The researcher is also experimenting with strawberry cultivars, including

Western Innovator

ERICA CHERNOH

- **Age:** 45
- **Hometown:** Antioch, Calif.
- **Education:** Undergraduate degree, Humboldt State University; master's degree, UC-Davis in international agricultural development focused on sustainable cropping systems
- **Occupation:** Assistant professor of practice at Oregon State University

Albion and Seascape. Oregon's industry has historically produced mostly June-bearing cultivars, but the industry — with the help of OSU's Berry Initiative — is currently experimenting with "day neutral" varieties.

Day neutral refers to a variety's light sensitivity. Day-neutral strawberries can blossom and set fruit regardless of length of available daylight hours when temperatures are between 40 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Chernoh said she's excited about helping growers extend their season and meet demand.

Idaho ag community celebrates Waitley's honorary doctorate from UI

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Rick Waitley's recent honorary doctorate in agricultural sciences from the University of Idaho recognizes his 40-plus years of ag advocacy and his connection with many who share his passion.

"I feel very honored," he said following a Feb. 23 Boise recognition event that drew about 125 people. "It's a very busy week for us and a very busy week in the Legislature. I was amazed people would carve out an hour and 20 minutes. That was very, very nice."

When university President Scott Green informed Waitley last summer that he would receive the honorary doctorate, "it was a pretty big shock. It was never something I aspired to and totally took me by surprise."

Some 34 letters advocated



Joseph Pallen/UI

Rick Waitley receives an honorary doctorate in agricultural sciences during University of Idaho winter commencement Dec. 11, 2021. From the left are UI President Scott Green, Waitley and UI Provost and Executive Vice President Torrey Lawrence.

the honor for Waitley, who participated in commencement ceremonies at UI's main campus in Moscow Dec. 11.

He leads Food Producers of Idaho, Leadership Idaho Agriculture and Idaho Ag in the Classroom. He and colleagues at Association Management Group put together

the annual Larry Branen Idaho Ag Summit. He also lobbies for several commodity and other ag groups.

Michael Parrella, UI College of Agricultural and Life Sciences dean, said Waitley "has been a tremendous partner to the University of Idaho and particularly to CALS."

Parrella said Waitley advocates on behalf of Idaho agriculture, and serves on many boards and committees — including the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Dean's Advisory Board, which he chairs.

In that role, "he helps shape the vision for the college. His dedication to higher education is inspiring."

He is "a unique treasure for the state of Idaho's ag industry, and I think we sometimes take for granted how much Rick has done for us in his career for the ag industry's benefit," said Blair Wilson, a retired Northwest Farm Credit Services Idaho president.

Wayne Thiessen, a retired Ore-Ida Foods executive and former Idaho Potato Commission board member, said Waitley is accomplished and articulate, and "has a tremendous capacity for meeting people and identifying

a need in agriculture." And he is skilled at designing and developing activities and groups "to deal with and further Idaho agriculture."

Waitley grew up on a farm south of Meridian. He graduated from Meridian High School in 1969 and earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural education at UI in 1973. He taught vocational agriculture at Kuna High School until 1977, when he joined the national FFA staff.

He returned to Idaho after about a year to help care for his mother, who was ill. He served as executive director of the Idaho Dairymen's Association and executive secretary of the Idaho Cooperative Council. He formed a consulting business in 1979.

"We've got so many great people in ag," Waitley said.

He and his wife, Dorita, live in Meridian and have two adult daughters.

Washington wheat farmer talks crop insurance before House ag committee

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — USDA crop insurance programs don't cover farmers' cost of production, Washington wheat farmer Nicole Berg told the House Agriculture Committee this week.

"They don't even hit our break-even," Berg told the Capital Press.

The committee held a hearing March 1 to review the 2018 Farm Bill with a focus on Title I commodity programs.

Berg, who farms in Paterson, Wash., is vice president of the National Association of Wheat



Nicole Berg

Growers. She will assume the presidency during NAWG's annual meeting March 8-12 during the Commodity Classic in New Orleans.

USDA estimates the break-even price for wheat farmers is about \$6.32 per bushel. The crop insurance programs use \$5.50 per bushel as the reference price.

"It needs to be a little bit more equitable for farmers, especially since we're price-takers, not price-setters," Berg said.

NAWG will work to set its farm bill

priorities during the Commodity Classic. Berg hopes to discuss increasing the crop insurance reference price for wheat. Farm bill hearings may begin this spring.

She hoped to convey to the committee the importance of the agricultural safety net, as farmers face inflation and higher input costs.

Berg also highlighted key improvements made in the 2018 Farm Bill. She spotlighted giving farmers the option to choose between Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) each year. Previously, growers locked in one option for five years.

"As you know, markets, yields and

droughts and everything changes the scope of the countryside," she said.

Berg felt the committee responded well to her testimony. She's spoken before state agriculture committees, she said, but this was her first time speaking to a congressional committee.

Berg encouraged other wheat farmers to get involved in developing policy.

"We need all the wheat growers to tell our story," she said. "Anybody who wants to approach making a decision to be in a leadership role, I encourage them and I will totally support them."

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

SATURDAY MARCH 12

Tour of Sheep Farm and FAMACHA 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 FAMACHA certified and learn more about small-scale sheep production from expert farmers. FAMACHA 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 ani-

mal 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, Redmond, 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/>

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY MARCH 23-26

High Desert Stampede: Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center, 3800 SW Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. This annual ProRodeo Tour stop is going forward the last weekend in March as one of the top 60 rodeos in the country. We are expanding to three nights to give contestants and fans additional opportunities to participate. Let's rodeo! For the full schedule, go to the website: <https://bit.ly/33tT2hE> Contact: 844-414-2242, info@highdesertstampede.com

FRIDAY-SUNDAY MARCH 25-27

Northwest Horse Fair and Expo: 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday, and 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday. Linn County Fair and Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. The Northwest Horse Fair and Expo is a huge horse expo packed with family-friendly fun, exciting equine entertainment and education. It features daily clinics with top-notch trainers and riders; Colt Starting Challenge USA; stunning stallions and beautiful breeds performing daily; giant trade show; and much more. More information: <https://bit.ly/3rvKaA9> or 765-720-2098.

SATURDAY-SUNDAY MARCH 26-27

Central Oregon Agricultural Show: 9 a.m. Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center, 3800 SW Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. Welcome to the first-ever Central Oregon Agricultural Show, featuring exhibitors, presentations, seminars and more. See you in Redmond! Website: <https://northweststagshow.com/> Phone: 800-882-6789

SATURDAY-TUESDAY MARCH 26-29

California FFA State Leadership Conference: Golden 1 Center, 500 David Stern Walk, Sacramento, Calif. More than 7,000 FFA members will gather for this year's convention in Sacramento. Website: <https://bit.ly/3sgmifR>



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Index

Crisis in Ukraine 3
Dairy 9
Markets 12
Opinion 6
Water 7

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