

# Washington's new FFA officers look ahead to year after pandemic

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — New state officers were elected Saturday, capping the Washington FFA's state convention.

It was the first in-person convention in two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the first time the convention has been in Kennewick, Wash.

"For this year, I'm really hoping we get members back involved, back in the swing of things now that we're mostly out of the woods with the pandemic and can have things in person again," Samuel Gillis, newly elected president for the coming year, told the Capital Press.

Gillis said he wants members to be excited, but also feel included.

"We've been suffering with isolation for so long, just making sure every member has the chance to succeed and feel included," he said. "That's the big thing for this year for me."

The new state officers are:

**President: Samuel Gillis, Elma FFA, senior**

How does it feel? "It feels great."

Agriculture background: Family owned a small tree farm in Florida for several years; when he was 5, he and his dad



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

From left to right, the new Washington FFA state officers are sentinel Pedro Mendoza-Zamora of East Wenatchee, reporter Lillian McGregor of LaCrosse, secretary Esther Grosz of Rochester, vice president George Dress of Kamiakin FFA in Kennewick, treasurer Madi Weber of Pullman and president Samuel Gillis of Elma.

started a nursery in their backyard, selling plants at local fairs and festivals.

Family: His father was an ag teacher and FFA member, an aunt is a former state officer, grandfather was ag education teacher for 30-40 years.

Favorite thing about FFA: "Definitely the community feel. I enjoy getting to see all of the people in different blue jackets. It just immediately feels like home and makes me feel all warm inside, like a nice box of good cookies. It's definitely exciting to see everyone back and in person for convention."

Plans: Double major in agricultural education and horticulture at Washington State University; wants to become an agricultural educator.

**Vice President: George Dress, Kamiakin FFA, Kennewick, senior**

How does it feel? "It means so much, it really does. I don't even know how to explain it. It's a really great experience to continue to benefit the organization and Washington state, and make sure to help members get involved and understand what agriculture is all about."

Agriculture background: Family is involved in the agriculture retail industry, owning Ranch & Home stores.

Family: His mom was involved in FFA. Her uncles were also involved.

Favorite thing about FFA: "Just getting to socialize with all of the members and benefit agricultural edu-

cation, agriculture as a whole."

Plans: Associate's degree at Columbia Basin College in Pasco, go on to a four-year college to study agribusiness. "I really like real estate, so maybe try to sell farms and ranches some day."

**Secretary: Esther Grosz, Rochester FFA, senior**

How does it feel? "A little unreal, but super exciting."

Agriculture background: Parents own a farm in North Dakota, manage it from afar.

Family: First family member in FFA.

Favorite thing about FFA: "The members. I love connecting with people. That's my big thing."

Plans: Attend Washington State University for agribusiness or agri-law.

**Reporter: Lillian McGregor, LaCrosse FFA, senior**

How does it feel? "It feels really great. I'm really happy to help represent ag and Washington FFA across the state next year."

Agriculture background: Born and raised on a farm in Whitman County, family owns the McGregor Co., owns herd of 20 goats.

Family: Grandparents and parents were in FFA. "My parents actually met at an FFA competition."

Favorite thing about FFA: "All of the opportunities it has provided me ... It's really helped me a lot in terms of confidence. I remember my first FFA competition. Certainly I wouldn't ever have thought in a million years that I would be doing this when I started out in 7th grade."

Plans: Computer engineering degree at Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y.

**Treasurer: Madi Weber, Pullman FFA, senior**

How does it feel? "Relieving."

Agriculture background: Family owns a wheat farm.

Family: Her dad was in FFA.

Favorite thing about FFA: "All the people I've met and extemporaneous speaking."

Plans: Considering studying at University of Idaho or nearby to become a veterinarian.

**Sentinel: Pedro Mendoza-Zamora, Eastmont FFA; East Wenatchee, senior**

How does it feel? "Surreal. I can't believe it really happened. I'm still trying to process everything, but I think it'll be an amazing year with this amazing team."

Agriculture background: Parents work in the fruit industry.

Family: First family member in FFA.

Favorite thing about FFA: "Being able to meet different types of people from all over Washington and see what drives them to be in FFA."

Plans: Major in zoology or animal science at Washington State University, hopes to become a zookeeper or private researcher, working with endangered animals.

## Stripe rust begins to develop in PNW

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

The wheat disease stripe rust has been found in a handful of isolated areas of the Pacific Northwest.

The fungus was found on "isolated hotspots" on UI Magic in Morrow and Gilliam counties in Oregon, and two commercial fields near Walla Walla, Wash.

It was also found at low levels in experimental fields near Pullman, Central Ferry and Walla Walla, said Xianming Chen, USDA Agricultural Research Service plant geneticist.

Recent conditions have been favorable for stripe rust development, said Christina Hagerty, assistant professor of cereal pathology at Oregon State University.

"Late arrival of rust this year is good news for growers," she said. "The earlier rust arrives in the season, the bigger dent it typically makes on yield."

For highly susceptible varieties, such as UI Magic and Mary, it is best to spray when rust is first found rather than wait for flag leaf emergence, Hagerty and other OSU researchers said in a recent alert to growers.

Farmers should be prepared for a second spray, Hagerty said in the alert.

"Rust is never a disease to chase," she said. "We need to stay on top of it with timely applications in infected fields of susceptible varieties."

In his report, Chen recommended fungicide application for susceptible and moderately susceptible varieties of winter wheat before the flowering stage.

He also advised farmers to check fields planted to moderately resistant varieties.

"Growers should check fields immediately in southcentral and central Washington, Oregon, and southern and central Idaho for stripe rust," Chen said in a report. "Fields in the Palouse region of Washington and Idaho and farther north should be checked starting about (May 22)."

UI Magic is known to be susceptible to stripe rust. During years of disease pressure, growers should utilize fungicides, said Hannah Kammeyer, Pacific Northwest regional commercial manager for Limagrain, which developed the variety with the University of Idaho.

Limagrain is releasing two new Clearfield wheat varieties with improved stripe rust tolerance in collaboration with UI — VI Voodoo and VI Presto. Certified seed will be available this fall, Kammeyer said.

## Company helps farmers 'reset' orchards, berries

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

WOODBURN, Ore. — One by one, the Prinoth Raptor mowed over blighted hazelnut trees in a 30-acre orchard near Woodburn, Ore., snapping branches like toothpicks and leaving behind a trail of mulched wood and leafy debris.

Tom Senter stood and watched as the tank-like vehicle devoured each row. These trees, he said, were heavily infected with Eastern Filbert Blight, a fungal disease that reduces crop yield and requires labor-intensive management to avoid spreading.

Senter, who has farmed hazelnuts for 33 years, spent six seasons trying to save the orchard. Then came a major ice storm in February 2021 that caused severe damage for him and other producers across the Willamette Valley.

"The trees just broke off this high off the ground," Senter said, holding his hand to about his waist. "That was the final straw. ... Mother Nature made the decision for us."

Senter hired Advanced Land Management, a crop removal and reintegration company based in Sweet Home, Ore., to clear the orchard. That will allow him to replant newer blight-resistant hazelnut varieties — specifically McDonalds or PollyOs.

It isn't just hazelnuts driving demand for the ser-



George Plaven/Capital Press

The Prinoth Raptor maneuvers along rows of hazelnuts at an orchard near Woodburn, Ore., knocking down and mulching trees that will later be tilled into the ground using a Rotovator.

vice, said Matt Bostrom, the company's owner. Blueberry farms are also transitioning to newer varieties that can better handle extreme heat and drought, while apple growers are converting more acres to Honeycrisp and Cosmic Crisp to meet consumer demand.

"We can flip an orchard in days, depending on the size of it," Bostrom said. "And we don't have to burn anything. You don't have hardly any groundwork afterward."

Bostrom founded Advanced Land Management in 2008. At the time, he

was working mostly on timber and riparian restoration projects, doing everything from mowing brush to piling and burning nonsalable forest slash.

Rather than resorting to burn piles, Bostrom said he wanted to come up with a way to put all that organic, carbon-rich material back into the ground, where it could improve soil health and water retention.

In 2014, the company acquired the 630-horsepower Prinoth Raptor 800, one of the largest linear mulchers on the market. It

didn't take long to draw the attention of farms, Bostrom said, realizing its potential for resetting cropland.

The entire crop reintegration process takes several phases to complete. First, the Prinoth Raptor does the primary mulching, knocking down entire trees or consuming bushes down to the stump and roots.

A second round of mulching grinds the material even finer before it is mixed into the ground using a Rotovator. Once finished, the site looks like a freshly tilled garden, providing essentially a blank slate for farmers to replant newer and better crops for their operations.

After about two years, Bostrom said the organic material breaks down enough to significantly boost production.

"Overall, it's been great for the soil," Bostrom said.

Advanced Land Management works with about 200 clients per year in agriculture and forestry, from the Rogue Valley in Southern Oregon north to the Canadian border and as far east as the Tri-Cities in Washington. Bostrom said they plan to push into Northern California.

"We have the right machine for just about everything," he said.

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