

Blue Heron Vineyard: Family switches from cattle to growing grapes

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — Hal and Vicki Westbrook considered several options for their land as they contemplated transitioning out of the cattle industry.

At the top of the list of options were wine grapes, blueberries and hazelnuts. The final decision: wine grapes.

Blue Heron Vineyard was born at the southern end of Garden Valley a mile west of Roseburg with the first planting of wine grapes in 2011. More planting followed in 2012 and 2014. The vineyard expanded to 750 acres in 2020 when another 150 acres were planted in the Umpqua area at the northern end of Garden Valley.

The vineyard is 70% Pinot noir, 25% Pinot gris and 5% Chardonnay.

The vineyard is owned and operated by the Westbrook family. Teal and Taylor Stone manage the business. Teal is the daughter of Hal and Vicki Westbrook.

“They considered hazelnuts, blueberries and grapes,” said Teal of her parents’ decision. “All those markets have their advantages and disadvantages. They wanted a 30- to 40-year lifespan crop, something to invest in.

“They decided on wine grapes because they could be a standalone business with a huge market for the grapes,” she explained.

Teal and Taylor had both moved away from their Roseburg homes after high school to attend college. Taylor earned a construction management degree from Colo-



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Teal and Taylor Stone check out the wine grape crop at Blue Heron Vineyards near Roseburg in late July. The Stones manage the vineyard that was started in 2010 by Teal’s parents, Hal and Vicki Westbrook.

rado State University and Teal a human nutrition degree from Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo, Calif. Both were working in the San Francisco Bay Area for large companies, Teal in marketing and sales and Taylor in commercial construction, when they decided to move back north to Roseburg to help in the family business.

Teal and Taylor both said their

college educations and subsequent experiences have been useful in managing the vineyard. Teal said there are a lot of similarities in human nutrition and vine nutrition. She also had experience in contacting buyers and dealing with contracts and negotiations.

Taylor said there are similarities in what he was doing in commercial construction and now in

the management of the vineyard crews, lining out work and the tracking of field equipment and supplies.

The Stones said Blue Heron Vineyard is only in the business of growing and selling its grapes. There are no plans to build a winery and to make wines with a Blue Heron label.

“There’s a total art to mak-



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Blue Heron Vineyards, a mile west of Roseburg, Ore., was established in 2010 when Hal and Vicki Westbrook decided to transition from cattle to wine grapes.

ing wine and we’re not interested in it,” Teal said. “And then there’s the marketing, the sales of the wine. We have no interest in that.

“I do really appreciate what people are able to do in making wine, but it’s just not how we want to spend our time,” she added. “We’ll do our part and then it’s on them to make the wine.”

Blue Heron Vineyard has contracts of 5- to 10-year durations to sell the majority of its grapes to three Oregon wine making companies: Erath of the Dundee Hills area, A To Z Wineworks of Newberg and Union Wine Co. of Tualatin.

“These are our backbone buyers,” Teal said of the three. “We work with some others on a much smaller scale. It’s a big deal to us that we are an Oregon grower and that we’re not shipping our grapes out of state.”

“Our whole goal and business model is to grow as much fruit as possible at the highest quality,” Taylor said. “We feel like we’re achieving that.”

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