

Bielemeier family: Hazelnut trees a long-term investment

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

MT. ANGEL, Ore. — In an area where family farms are commonplace, Aaron Bielemeier and his family have broken new ground — literally.

Aaron and Abby Bielemeier, with his parents John and Mary Kay Bielemeier and a cousin and his wife, bought 84 acres along the Pudding River near Mt. Angel, Ore., in June 2016.

They cleared and leveled ground and in 2018 planted 50 acres to hazelnut trees and tall turf fescue grass seed. The grass, planted between the rows as a cash crop while the trees grew, will come out once the trees hit their stride.

In the meantime, the family also purchased a 31-acre field in Crabtree, Ore., in 2017, which they subse-



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press

A good day's work for Mt. Angel, Ore., hazelnut growers Aaron and Abby Bielemeier and sons Maxon, 7, and Kelvin, 5. They've been busy laying out the welcome mat for birds of prey by erecting raptor perches throughout the young orchards.

quently planted to hazelnuts.

"We look at hazelnuts as a long-term investment; something for our kids into the future," Aaron Bielemeier said. "I like being in an agri-

cultural community and we have family ties here.

"The other part is that it's just fun to grow things," Bielemeier said. "It's so nice to be outside; I could be out

here pruning and working with the trees all the time."

Aaron grew up near Hood River, Ore., where his father worked in and around orchards, but hazelnut orchards require much less labor to maintain than pear orchards, making them a better fit for a small crew.

Until several months ago, Bielemeier had to commute from the coastal city of Astoria, Ore., to work on the farm. There he served as a career firefighter for 16 years until being hired by the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards

and Training in Salem as a regional fire trainer. He now trains firefighters across the state.

"Our trees are a little behind, but we also just moved from the coast at the end of August," he said. "With my parents, we all had full-time jobs and owned an RV park and convenience store in Astoria, so there was a lot going on at the coast and the orchard kind of took a back seat."

The Bielemeiers planted each orchard in four blocks containing the same varietal pattern: McDonald, Jefferson, Wepster and Yamhill.

"We would like to potentially harvest variety-specific," Bielemeier said. "The market pays by variety price per pound and, wanting as many options as possible, were available at the time.

"We also figured that pollination wouldn't be an issue with planting multiple varieties," he said.

They purchased many of their trees from Canby's Birkemeier Nurseries, which also planted their orchards.

"Loren Birkemeier planted our orchard — three fields, 5,000-plus trees — in one day," Bielemeier said. "It was rather amazing how fast we had a standing orchard."

In fact, the whole thing almost seems like a dream to Bielemeier who, as a kid visiting from Hood River, used to envy his Mt. Angel cousins who got to grow up on the farm running farm machinery.

"I always wanted to get into farming, and what kid doesn't want to be a firefighter?" Bielemeier said. "I get to play with fire trucks, then go out and play with big tractors and equipment."

Abby and Aaron Bielemeier and their boys Maxon, 7, and Kelvin, 5, are excited about their latest venture — keeping moles, gophers, voles and field mice at bay by making their orchards more hospitable to raptors.

Repurposing hop poles from Riverside Hop Farms in St. Paul, Ore., with a crossbar or platform at the top, the Bielemeiers are sinking them throughout the orchards to provide convenient resting and nesting places for the local birds of prey already keeping an eagle eye on the farm.

"When we're mowing in the summer, we'll have red tail hawks following us," Birkemeier said. "When we're doing groundwork, they're constantly watching, and it's pretty cool when one swoops in close for a vole."

EVERYTHING A FARMER NEEDS UNDER ONE ROOF

Burrows is the one stop shop for all your orchard, vineyard and hopyard needs.



CONTACT US TODAY TO SCHEDULE A DEMO!

YOUR SPECIALTY TRACTOR LEADER FOR ORCHARD, NUTS, & VINES

1888) 819-5045 • BURROWSTRACTOR.COM

SERVING THE ENTIRE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

YAKIMA, WA • WENATCHEE, WA • SUNNYSIDE, WA • HILLSBORO, OR



INVESTING IN OUR AG COMMUNITIES FOR 65 YEARS

Banking with a Local Focus:

- On-site Loan Officers who are empowered to make local loan decisions, offering a variety of ag operating lines of credit and equipment & real estate term loans.
- Access to modern banking technology supported by personalized care you expect from a community bank.

CITIZENS BANK™
Good Business. Good Friends.
www.citizensEbank.com

15 Branches across 13 communities in the Willamette Valley



Member
FDIC

