# Farm turns to desert-adapted sheep to improve dairy business

By SIERRA DAWN **MCCLAIN** Capital Press

LEXINGTON — Farm owner Terry Felda has seen first-hand the value of matching genetics to environment: raising a breed of dairy sheep adapted to her region's specific microclimate.

Introducing genetics from the Assaf breed into her flock the past few years has been transformational, boosting productivity and improving her farm's sustainability.

"We can already see the difference," Felda said.

For more than a decade, Felda, 59, ran her operation with standard American dairy sheep crosses: Lacaune and East Friesian breeds. The problem was these breeds need good pasture and a temperate climate to thrive, and Felda's 450-acre farm lies among the dry, crumpled hills outside Lexington, in semiarid Morrow County.

Felda's ewes struggled on ranges with limited forage.

"I felt I had to put a lot of feed and time into them to get them to where I wanted," said Felda.

For years, she wanted to bring in genetics from breeds better adapted to arid climates, such as the Awassi, native to Israel, or the Assaf, a cross between the Awassi and the German East Frie-

The Assaf, according to



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Pres

Lexington sheep rancher Terry Felda holds a lamb. Felda has introduced genetics from the Assaf breed into her flock the past few years to raise a breed of dairy sheep better adapted to the region's microclimate.

prized for high milk production and tolerance to almost all climates. The breed has spread across Eurasia and today is the most important dairy sheep breed in Spain, according to the Journal of Dairy Science.

Felda was one of many American farmers who the Israel Dairy Board, is wanted Assaf genetics, but

for years, the U.S. blocked importation over concerns about scrapie, a disease that affects sheep.

Finally, in 2017, after years of negotiations with U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Spanish Department of Agriculture and European Union officials, the U.S. sheep industry brought in Assaf

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ALMANAC **PENDLETON** through 3 p.m. yest.

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

HIGH

**PRECIPITATION** 

Last year to date

TEMP.

Yesterday

Records

Normal year to date

**PRECIPITATION** 

Month to date

Year to date

Boardman

Pendleton

Sunset tonight

Moonset today

Last year to date

Normal year to date

WINDS (in mph)

**SUN AND MOON** 

24 hours ending 3 p.m

Normal month to date

24 hours ending 3 p.m Month to date

semen through a University of Wisconsin-Madison project.

The Dairy Sheep Association of North America secured some of the semen, from which Felda got her first batch for Tin Willows Dairy and Sheep Ranch.

"To be able to finally get (the genetics) was huge," she said.

In 2019, she introduced

the semen into her flock through laparoscopic artificial insemination. In 2020, she had her first cross-bred 50% Assaf lambs. In 2021,

she milked the crosses. Felda said the Assafcrosses gain weight faster and seem well-adapted to handle heat, stress and minimal forage. The ewes also produce more milk.

Before introducing the new genetics, each Lacaune-East Friesian dairy sheep was fed and milked twice a day but produced only 300 to 400 pounds of milk annually. Last year, each 50% Assaf ewe was fed and milked only once a day but produced up to 500 pounds of milk annually.

Felda expects the numbers would be higher if she milked twice daily, and because last year's milk came from crosses, Felda anticipates even higher production in future years as her ewes approach purebred Assaf status.

Some farms in Felda's industry started on the genetic improvement path years before Felda did and are seeing even larger gains, with some ewes producing 1,000 pounds of milk annually.

"I'm playing catch-up," Felda said.

She spoke over the chorus of farm sounds around her: chittering guinea fowl, quacking ducks, bleating lambs and the occasional bark of an Akbash livestock guardian dog.

Felda said the combination of imported genetics and new record-keeping programs available to farmers gives her renewed hope for America's dairy sheep

"It's an exciting time to be milking sheep right now," she said. "And it's been a long time coming."

#### **Forecast for Pendleton Area TODAY**

Periods of clouds and sunshine winds subsiding

**72°** 

Showers around:

39°

**OREGON FORECAST** 

Rain and drizzle in

the morning PENDLETON TEMPERATURE

Winds gradually subsiding

Times of clouds

**WEDNESDAY** 

**34°** 

35°

33° 16° (2019)

0.56" 0.26" 1.62"

1.65"

WSW 12-25

WSW 12-25

5:57 p.m.

3:40 a.m. First

36° **50°** 

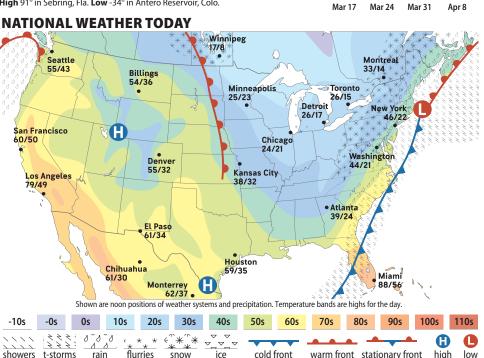
Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows. Wenatchee

Aberdeen Pendleton 51/32 The Dalles 72/45 2 • La Grande 55/37 57/45 Albany 57/44 John Day Ontario ! Eugene Bend Caldwell Burns

#### Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2022 **NATIONAL EXTREMES**

Medford

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states) High 91° in Sebring, Fla. Low -34° in Antero Reservoir, Colo.



## Separate crashes in Eastern Oregon claim two lives

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A Condon man and a Portland man died in separate crashes in two days in Eastern Oregon.

The first deadly crash occurred Tuesday, March 8, on highway 19 in Gilliam County, and the second occurred March 9 on Interstate 84 in Union County, according to Oregon State Police.

OSP troopers and emergency personnel March 8 at approximately 8 p.m. responded to a single vehicle crash on Highway 19 near milepost 35, about 3 miles north of Condon.

The preliminary investigation revealed Timothy Bushnell, 31, was driving northbound in a red Mitsubishi Eclipse when the vehicle swerved across the southbound lane and rolled, according to state police. The crash ejected Bushnell, who suffered fatal injuries.

The two passengers, Dustin Hughes, 30, of Spray, and Justin Martin, 31, of The Dalles, were injured and transported to an area hospi-The crash resulted in the

closure of the highway for approximately 4 hours. OSP also reported the Gilliam County Sheriff's Office and Oregon Department of Transportation assisted at

In the second deadly crash, state police reported, Brian Burton, 59, of Portland, on March 9 at approximately 8:50 a.m. stopped his Mercedes GLS on the eastbound side of Interstate 84 in a traffic backup related to a previous commercial vehicle crash near milepost 259.

Eddi Morales, 30, of Othello, Washington, was driving a Freightliner semitrailer eastbound when it rounded a curve, according to state police, and was unable to stop and collided with the left side of Burton's

State police reported Burton died at the scene.

Helen Burton, 62, from Portland, was in the passenger seat and was uninjured. Morales also did not suffer any injuries in the collision.

I-84 eastbound lanes remained closed for approximately five hours. According to the press release, OSP is investigating icy roadways and speed as contributing factors in the automobile

The Oregon Department of Transportation and local firefighters assisted state police.

#### IN BRIEF

#### Baker County man facing sex crimes might not be able to attend trial

BAKER COUNTY — A Baker County man arrested more than two years ago on multiple charges of sex crimes might not physically be able to attend his trial in May.

Bill David Gonyer, 75, is undergoing treatment for cancer. Gonyer's attorney, Damien Yervasi of Baker City, wrote in an email to the Baker City Herald on Thursday, March 10, that "it's hard to tell at this point" whether Gonyer could participate.

"It all depends on how he's doing between now and then," Yervasi wrote.

Baker County District Attorney Greg Baxter said he will be prepared for a trial in May, but that he's aware of Gonyer's medical situation.

Gonyer, who lived on Stices Gulch Road about 12 miles south of Baker City,

was initially arrested Dec. 28, 2019, in Ada County, Idaho, where he was receiving medical care. He was extradited to Baker County in early January 2020 and was held at the Baker County Jail until December 2020, when Judge Thomas B. Powers granted a motion from Yervasi to grant Gonyer a conditional release so he could get medical treatment at the Boise VA Hospital and other facilities.

State court records show Gonyer faces 41 counts in all, including nine for child pornography, five of first-degree sexual abuse and five of felon in possession of a firearm. Fifteen of the charges carry mandatory minimum sentences upon conviction in Oregon.

Gonyer in 1999 pleaded guilty in Clackamas County to one count of first-degree sexual abuse involving a girl younger than 14, according to court documents. He received a prison sentence in that case of six years, three months.

— EO Media Group

**CORRECTIONS**: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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