

# WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN



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## FAIRMINING ORGANIC Tough but rewarding



Bill Bradshaw

Patrick Thiel operates his 1956 Farmall tractor to spread a fertilizer mix of kelp and molasses diluted with water Wednesday, Oct. 2, at his farm just west of Lostine. The mixture is one practice that allows him to certify his produce as organic.

### Joseph farmer sells crops to Portland restaurants and locally

By Bill Bradshaw  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH – The life of a farmer isn't easy and when you add organics into the mix, it becomes even more difficult.

"Farming is tough," said Patrick Thiel, who operates Prairie Creek Farms on about 25 acres of leased land near Joseph and another few acres outside of Lostine. "There's times the weather will wipe you out. There are times other things will wipe you out. There are times when it'll turn out OK, but those are getting fewer and further in between."

Unlike many in the Wallowa Valley, who rely chiefly on cattle, hay or small grains, Thiel has a wide variety of crops, including several varieties of potatoes, beets and carrots – all grown to organic specifications.

Not all chemicals are banned in organic farming, he said. Often, common, everyday, and non-toxic (to humans) substances can be used instead. For example, ordinary vinegar that can be used as an herbicide. For fertilizer, he

uses kelp and molasses diluted in water.

"The overall goal is to avoid sterilizing the soil or introducing substances that destroy the function of the soil," Thiel said.

It's true, that running an organic operation allows for more pests and weeds, Thiel said. However, if a weedkiller such as Roundup is used, "It makes it more profitable in the short term," he said. "But in 10 to 50 years, you'll have more difficulty controlling pests and weeds" because they become resistant to the chemical.

Organic farming is "more labor intensive, but it's more productive in the long run," he said.

"One thing that happens when you introduce high levels of nitrogen is it reduces lot of the green foliage, but the product is more watery," Thiel said. "Because of the high nitrates, you don't get as good a flavor."

While organically grown produce remains more expensive than its commercial counterparts, the gap is narrowing.

"The organic industry has been growing by an average of 20% a year for many years," Thiel said. "The first farms were small – a scale that can't compare to a 5,000-acre (commercial) farm. In

recent years, more of the larger farms have been converting to organic."

While his cost for production is higher, the market value of his produce is "roughly double," he said, but that "depends on the market." Their, and his customers, all consider that his Prairie farms produce has much better flavor that even many organic competitors.

Thiel's market is primarily high-end restaurants in the Portland area. What he doesn't sell in Portland will be available at local farmers markets.

He said he's heard stories from his Portland customers of occasions when he'd run out of product and restaurants would have to look elsewhere.

"Diners would come back into the kitchen and say, 'What happened to your potatoes? What happened to your carrots?'" Thiel said.

Potato harvest just got underway in a serious fashion Wednesday, Oct. 2, when the weather dropped to 24 degrees Fahrenheit and got a good start on killing the tops of the plants. The tubers still have to remain in the ground a couple of weeks to allow the skins to set, but Thiel is finding some he can harvest.

"I've got a dozen varieties of pota-

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Ellen Morris Bishop

The Red Rooster Restaurant on West Main Street in Enterprise just had their first burglary on the night of Sept. 23-24.

### Burglars hit Red Rooster and others

By Steve Tool  
Wallowa County Chieftain

"There's a first time for everything," as the saying goes, but not every first time is something to be celebrated. The Red Rooster restaurant in Enterprise just had their first burglary. The restaurant is located at 309 W. Main St.

The burglary happened sometime during the night of Sept. 23-24, according to the county dispatch log and restaurant owner, Kim Moore. According to the owner, she was notified on the morning Tuesday Sept. 24. The restaurant is not open on Tuesdays and Moore worked in the restaurant doing payroll until 7:30 the night before.

"One of my co-workers came in to grab something she'd forgotten and noticed that my office was torn apart," Moore said. "All my petty cash, my drawer cash was taken." The main door was also left open. Moore said that if the employee hadn't come in, the door would have been open all day long and the night following as well.

Moore also noted the lock of the front door was taken in a way that caused her to suspect a professional tool was used. She also said the police told her they normally have an idea of who could have committed a local crime, but they were drawing a blank. Police did take fingerprints from the scene.

According to Moore, the restaurant didn't have an alarm system.

"I mean we live in Wallowa County, don't we," she asked. Moore added the business hasn't been broken into before. A locksmith had to replace the door lock, something that cost more than \$200.

"The good news is that they didn't trash the whole restaurant — just my office," she said. "They didn't take my computer. All they wanted was money."

Moore said the incident changed the way she does business. A daughter is bringing in cameras and other equipment for a security system both inside and out.

Enterprise Police Department Chief Joel Fish said that it's possible the Red Rooster burglary is related to two other recent burglaries, one at the Chevron Station on West North Street and a home burglary on Mildred Avenue. He added that evidence from at least one of the crime scenes indicates the criminal has prior experience.

"We don't have burglaries, then all of a sudden we're having burglaries," he said. Anyone with a tip can reach the department or an on-duty dispatcher at 541-426-3131.

### Community health advisory council seeks new projects, members

#### Meeting to help shape future of local health care

By Ellen Morris Bishop  
The Wallowa County Chieftain

If you've been to the Wallowa County Park at Wallowa Lake during this past summer, you may have noticed a large, attractive log sign that has a few life jackets hanging off it. They are there for free use, just in case someone is going boating (or even swimming) and forgot to bring theirs along. Similar stations are located at the marina at the head of Wallowa Lake and Kinney Lake as well. And if you are headed to

Fergie in the winter, you might notice a similar availability of youth winter sports helmets. These are just two of the projects developed and funded by the Local Community Advisory Council, the local branch of the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization.

The LCAC is composed of volunteers who develop projects that largely benefit Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) recipients in Wallowa County. The life jackets and winter sports helmets are there for those who can't afford them otherwise, and also for those who might need them because they forgot to bring them to the lake or snowpark. "We are there for everyone in the community," said Autumn Wilburn, one of

the local program founders. "The program is focused on those who use Medicaid, and it is focused on preventative care and measures, so that people don't have to go to a doctor, or worse, the ER." Other programs that the LCAC funds include Yak Trax and hiking poles so that seniors and others can go for more secure walks in the winter, and yoga to relieve pain and help people get off of opioids and other strong pain medications.

On Oct. 12, the LCAC will learn more about new guidelines for funding and projects from their parent organization, Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization. That



Steve Tool/Chieftain

This life jacket station at the county park at the foot of Wallowa Lake is an LCAC developed and funded project. It provides loaner life jackets in a variety of sizes. Other stations exist at the head of Wallowa Lake and Kinney Lake as well.

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