

# FARM: Automated equipment already becoming a staple on some farms

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took to the sky. After landing, he displayed infrared images taken by the drone showing where plants may be stressed due to uneven irrigation, pests or disease.

“The data has such high resolution that you can get out and investigate very specific areas in the vineyard,” Gould said.

Consider Bob Tyhuis, farm and vineyard manager at Echo West, a fan. Aerial imaging has led him to revamp portions of the farm’s irrigation system, making sure he is delivering water at the right place at the right time.

“The more efficient you can be, the better off you are in terms of quality,” Tyhuis said. “Quality is what you do, and that’s what you’re trying to sell.”

### Future Farm

At the intersection of farming and automation, Pendleton is working to place itself at the epicenter of new development.

Following the creation of the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range, the Oregon UAS Future Farm program was established to facilitate a connection between agribusiness and tech firms. The program was aided by a \$150,000 grant from SOAR Oregon, a state-wide UAS nonprofit.

The Future Farm Expo is the program’s showcase, with a trade show and multiple panel talks from industry leaders. More than 250 people registered for the event, which took place largely at the Pendleton Convention Center. Some attendees came from as far as South America and Africa to attend.

Jeff Lorton, Future Farm



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

**Kevin Gould, founder and CEO of Hawk Aerial, brings an Aqweo QR-200 drone in for a landing during a demonstration flight Wednesday during the Future Farm Expo at Echo West Ranch & Vineyard outside of Echo.**

manager, has been bullish on agricultural technology since 2013 when he was hired to focus on economic development for Yamhill County in the Willamette Valley. He has since crossed the state to Pendleton, and describes the Columbia Basin as “the perfect proving ground for the coming era of interconnected technology.”

“We’re on a march of progress, and agriculture is on that march as well,” Lorton said.

The global demand for food production is only increasing, Lorton said, yet there is no American or global strategy for filling the need. He sees the Future Farm as an industry-led, grassroots effort to drive automated farming forward.

“Now is the time to do this,” Lorton said.

### Labor scarcity

Future Farm has already brought Yamaha and Digital

Harvest, a Virginia-based UAS company, to Pendleton where they are working on research and development. One of Digital Harvest’s latest projects, the Remote Operated Vineyard Robot, recently received a \$100,000 state grant from Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

Young Kim, Digital Harvest CEO, said the prototype is meant to address the issue of labor scarcity for wine grape harvest. To hear Kim explain it, there is no shortage of workers — just a shortage of workers physically present in the vineyard.

The ROVR, or “Project Yamhillis,” was inspired by medical equipment that allows doctors to meet remotely with their patients. It can be operated by workers anywhere in the world using virtual reality goggles, and mimics human movements to prune clusters of wine grapes.

Kim presented a prototype of the machine during the expo Wednesday — basically a robot arm attached to a driverless golf cart. The ROVR is a dumb robot made smart by humans, Kim said, designed to open a global workforce for farm labor.

“We believe there is plenty of labor for agriculture, if you remove the requirement they have to be physically present where the labor is needed,” Kim said.

Labor scarcity was a common issue raised at the Future Farm Expo. George Kellerman, founding member and chief operations officer of Yamaha Motor Ventures & Laboratory Silicon Valley, said automation is what will ultimately save agriculture in the 21st century.

“A lot of people think robots are going to take jobs. In agriculture, it’s just the opposite,” Kellerman said. “What we really need to do is

figure out how to get money into the hands of people who are innovating.”

Mel Torrie, founder and CEO of Autonomous Systems Inc. based in Mendon, Utah, said the challenge developers have is proving to farmers that the technology can be trusted and provide a return on investment.

“Farmers are not stupid people. They’re not going to pay for something that doesn’t do anything for them,” Torrie said. “Until they develop trust in the system, they’re less likely to make use of it.”

Automated equipment is already becoming a staple on some farms, with GPS-driven tractors and robotic pruners more or less the norm. Zach McBride, equipment manager for Mercer Ranches in Prosser, Washington, said labor shortage has made advanced technology a necessity.

“If you don’t have the people or the advances in technology, it’s tough to stay in the ballgame,” he said.

### Forging relationships

Reports from UAS advocates suggest there could be significant economic development to come out of the industry.

According to the Association for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles International, drone pilots received 108 government exemptions to fly vehicles in Oregon between fall 2014 and summer 2016. Of those, agriculture was among the top three industries, along with real estate and construction.

The association predicted in 2013 that, once the vehicles were integrated into U.S. airspace, there would be \$82 billion in economic

impact within the first 10 years, including \$486 million in Oregon. But there is still work to be done.

Clark Hymas, maintenance manager for Watts Brothers Farms near Paterson, Washington, said he has flown a drone over fields of potatoes for the last two years, and while the vehicles are useful for spot checking, it would take 12-hour days, seven days a week to fly the entire farm — not including the time it would take to upload and interpret all that data.

“The processing is not up with even being able to fly right now,” Hymas said. “It actually works like it should, but getting through the acres is not possible.”

Erin Hightower, an agronomist for RDO Equipment based out of Pasco, said the integration of new high-tech farm equipment varies operation by operation.

“With any technology, you have early adopters and late adopters,” Hightower said. “What it drives down to is how quickly an operation can experience a return on investment.”

Future Farm has the potential to accelerate the process, Lorton said.

“We’ve developed a community here,” he said. “We all have a shared interest in producing food.”

Kim, with Digital Harvest, teased up as he discussed the positive momentum he’s seen for his own business.

“The relationships we forge, in this community and throughout, is what’s going to drive Yamhillis forward,” he said.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

**Kolby Currin, 18, of Heppner shows a feeder hog for a friend on Thursday at the Morrow County Fair in Heppner.**

# FAIR: Moved to Heppner 55 years ago

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“The population difference from when we were growing up, it’s probably a third of what it used to be,” Blake said.

But they noted that programs like FFA and 4-H were still going strong, thanks to the parents and teachers who keep them going.

One of those 4-H students is Heppner resident Faith Futter, 11, who entered two pigs in the fair. This year was her first experience showing animals, and she said she had learned quite a bit from the experience.

“I decided to show to start saving money for college,” Futter said. “And I just love (pigs). They’re cute.”

Futter’s two pigs, Bubba and Lily, won red ribbons at the fair. Futter said she was hoping for blue, but was OK with the outcome.

She said she learned a lot about the care of the animals, and that they often have a mind of their own.

“I like how they have different personalities,” she said. “They can be very playful, or rude.”

Ashley Price, 16, had been showing animals for a few years, but hoped this year would net her some top prizes for her steer, Midnight. The Boardman resident was busy spraying her animal with medium adhesive and pro gloss, as he stood patiently in a blocking chute.

“I love it,” Price said. “It’s a bigger animal, so it’s more challenging, but gives you a step into the real world.”

Price said she hopes to continue raising steers once she graduates.

People sat in the shade and ate lunch provided by the Bank of Eastern Oregon, which volunteers to cook burgers and fries each year for fairgoers.

Joycekay Hollomon sat with her great-grandchildren, who were visiting from Alaska, and took in the scene playing out in her hometown.

She, too, noted the changes in the fair since she moved to Heppner 55 years ago.

“The people here work very hard to hold it together and make it work,” she said.

“A lot has changed,” Hollomon said. “It’s diminishing, for one. We don’t have nearly the interested population to keep the displays up. When I first started coming here, we had a carnival.”

She commended the fair organizers for what they’ve done in the last few years, with exhibits like a reptile show and a bounce castle to keep kids entertained.

Hollomon said the fair has its own unique touches that keep people coming back. One, she said, is the rodeo.

“Friday and Saturday night is the big rodeo,” she said. “But Sunday is strictly county. You have to be related or graduated from a school in the county to take part. It’s kind of unique, and very laid back. They start with the little-bitty kids. It’s kind of interesting if you have lots of people participating, which I’m lucky to have a lot of.”

Hollomon said throughout the years, she had helped out with various aspects of the fair, from 4-H sewing to supervising different events.

Fair secretary Ann Jones said the fair had undergone some changes in the last few years with board members and technology, but the overall event was consistent.

“We have a few new people, but it’s mostly returning vendors,” she said. Jones said there were about 30 vendors this year, including a woman selling waffles on a stick from Portland, and a lemonade stand from Curlew, Washington.

Deputies from the Morrow County Sheriff’s Department said they’d be patrolling the grounds all weekend, but this year would be unique.

“It’ll be interesting to see people coming in from the eclipse crowd, looking for something to do,” said Deputy Glen Diehl. But he said so far, there had been no issues.

“It’s a nice, quiet family atmosphere,” he said.

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# MARCH: A few out-of-towners joined

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I want to draw your thoughts to the last six words of the pledge of allegiance: ‘With liberty and justice for all.’ Not just liberty sometimes. Not just circumstantial justice sometimes for a few people whatever the facts might be. But liberty and justice for all, all the time.”

Turner highlighted his nearly 30 years in the U.S. Marine Corps., retiring as a colonel in 2003.

Turner said the military was a meritocracy and the “giants amongst men” he served with valued an individual’s contributions and their ability to work as a team over their skin color or religious affiliation.

“The values of the hate groups that converged last week in Charlottesville, Virginia has no place in the America that I love,” he said to applause.

Karen Wagner, the Eastern Oregon field representative for U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, also shared a prepared statement from the state’s junior senator expressing solidarity with the march.

Before the march started, organizer Ashley Jones told the audience that she feared that only five people would show up to the march, which ultimately swelled to more than 100 people.

By the time the march reached its end at Brownfield Park, she wiped away tears

before addressing the audience again.

Jones said she frequently saw hateful comments on Facebook from people she grew up with in the community. She urged the crowd not to be intimidated by these kinds of comments.

“We can’t be afraid anymore,” she said.

The group marched a mile-long route that started down Main Street, detoured down Dorion to the courthouse and back via Court Street, ultimately ending with a few verses of “Come Together” by the Beatles in Brownfield Park’s amphitheater.

A few out-of-towners joined the mix, here for Monday’s eclipse and the Pendleton Center for the Arts Rock & Roll camp.

Together, they chanted “no hate, no way, racism is not OK,” waved to honking cars and carried homemade signs boasting slogans like “no hate allowed,” “love not hate will make America great” and “we only hate Mondays.”

“Future President 2045” beamed out in pink letters from a sign carried by Violet Hall, 7, of Pendleton. Her mother, Rachael Owen, painted the sign for Violet to carry during the Women’s March in January.

Owen felt it was important that she bring her daughters to march.

“With the political unrest

in the nation, it’s important to publicly show we’re against that,” she said. “The country has gotten to the point where I don’t even recognize it.”

While Hall and her sister, Ava, 9, were a little hesitant to march such a long way in the heat, Owen said, “they’re always glad in the end.” Violet confirmed she’d go through a lot of marches before starting her 2045 campaign.

Paul Collins carried a sign that read “Black Lives Matter” on one side and “Love Wins” on the other.

“When I was a kid, there was a complete lack of diversity. The discussion on race was really poor,” he said. The former Pendleton resident moved to New York, where he said his eyes were opened to racial disparity. “But it’s not about New York or Pendleton. We all have to acknowledge this. It’s part of us, and we won’t get anywhere unless we start talking about it.”

Other marchers agreed with that sentiment, noting that small steps line the path to change.

“As a part of an interracial family and a person of mixed heritage, it’s important to march,” said Sascha McKeon of Pendleton. “I feel like it’s one of those things where if one person says something — either with a smile or an act — people will be reminded that this place is safe.”

# MABBOTT: ‘She will have her hands full’

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her county capacity to help them create a “vision plan” for downtown. In her new position she will oversee the planning, building, parks and recreation, code enforcement and Geographic Information Systems for the city.

“She will be busy,” City Manager Russ Pelleberg said. “She will have her hands full, but not all of this will be handed to her on day one.”

Mabbott starts Sept. 1, and Umatilla County is advertising her position.

Pelleberg said the city was excited to have someone with her experience, integrity and accomplishments take the new position.

He said he has wanted to create a “community development director” department head for about a year now to help implement new initiatives for the city such as creation of a recreation

program, and to focus on development of the city in general. He said he and Mabbott have been working together behind the scenes on a few economic development projects he hopes to announce soon, and he has been trying to recruit her for a while.

“A lot is about to happen,” he said. “The timing is just perfect.”

Pelleberg also announced that Jason Barron, who has worked for the city of Umatilla’s public works department for 16 years, is now Umatilla’s public works director.

Pelleberg was public works director prior to becoming Umatilla city manager in early 2016. At that time he agreed to continue to oversee public works while serving as city manager, but promoted Barron to public works supervisor to share some of the administrative workload.

“Over the last year I’ve been kind of grooming him to make that step up,” Pelleberg said.

He said Barron will be a key player in the city’s organization as they move forward on some “very exciting and important infrastructure and development projects.”

In a third staff shake-up, the city is looking for a new city planner. Pelleberg said former city planner Bill Searles left of his own accord to take a job in another city. In January Searles filed a complaint against Pelleberg with the city’s human resources department, which he declined to discuss publicly, after Pelleberg gave him a disciplinary letter criticizing his performance.

Mabbott will oversee the new city planner and planning commission.

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