

Former banker bets on cider apples in Sherwood

Hard cider an industry on the rise, like craft beer

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

SHERWOOD — Richard Hostetter wasn't a farmer, but he knew the international investment game. He knew the big boys were increasingly favoring agriculture over the long haul. People have to eat, after all.

Arriving in Oregon in 2013 after 17 years in Tokyo, where he'd worked for big banks and investment houses, he searched for an opportunity. He figured he was too late to make money in Oregon blueberries or hazelnuts, and the wine industry likewise seemed over-populated.

When someone mentioned cider apples, his response was, "What the heck is that?" "Initially, I wasn't interested," he said. "I didn't think it had any legs."

Mimicking rise of craft beer

Research and due diligence convinced him otherwise. It quickly became apparent that

hard cider was an industry on the rise. Cideries and cider pubs were popping up everywhere, especially in Portland, mimicking the rise of the craft beer industry. Membership in the Northwest Cider Association grew from 17 to 70 in the past three years.

And just like wine grapes, the apples that make the best hard cider are different than the ones people like to eat. The rush is on to provide the bittersweet varieties — including old English and French apples — that make the best hard cider.

There is, Hostetter discovered, "A mismatch between rapidly growing demand and slow growing supply."

Which is how he came to plant 15,000 cider apple trees on three leased acres outside Sherwood, 20 miles south of Portland.

"I do believe there's a big opportunity in cider apples," he said. "I've rolled the dice fairly aggressively on this."

Emerging generation of farmers

In that sense, Hostetter, 47, represents a couple of truisms in Oregon agriculture. First, the emerging generation of farmers includes people new to



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Richard Hostetter, a former banker and financial consultant, is "rolling the dice" on the next hot agricultural crop by planting 15,000 cider apple trees in Sherwood.

the field but with other skills, experience or money. Second, Oregon's agricultural diversity — the state grows 220 crops — opens doors to unexpected economic development.

Hostetter is engaged in a crash course on grafting,

planting and growing fruit trees, all of which is complicated and costly. "Even the wood for grafting is worth a lot of money right now," he said.

The biggest difficulty has been finding farmland to buy,

with water rights, suitable soil and within striking distance of Portland. He has about two dozen varieties growing in close-packed nursery style on the leased land while he searches for property on which to transplant his orchard.

He believes the industry will achieve a high-quality niche once cider makers have a supply of proper apples.

Ten years from now, he hopes to be known as the owner of a sizable commercial cider apple business.

Climber dies in fall on Mount Jefferson

Associated Press

DETROIT — Marion County authorities say a climber has died from a fall on Mount Jefferson.

Coast Guard Air Station Astoria assisted several national and local agencies to search for a woman and her 32-year-old husband, Thomas Fountain.

Rescue efforts began Sunday after Fountain fell into a crevasse while climbing with his wife. Searchers could not reach the couple until Monday morning because of the difficult terrain.

Two MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crews from Coast Guard Air Station Astoria assisted in the pickup and delivery of 15 Corvallis Mountain Rescue Unit team members to a site where they were able to better access the missing hikers.

Sheriff's Lt. Chris Baldridge says Fountain's wife, 29-year-old Alison Fountain, is in good condition after a night on the cold mountain. He says crews were working to bring her down.

Public records show the couple most recently living in McMinnville. Alison Fountain's Facebook page says she works as a flight nurse at Reach Air Medical Services in Corvallis. Photos on Tommy Fountain's Facebook page show he was an avid climber.

At nearly 10,500 feet, Mount Jefferson is the second-highest peak in Oregon, behind Mount Hood. It's a popular destination for climbers.

The air temperature on site was reported to be 20 degrees, and the altitude at the location of the crevasse was reported to be 8,900 feet.

Litter piles up after Douglas County adds dump fee

Associated Press

ROSEBURG — Woodlands and forests around Oregon's Douglas County have been accumulating piles of garbage since the region started charging for trash disposal at the dump.

The county has seen a 65 percent increase in littering calls since implementing a \$3-per-can fee at the dump. The News-Review reported. The Douglas County Sheriff's Office has responded to 71 litter-related calls since July 1, up from 43 calls during the same time period in 2014.

"It's a problem," said Rick Held. He's timber deputy with the sheriff's office and patrols the forests while contracted out to the Bureau of Land

Management and Douglas Timber Operators.

"It's such an eyesore, and when people dump trash, they'll dump five or six garbage bags and then within a few days, the animals will get into the bags and the trash will get strewn everywhere and it makes a giant mess."

Even without seeing the data, Held said he's noticed an increase in the number of locations where people are dumping garbage.

In early November, deputies got a report about a large dump on a Seneca-Jones landing. They found mail belonging to a residence in Sutherlin, and the residents told them they paid their neighbor to take the garbage to the dump.

But the neighbor told deputies he chucked the trash in the woods when he realized he didn't have enough money for the dump fee after refueling his truck.

The man was cited for offensive littering, which can carry a fine of up to \$1,250 — enough to cover dropping 416 bags of garbage at the dump.

"As I told the guy, he drove farther out Marvin Hill than it would have taken him to drive to the dump in Oakland," Held said. "But he told me he

just didn't have the money, at \$3 a bag to pay the fees."

Douglas County Commissioner Chris Boice says the county anticipated an increase in illegal dumping and tried to accommodate it in the budget.

"The situation for us was that we didn't really have the revenue to deal with illegal dumping before we implemented the fee, but we built into the landfill budget some money for work crew supervision for illegal dump sites," said Boice.

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