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EAST OREGONIAN Hermiston **Herald**

Wednesday, April 26, 2017

HOMEGROWN



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Workers cover freshly planted rows of red seedless watermelon starts to protect them from the elements at Bellinger Farms outside of Hermiston.

Farm fresh

Local ingredients on the menu at Pendleton, Hermiston restaurants

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
EO Media Group

Jack Bellinger opens the greenhouses at Bellinger Farms in Hermiston to reveal thousands of leafy watermelon seedlings that will soon be planted in nearby fields.

Planting season came just a few days later this year due to the wet weather, Bellinger said, but crews are working hard to get everything prepped and in the ground. Once that is done, the rest is up to Mother Nature.

"For us, it's all (about) what happens from here on out," Bellinger said.

Pendleton and Hermiston restaurants, meanwhile, are already anticipating the return of fresh, locally grown produce to add to their menus. Bellinger said they receive lots of phone calls around harvest time from customers checking in on the crop.

Farm-to-table is nothing unusual in Eastern Oregon, a region dominated by agriculture. Farmers in the Columbia Basin are capable of growing more than 200 different types of crops, leaving no shortage of local ingredients for chefs to explore.

Bellinger, who also grows a few acres of tomatoes and squash in addition to melons and said growers appreciate those relationships and are proud to help feed their communities.

"It's a bit of satisfaction, seeing the fruits of your labor and where it ends up," he said.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Joel McCullough plates food during lunch service at the Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co. in Pendleton.

Walker's Farm Kitchen, which opened in 2013 in Hermiston, purchases its produce seasonally from neighboring farms including Bellinger's, Walchli Farms and Finley's Fresh Produce. Owners Larry and Cynthia Walker said

they want to provide diners with a unique food experience, while staying as true to the area as possible.

"It works out very well because everything is so fresh," said Cynthia Walker, the restaurant's chef.

Walker's also sources its meats, including chicken, beef and pork, from Northwest ranches and grows fresh herbs in its own garden at the entrance.

"This is a bountiful area," Larry Walker said. "All we're trying to do is bring that in

during the season as long as we can."

The partnership has just as many benefits on the farm, Bellinger added.

"What's really valuable is we

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