

People & Places

Grower goes from teaching to farming

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

BRENTWOOD, Calif. — When Al Courchesne decided to quit his teaching job in Hawaii to farm in California, he got some good advice.

“I came here as a complete novice, and the first local farmer I talked to said, ‘Plant peaches, you’ll make nothing but money,’” Courchesne said. “He was right. People love peaches, and peaches grow better here than anywhere, even Georgia.”

“Farmer Al,” as he likes to be called, farmed tomatoes, corn, mixed vegetables and soybeans in Hawaii while teaching history to eighth-graders. When he realized farming was his true calling, he gave up the classroom and moved to Brentwood and started farming in 1976.

Today he farms 270 acres in Contra Costa County and raises more than 97 varieties of organic fruit. He also sells baked goods, dried fruits, meat, poultry and gift boxes through his stand and website.

Disease pests are ubiquitous, he said. Fungus and bacteria are everywhere in the environment and become a threat when conditions are favorable to their growth. It usually has to do with the temperature and moisture.

“As a general rule, bacteria and fungi don’t like it too



Foodwise

Al Courchesne of Brentwood, Calif., switched from teaching to full-time farming.

hot or too cold, they like it just right — just like people,” he said.

Drought continues to be the biggest challenge for California farmers but it has not directly affected his operation because of strong, pre-1914 water rights in the area.

“It has affected our planning and spending though,” he said. Out of caution and a desire for an “insurance backup,” he spent several hundred thousand dollars drilling a well, which will only be put to use if desperately needed.

He also installed permanent soil moisture probes throughout the farm to monitor the ground and make

more efficient use of irrigation water.

Fruit boxes are his biggest sellers.

Brie Mazurek, communications director of Foodwise, formerly CUESA, said Frog Hollow Farm has been a part of the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market since the market’s founding nearly 30 years ago.

“They’re beloved by market shoppers and restaurants like Chez Panisse alike for the delicious tree-ripened, organic fruit, as well as their hand-crafted preserves and pastries,” she said. “They exemplify the environmentally sustainable and regenerative values that

we champion here at Foodwise, with care for the land, their workers and our market community.”

Labor issues are a concern for Courchesne on a deeper level.

“Labor looms as a dark shadow on the horizon because of the unfriendly political landscape towards immigrants,” he said. “Here in California we understand and welcome immigrants but, generally speaking, immigrants from across the border are not welcome in America and that is felt in a very real way on an emotional level, in villages and townships all across Mexico.”



Western Innovator

‘FARMER AL’ COURCHESNE

Occupation: Farmer

Hometown: Brentwood, Calif.

Family: Wife and co-owner of Frog Hollow Farm, Becky Courchesne, and two teenage daughters

Education: B.A. in anthropology and Spanish from the University of California-Berkeley, 1965

Website: <https://www.frog hollow.com/>

Personal quote: “I wouldn’t trade this job for Jeff Bezos’ job.”

Immigrants just aren’t coming to the U.S. to seek temporary work like they used to, he said, and federal programs such as the H-2A guestworker visa are not built to help “small and medium-sized farmers, but unfairly stack the deck against us, in favor of big conventional agriculture,” he said.

See it? Squish it! Officials put out a hit on spotted lanternfly

By MICHAEL HILL
Associated Press

When Stephen Nixon recently noticed a “beautiful” spotted lanternfly by his bag as he skateboarded in Brooklyn, he heeded the request of city officials.

He stomped on it. “I don’t like killing things. Not many people do. I’ll catch and release cockroaches if I find them in my apartment,” Nixon said. But he said it “seems like something worse” if the insect’s population explodes.

Kill-on-sight requests in New York City and elsewhere are a part of public campaigns to fight an invasive insect now massing and feeding on plants around much of the eastern United States. Pretty with red wing markings, the spotted lanternfly is nonetheless a nuisance and a threat — the sort of insect that inspires people to post about squishing and stomping them on social media.

In cities, it swarms outside buildings and lands on pedestrians. It excretes a sticky substance called honeydew that can collect on outdoor furniture. The sap-sucking insect also poses a danger to grapes and other agricultural crops, which is raising alarms this summer in New York state wine country.

Across mid-Atlantic states, officials are asking people to help them



Lawrence Barringer/Pa. Dept. of Agriculture
An adult spotted lanternfly

track and slow its spread, even if they have to put their foot down.

“Be vigilant,” said Chris Logue of New York’s Department of Agriculture.

A native of Asia, the spotted lanternfly was first identified in the United States in 2014, northwest of Philadelphia. It’s likely that insect eggs came over with a load of landscaping stones. Eight years later, there are reported infestations in thirteen states, mostly on the East Coast, according to the New York State Integrated Pest Management program at Cornell University. Individual insects have been spotted in more states, with two turning up in Iowa this summer.

The insect has been able to spread so far, so fast because it is a stealthy hitchhiker. Drivers this time of year unwittingly give lifts to adults, which look like moths, perched inside trunks, on wheel wells or on bumpers.

“Check your vehicle,” warned Logue. “What you’re really after is

anything that maybe is alive, that is kind of hunkered down in there and is not going to get blown off the vehicle during the trip. Really, really important.”

People also unknowingly transport spotted lanternfly eggs, which are laid later in the season. Females leave masses of 30 or more eggs on all sorts of surfaces, from tree trunks to patio furniture. Eggs laid on portable surfaces, like camping trailers and train cars, can hatch in the spring many miles away.

Spotted lanternfly fighters are doing everything from applying pesticides to cutting down trees of heaven, another invasive species that is a favored host of the spotted lanternfly. But public involvement is front and center.

In Pennsylvania, residents in quarantined counties are asked to check for the pests on dozens of items — ranging from their vehicles, to camping gear to lumber and shrubs — before heading to non-quarantined destinations.

Around the East, people are being asked to report sightings to help track the spread.

And if you see one? Show no mercy.

“Kill it! Squash it, smash it ... just get rid of it,” reads a post by Pennsylvania agricultural officials.

New York City parks officials agree, advising: “please squish and dispose.”

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com. All times reflect the local time zone unless otherwise noted.

THROUGH AUG. 28
Western Idaho Fair: 11 a.m. Western Idaho Fairgrounds, 5610 Glenwood St., Boise. Western Idaho gets together annually for this celebration of country living. Website: <https://idahofair.com>

AUG. 26-SEPT. 5
Oregon State Fair: 10 a.m. Oregon State Fair & Exposition Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem. The Oregon State Fair continues through Sept. 5. Website: <https://oregon-statefair.org/>

SEPT. 2-10
Eastern Idaho State Fair: Eastern Idaho Fairgrounds, 97 Park St., Blackfoot, Idaho. It’s fair time in Idaho. Website: <https://funatthefair.com/general-info/>

SEPT. 2-25
Washington State Fair: 10:30 a.m. Puyallup Fairgrounds, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. The Washington State Fair is the largest single attraction held annually in the state of Washington. Closed Tuesdays and Sept. 7. Website: <https://www.thefair.com/>

THURSDAY SEPT. 8
Farm & Ranch Succession Planning and Working Lands Easements: 12:30-4 p.m. OSU Malheur County Extension, 710 Southwest 5th Ave., Ontario, Ore. Attorney June Flores will present on the topics of succession and estate planning, and how to prepare your

operation to be resilient for future generations. Easement specialist Marc Hudson will answer your questions about working lands conservation easements — what they are, what they aren’t, and how they may be helpful in executing your agricultural business plans. These in-person events are part of a free 6-workshop series in Lake, Harney and Malheur counties. All are welcome, and the events are free. RSVP for these or any of OAT’s other events and refer any questions about the event to diane@oregonagtrust.org 503-858-2683

FRIDAY SEPT. 9
Farm & Ranch Succession Planning and Working Lands Easements: 12:30-4 p.m. Burns Elks Lodge, 18 N. Broadway Ave., Burns, Ore. Attorney June Flores will present on the topics of succession and estate planning, and how to prepare your operation to be resilient for future generations. Easement specialist Marc Hudson will answer your questions about working lands conservation easements — what they are, what they aren’t, and how they may be helpful in executing your agricultural business plans. These in-person events are part of a free 6-workshop series in Lake, Harney and Malheur counties. All are welcome, and the events are free. RSVP for these or any of OAT’s other events and refer any questions about the event to diane@oregonagtrust.org 503-858-2683

SATURDAY OCT. 1
Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in White City: Rogue Transfer and Recycling, 8001 Table Rock Road, White City, Ore. The

Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or unused pesticide products. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov Registration for this event is required by Sept. 16. Website: <https://bit.ly/3FloyFE>

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY OCT. 5-6
National Cooperative Business Association IMPACT Conference (in person and online): National Press Club, Washington, D.C. The conference provides a platform to re-energize the cooperative movement. Website: <http://ncba-clusa.coop>

WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY OCT. 5-9
Trailing of the Sheep Festival: Ketchum, Idaho. The five-day festival includes activities in multiple venues and culminates with the big sheep parade down Main Street in Ketchum. Website: <https://www.trailingofthesheep.org>

FRIDAY OCT. 14
Federal Milk Marketing Order Forum: 12:30 p.m. local time Kansas City Marriott Downtown, Kansas City, Mo. Hosted by American Farm Bureau Federation, the forum will explore solutions to FMMO shortfalls. Registration closes at noon on Sept. 23. Website: <https://bit.ly/3QC08Xp>

SATURDAY OCT. 15
Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in Roseburg: Douglas County Fairgrounds, 2110 Frear St., Roseburg, Ore. The Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or unused pesticide products. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov Registration for this event is required by Sept. 16.

TUESDAY OCT. 18
FIRA USA Agricultural Robotics and Technology Forum: Fresno Convention Center, Fresno, Calif. The forum focuses on problem solving, decision making and planning for agricultural robotics. Website: <https://www.fira.usa/fira-agtech.com>

SATURDAY OCT. 22
Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in Madras: Jefferson County Fairgrounds, 2110 Frear St., Madras, Ore. The Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or unused pesticide products. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov Registration for this event is required by Sept. 16.

MONDAY-TUESDAY OCT. 24-25
Idaho Farm and Ranch Conference: Riverside Hotel, 2900 Chinden Blvd., Boise. Registration for the Idaho Farm and Ranch Conference is open now until Oct. 14. It’s never been a more important time to come together and exchange knowledge and expertise that position Idaho agriculture for success. Website: <https://agri.idaho.gov/farmcenter/conference/>

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY OCT. 26-29
85th National FFA Convention and Expo: Indianapolis. FFA members from around the nation will converge on Indianapolis to celebrate agriculture and compete. Website: <https://convention.ffa.org/>

FRIDAY-MONDAY NOV. 4-7
Angus Convention: Salt Palace Convention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah. The convention provides industry updates, education and networking. Website: <https://www.angusconvention.com>

TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY NOV. 30-DEC. 1
Organic Grower Summit: Hyatt Regency Hotel and Spa, Monterey, Calif. The summit offers presentation, education and networking. Website: <https://www.organicproducer-network.com>

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