

New farmers learn basics at OSU's farm school

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

OREGON CITY — He was speaking to a class of beginning beekeepers, but Joe Maresh's advice probably could apply to all the prospective farmers who attended Oregon State University's one-day Small Farms School:

"Take your stings."

In other words, accept the fact that you will take your lumps in agriculture. But that doesn't deter the people who continue to flock to OSU's popular small farms programs. At least 175 registered for the Sept. 12 farm school workshops and demonstrations held at Clackamas Community College in Oregon City southeast of Portland.

Classes offered through the day ranged from horse and sheep handling and emergency veterinary care to pasture management, small engine basics and how to grow blueberries.

Maresh, president of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association, led about 30 students through the basics of keeping pollinators and collecting honey.

Among his tips: Get into your hives frequently to see what's going on, join a bee club and get one or two good



Joe Maresh, left, president of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association, advises beginning farmers during an OSU Small Farm School session Sept. 12.

Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

beekeeping books, not a bunch.

"Avoid beekeeping on the Internet," Maresh advised. "The Internet is not your friend."

"You can ask five different

beekeepers a question," he added, "and get eight different answers."

Irrigation

Outside at the college's expansive crop plots, Aaron

Guffy of East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District talked irrigation basics with two dozen beginning farmers.

In a fast-paced discussion of screens, filters, pump

pressure tanks and variable frequency drives, Guffy emphasized the need to focus on getting water from one place to another.

"Before you decide the beginning" of an irrigation sys-

tem, he said, "decide the end."

Where food is from

The turnout for farm school was indicative of the continued intense interest, especially in urban areas, about where food comes from and how it's produced, said Garry Stephenson, director of OSU's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems.

That interest can energize agriculture as legions of baby boomer farmers near retirement age.

"We have a generation of people in their 20s and 30s who are interested in going into farming as a business and as a statement of how they see the world," Stephenson said. "One of the hopes we have is that they will eventually scale up and become medium-size farms."

Not all the farm school students were youngsters, however.

John Hergenrath, attending from Hood River, said he's 70 and his wife, Rhea, is 65. They own a garden store and cafe, and recently bought an adjacent 6.5 acres on which they hope to grow food and plants to supply their business.

"We ask ourselves, 'What are we doing becoming farmers now?'" Hergenrath said with a laugh. "Lord knows."

Another food fight? Congress mulls school meal standards

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress is deciding whether it wants another pitched battle with first lady Michelle Obama and the administration over school lunches that put more whole grains in kids' meals and cut salty foods.

Last year, school food rules pitted Michelle Obama against Republicans seeking full exemptions for some schools. The first lady declared that she would fight "to the bitter end" to make sure kids have good nutrition.

Lawmakers are now hoping to find bipartisan com-

promise on the rules and also dollars for the nation's child nutrition programs before the law expires Sept. 30. So far, however, negotiations have failed to produce a bill in either the House or the Senate.

Lawmakers may not seek an immediate extension if the law expires. The school foods rules won't change unless Congress takes action, and the Agriculture Department says other programs would continue to operate as long as Congress passes a budget this fall.

The rules phased in since 2012 set fat, calorie, sugar, grain and sodium limits on foods in the lunch line and be-

yond. Schools have long been required to follow government nutrition rules if they accept federal reimbursements for free and reduced-price meals for low-income students, but the new standards are stricter.

While many schools have had success putting the rules in place, many Republicans say the standards have posed too many challenges for school nutrition officials who must balance serving healthy foods with keeping participation up in their programs.

The School Nutrition Association, a group of school nutrition directors, has pushed Congress to ease the whole grain and sodium standards and eliminate the stipulation

that all children buying a full lunch take a fruit or vegetable. They are also seeking a higher federal reimbursement rate.

Democrats, including Michelle Obama, would like to leave the standards alone and argue that they are working.

Beyond school lunch, child nutrition programs expiring at the end of the month include the Agriculture Department's Women, Infants and Children program for new and expecting mothers and their children, summer feeding programs and other government institutional food aid.

Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, is negotiating with the panel's top

Democrat, Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, to get a bipartisan bill. He said this week that changes to the sodium standards are a priority.

The 2012 standards already lowered salt levels in school meals, with even lower sodium levels set to start in two years. Some schools have said they will have to take many popular items off their menus if the 2017 levels go into effect.

Jessica Shelly, food service director at Cincinnati's urban public schools, says the new standards would mean she couldn't serve soy sauce or hot sauce with some items, condiments that have helped her get kids to eat healthier

foods like greens.

"We need to take care of that," Roberts said of the upcoming sodium rules. "You are serving kids food that some people would like to mandate that they eat, but they are simply not eating it."

After a GOP bid to let some schools have a one-year exemption from the standards failed last year, Congress passed legislation that would allow schools to temporarily request waivers from some of the whole grain requirements and put off the 2017 sodium standards until further study proved those reductions are needed. The Senate bill could make those changes permanent.

Dog stands guard for week protecting trapped friend

The Associated Press

VASHON ISLAND, Wash. — A Washington state animal shelter says a dog dutifully stood guard for a nearly a week on Vashon Island to protect another dog that had fallen in a cistern.

Tillie, a setter mix, only left Phoebe's side to try to alert people of her trapped friend.

Amy Carey of Vashon Island Pet Protectors says the two were found Tuesday after they were reported missing by their owners last week. Vashon Island Pet Protectors says volunteers looking for the pair received a call about a reddish dog being seen on someone's property a few times before promptly heading back into the ravine.

Carey says the Pet Protectors followed the tip and found Tillie lying beside an old cistern. Inside rescuers found Phoebe, a basset hound, on a pile of stones above the water.

The dogs were cold and hungry but otherwise unharmed.

"It's really quite remarkable," Carey said.



A setter mix named Tillie, left, watches over Phoebe, a basset hound who was trapped after falling into the cistern nearly a week earlier before being rescued by searchers on Vashon Island, Wash., Tuesday. A Washington state animal shelter says Tillie stood guard for a nearly a week to watch over Phoebe, only leaving her side to alert people of her trapped friend.

Amy Carey
Vashon Island
Pet Protectors

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