

Northwest research effort explores dry farming possibilities

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

CORVALLIS — Northwest farmers and researchers are exploring how to expand the use of “dry farming.”

Dry farming is a low-input approach to farming. Some farmers draw a distinction between “dry farming” and “dryland farming,” while others use the terms interchangeably. Those participating in the research use the definition of “irrigated once or not at all.”

Dry farming was more prevalent before farmers turned to irrigation, said Amy Garrett, president of the Dry Farming Institute and Oregon State University Extension small farms programs instructor. She’s met longtime dry farmers raising crops that researchers weren’t aware could be grown without irrigation.

Crops include winter squash, tomatoes, dry beans, orchards, zucchini, melons, carrots and corn.

“As soon as you say, ‘These are the only crops you can dry farm,’ there’s always going to be somebody innovating...,” Garrett said.

More than 50 farmers are participating in research efforts involving crops ranging from vegetables to wheat.

Most of them are using small parcels, some as small as 1,000 square feet, Garrett said.

Water availability in the soil is the most important factor, said Alex Stone, OSU

vegetable specialist. The more water-holding capacity in the soil, the more likely it is to produce a higher yield, she said.

Some dry-farmed tomato yields on some sites in Oregon were comparable to irrigated yields in California, Stone said.

“You don’t have the irrigation expense and you can have lower weeding costs,” she said.

Researchers also are analyzing profitability. Yields are lower, so the cost of dry-farmed produce tends to be higher, according to the Dry Farming Institute.

One goal is to entice customers to pay more for dry-farmed products than

for irrigated products, said Emily Dick, project manager at the Washington Water Trust, a nonprofit dedicated to improving and protecting stream flow and water quality.

A pilot project involving 11 farmers developed a label for dry-farmed produce.

Benefits of dry farming for farmers can include 50% lower weeding costs and lower input costs.

For consumers, benefits can include enhanced flavor and better storability, Garrett said.

The researchers have conducted taste tests comparing dry-farmed tomatoes, melons and berries to their irrigated counterparts.



Oregon State University/Contributed Photo
Oregon State University Dry Farming Project student research assistants Kelly Andrus, Asher Whitney and Meaghan Herlihy host a dry-farmed tomato tasting at the Corvallis Farmers Market.

About \$1 million has been devoted to research so far.

The researchers hope to find more funding

for research, said Lucas Nebert, an OSU post-doctoral student. He hopes to start mapping sites where

DRY FARMING INSTITUTE

To learn more, visit dryfarming.org.

dry farming is likely to be successful.

Garrett thinks more recognition in the marketplace will lead to more demand.

“This year, especially with temperature extremes, water issues and the backdrop of the fires, people are thinking about how to adapt,” she said. “It’s not the solution (by itself), but it can be part of an adaptive strategy.”

Prudential seeks millions more from Easterday bankruptcy

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

YAKIMA — Prudential Insurance Co. claims the bankrupt Easterday estate owes it more than \$9 million, a demand opposing lawyers call unreasonable and if paid will come “out of the hide” of other creditors.

Eastern Washington cattleman Cody Easterday borrowed \$50 million from Prudential in 2020, about one year before he filed for bankruptcy as he was being investigated for defrauding Tyson Fresh Meats.

Prudential recovered with interest the loan out of the \$209 million that Farm-land Reserve Inc. paid to buy Easterday farms in Benton County.

The New Jersey-based lender, however, says it’s still due nearly \$7 million because the 10-year loan was repaid early and \$2.1 million because Easterday’s bankruptcy triggered a 12% default interest rate.

Attorneys for the bankrupt Easterday businesses say there is no evidence early payment harmed Prudential and have asked U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Whitman Holt in Yakima to deny the prepayment penalty and default interest.

The attorneys called the formula used to calculate the early payment penalty “unconscionable” and that every dollar paid in default interest is “a dollar that comes out of the hide” of other creditors.

On Wednesday, Oct. 6, Prudential filed a brief responding to accusations it was being unreasonable.

Cody Easterday — along with his wife and parents — were sophisticated borrowers who understood the nature of Prudential’s business, according to the brief.

“At its core, the prepayment formula employed by Prudential is ubiquitous in the real estate finance industry,” according to Prudential.

The two sides are due to appear in front of Holt on Oct. 20. The resolution will affect how much money is left for other creditors, including Tyson, who was defrauded out of \$233 million.



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