

VOICES of the

APPLEGATE

New session begins in January

Voices of the Applegate, our local community choir led by Blake Weller, has just ended the fall session of music. Two concerts were held, one on November 21 at the Old Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, and the other on November 23 at the Applegate River Lodge. Our concerts consisted of three Italian madrigals, gospel songs and folk songs.

We will begin another session in January with rehearsals at the Ruch Library starting on January 7 at 7 pm. Rehearsals are held every Wednesday evening until March 25, with concerts on March 27 and March 29.

Tuition is \$55, which includes all of our costs including music. Everyone is welcome to join, even if you have never sung in a choir before. If you can sing on tune, you're in!

For more information, call Joan Peterson at 541-846-6988.

The non-GMO sugar beet story

BY JONATHAN SPERO

The sugar beet industry is very concentrated, with just a few players. In the mid 1990s, the industry (led by Syngenta growing Monsanto's seed in southern Oregon) decided that they were going to go "Roundup Ready" and started using exclusively genetically engineered sugar beets. Trouble is, if buyers have a choice, they will pick non-GMO sugar, so the industry endeavored to remove non-GMO sugar beets from the marketplace. Rumor had it that they were all gone.

I turned to Seed Savers Exchange and found

Nesvizhskaya seed saved from a commercial variety in Belarus and claiming 17 to 18 percent sugar content. The seeds arrived and I planted them in 2013.

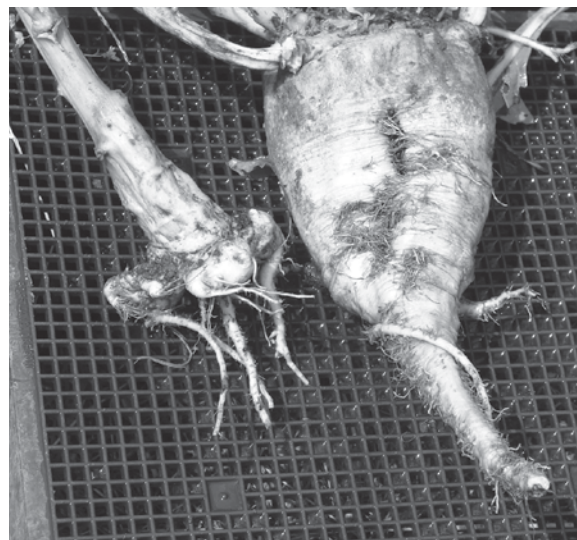
Beets are biennial. Most beet-seed growers grow what are called "stecklings" by planting in the late summer and harvesting small roots in the fall. They store the stecklings over winter and replant them in the spring to grow seed stalks.

Not me, though. Knowing little about growing beet seed, I planted in the spring to let them get big. I would just leave them in over winter. I had some Reemay fabric that I could cover them with in a cold snap. The easy way, right?

The gophers thought this was a tremendous idea. I spent summer, fall, winter and spring battling gophers.

I practiced a technique called "snibbeting" that I learned from former Applegate resident Dr. Alan Kapuler. He would snibbet carrots by harvesting the carrot, cutting off the bottom three quarters of the root to eat and compare, and replanting the top of the best roots to grow seed. My beet roots were being eaten anyhow, so I figured I might as well try to replant the snibbets.

Every couple of days I walked the sugar beet patch and frequently found plants fading away. The roots had been eaten. Sometimes all that was left was the top chunk of the root; other times there was not much at all. Many plant tops would



Snibbet beet root (left) and whole beet root (right).

just lift out of the ground. Each time I found such a plant, I dug it a new hole and replanted it.

For a long time the beets didn't look like they would survive, but I kept them watered, and many made it through, made a stalk, and produced seed. Of course, the uneaten roots made more seed, but the snibbets also had an advantage: there was not much tasty sugar-beet root left on the snibbets, so the gophers usually did not attack a second time. I credit snibbeting with saving this sugar beet population.

Nesvizhskaya sugar beets are now harvested and available from me at Lupine Knoll Farm. They have been tested for GMOs, and have none at all. The next step is to test sugar content.

It turns out that these are not the only non-GMO sugar beets in the western world. I hear that a couple of other seed growers have pulled out old seed that is pre-GMO, and are growing it this year. It appears that Horizon Herbs in Williams has had packet quantities of a sugar beet seed available all along.

Because sugar beets are the primary sweetener source that can be grown in places that freeze in the winter, they are a tremendously valuable crop. Organic beet sugar has a place in the market. Maybe it is Nesvizhskaya.

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