RESEARCH: Scott Lukas wants to expand production markets for new crops

Continued from 1A

Qin, who goes by "Ray," joined HAREC in September and has already started to develop specialized water and fertilizer "recipes" for new potato varieties developed at the station.

"I'm focused on how to improve yield directly," Qin said. "Not only yield, but also the income of every farmer."

As the new station agronomist at HAREC, Qin knows he has big shoes to fill. He replaces Don Horneck, who spent 15 years with OSU before he died unexpectedly in 2014. Qin said he's heard stories about Horneck, and his lab is even located in the new Don Horneck Memorial Building.

"He was a very successful scientist here," Qin said. "I hope I can do something to fill that gap."

Qin said he is already getting strong support from growers around Hermiston. He will be joined by his wife and two sons, who are still in California, before the end of the year.

Scott Lukas

While Qin's focus is primarily on field crops, including potatoes, Scott Lukas has been hired to research high-value specialty crops as HAREC's new horticulturist.

Lukas also arrived in September, and takes over for the retired George Clough. Already, Lukas sees the Columbia Basin as a potential landing spot for niche products affected by the extreme drought in California — things like almonds, tree nuts and more vegetables.

"This is a really unique growing environment," Lukas said. "A lot of crops that are grown in California that are struggling could find a new home up here."

It will be Lukas' job to figure out how farmers can adopt those commodities and work them into their own farms. His research will look into what kind of fertilizers would be needed, and managing weeds while at the same time using resources efficiently.

"The growers here seem progressive, and are really embracing new production techniques," Lukas said. "I'd like to expand the current production markets for new crops in the area."

Staff photo by George Plaven

Angie Treadwell is the SNAP-Ed Program Director for Umatilla and Morrow counties with Oregon State University Extension Service.

Lukas, 35, comes to Hermiston from Hawaii, where he earned his doctorate in crop production systems from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His position breaks down to roughly 70 percent research and 25 percent extension. Primarily, Lukas said he intends to do a lot of field research and trials.

Lukas said he will have a better idea of what those projects look like by next growing season. He is intrigued by the commercial potential for berries in Hermiston, especially blueberries. He is also working with Clive Kaiser, OSU's extension horticulturist in Milton-Freewater, on an experiment involving wild huckleberries.

"That could be a nice niche," Lukas said.

Angie Treadwell

Not all staff at HAREC are scientists. Angie Treadwell, the SNAP-Ed Program coordinator for Umatilla and Morrow counties, provides outreach to help individuals and families make better choices with their grocery budgets.

SNAP, which stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is the largest federal program to combat hunger among low-income individuals. Treadwell spent several days last week working with second- and fourth-graders at Sunset Elementary in Hermiston, and A.C. Houghton Elementary in Irrigon.

"I love teaching cooking classes with the kids," Treadwell said. "We like to touch, taste and smell."

Treadwell is not new to the job, but just set up a new office at HAREC in August. She also works out of the OSU Extension Office at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

Prior to coming to OSU last year, Treadwell spent 17 years with Umatilla-Morrow Head Start, and served as nutrition services director for the Woman, Infants and Children Program. Treadwell still partners with Umatilla-Morrow Head Start on "Cooking Matters" classes, where they teach families how to make nutritious meals.

"That's really about teaching people to plan ahead for nutritious meals, and give them some of the technical skills on how to prepare those foods," she said.

Treadwell also leads the "Walk with Ease" classes, aimed at emphasizing physical activity and improving overall health.

While her job isn't directly tied in to the research done at HAREC, Treadwell said there are benefits to her working alongside scientists in the same building.

"I feel it's all interrelated," she said. "It's my job to take that research to the public in a way that people can understand it."

Contributed photo

Anna Browne arrived at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center in July as the assistant professor in charge of 4-H and Latino outreach.

Anna Browne

OSU Extension has created an entirely new position aimed at promoting 4-H and college readiness directly to the Hispanic populations of Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Anna Browne, a former fifth- and sixth-grade teacher at Windy River Elementary in Boardman, took over the job in July, helping to fill a much-needed gap for the school districts.

Approximately half of students are Hispanic in the Hermiston School District, and about 55 percent in the Morrow County School District, according to the Oregon Department of Education. Browne works with those students and their families through a six-week college and career readiness program called "Juntos" (meaning "together" in Spanish), which teaches them how to make attending college a goal, and how to apply for financial aid.

"There are just a lot more barriers for Hispanic high school students, especially if they are first-generation students to go to college," she said.

Browne, who is bilingual, teaches the classes in Spanish and recently completed her second session at Riverside Junior-Senior High in Boardman. Nineteen families have now completed the course.

Browne also helps younger Hispanic students to become involved in 4-H, which she said can help them to develop leadership skills and give them another positive experience they can add to their future college applications.

"There's really a tremendous amount of leadership development that can come out of 4-H," Browne said.

Browne is based at HAREC, and can be reached at 541-567-8321.

Staff photo by George Plaven

Christina Hagerty joined the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center in September as the station's new plant pathologist.

"I'm really going to make the focus as much as possible on winter wheat."

— **Christina Hagerty,** plant pathologist at Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center

Christina Hagerty

For Christina Hagerty, coming over to the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center was her dream job.

Hagerty, 28, takes over for Dick Smiley as the station's plant pathologist. Smiley had spent nearly 30 years in the position before he retired in 2014.

Now, Hagerty said she hopes to take the program in a new direction while continuing to build on the work Smiley accomplished over the course of three decades.

"I'm really going to make the focus as much as possible on winter wheat," Hagerty said.

It took two tries for Hagerty to join the CBARC team. She initially applied for the job a year ago, while she was still working on her doctorate at OSU in Corvallis.

Hagerty didn't get the job — but neither did anyone else. She applied again earlier this year, landing an interview in March. She was hired a month later, on the condition she finish her degree.

Hagerty wrapped up school in July, and moved to Pendleton from Corvallis in September with her husband, Ryan Graebner.

"It was the perfect way to finish my Ph.D," Hagerty said. "It was nice to have this to look forward to."

Fighting back against soil-borne diseases, such as crown rot and wheat mosaic virus, are on Hagerty's radar. She already has field trials underway, including one project funded by the Oregon Wheat Commission.

Wheat mosaic virus can cause severe stunting of the crop if it isn't kept under control. As part of her trial, Hagerty is trying to mix and match different wheat varieties, which together could keep the disease at bay.

Hagerty said she is also looking forward to meeting with growers and learning more about their needs.

"I want to know the top issues they're struggling with on their farms, and ideas about research that needs to be completed," she said.

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IRRIGATION: Only Westland Irrigation District patrons are allowed to vote

Continued from 1A

follow some different rules — first, the position does not appear on the regular mail-in ballot. Voting will be done in person, on Election Day, at the district offices, 77096 Highway 207, Echo.

Only district patrons are allowed to vote, whether they are Oregon residents or not. If a farm has multiple owners, they are allowed to vote only once.

Finally, voting is weighted in the district by land ownership. That means, for anyone with up to 40 acres, they are allowed one vote. Anyone with at least 40 acres, but no more than 160 acres, gets two votes, and anyone with more than 160 acres gets three votes.

Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 8.

Even though Parks is suing Westland, District Manager Mike Wick said there is nothing legally preventing her from running for the board.

"The district has to remain neutral for all the candidates," Wick said.

Parks was not able to discuss the lawsuit directly, but said she feels patrons are looking for more transparency from the district board.

"With a lot of the patrons, it's been a blind trust," she said.

Sharkey, who owns the South Ranch in Hermiston, has served on the Westland board since mid-2014, when he finished the term of former member Frank Mueller. Mueller is now also listed as a plaintiff in the current lawsuit, which was filed earlier this year.

The litigation has changed the entire dynamic of board meetings, Sharkey said. Conversations that were once open and informal have become much more restricted, which has led some neighbors to feel the board isn't being forthcoming.

Despite that, Sharkey said he wanted to run again to help settle the turmoil and continue pursuing more irrigation water for everyone. To do that, the board is circulating subscriptions for the Central Project, which would capitalize on mitigated irrigation water from the Columbia River.

"This is the first time in 40-plus years we've been able to tie in to the Columbia River," Sharkey said. "If we don't do it now, it will probably never happen."

Sharkey said he has a working knowledge of what needs to be done, and how to get there. The current board has been very proactive in trying to get the most irrigation water for all patrons, he said, though the lawsuit has muddied the situation.

"There are a lot of people unhappy with the litigation, along with the cost and outcome of it," he said.

Parks said that, while she recognizes the hard work of the current board, she would add a new perspective to represent the whole district.

"Nothing is going to be accomplished with all the fighting," she said. "We all want the same thing."

Another seat on the Westland board is also up for election this year, and will see a new face. Jordan Bennett will take over for Mike Taylor, who has decided not to run for the seat again. Bennett is related to Doug and Don Bennett, who are listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit, though Jordan is not specifically mentioned in the filings.

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