



photo by Jon Stinnett

High Wire Farm founder Drew Renault harvests leeks prior to a Thursday Farmers Market.

# High Wire Farm works to find its niche

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

High Wire Farm's Drew Renault says he got into farming to grow food for the people around him. Learning how to make a living on the farm, though, has been an ongoing lesson.

"It's mostly about the lifestyle," Renault said while preparing produce for Cottage Grove's South Valley Farmers Market. "I love producing food for the people I know, for my community, my family and my neighbors. Farming used to be about sustenance, but then it became a business, and a lot of farmers these days — especially new farmers — are trying to find the in-between."

For Renault, who raises vegetables on the 2 1/2 acre farm he and his family founded in 2014, finding a scale at which High Wire can thrive has been one difficulty.

"We're not trying to be some big industrial farm, but we're definitely bigger than any one person can handle," he said. "I'm working to find the niche



where I can operate the farm and make a living."

Many of the farmers in the South Willamette Valley, where small operations dominate as opposed to larger-scale industrial farms, have confronted the same challenge lately, and Renault was among those pushing for the establishment of the South Valley Farmers Network, which in turn led to the founding of the downtown Farmers Market, last spring. In the process, Renault and others have learned to farm without the use of large equipment.

"Veggies are very labor-intensive," he said. "It takes a lot of planning and getting things established in a way that makes sense. Planning creates less work in the long term, but

it can still be tough."

Such skills were what Renault said he sought when he left the "big city" of San Francisco and the graphic design career he'd originally envisioned for himself. These days, he's as likely to be found among the 100-foot beds that are the heart and soul of High Wire, raising corn, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and a host of other crops, often for the two-dozen or so people that purchase his vegetables through a Community Supported Agriculture model.

Much of the struggle to grow delicious food, he said, involves water.

"Water is the biggest challenge," Renault said. "Most wells in this area are bad —

they've got arsenic in them, or salts, or other metals. Finding reliable groundwater has been tough."

And the biggest pest to bother the farm so far have been voles, which Renault called "unstoppable." And yet, like any farmer, Renault toils on, handling whatever Mother Nature throws his way the best he can.

"Every year, I realize that so much success has been about luck," he said. "I've got good soil to work with, but it still gets more difficult every year."

More information about High Wire Farm can be obtained on its website, highwirefarm.com.

## FIGS

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mant, clip off a piece about 8-10 inches long. Cut below a node and at the tip of the stem. Stick the piece in a pot of potting mix and leave it through spring. At that point, the small plant can go in the ground, but keeping it in a pot for a year is not a bad idea.

Renquist doesn't recommend growing figs in pots for the long term. They are vigorous plants that need room for sustainable root growth. If you have a small space to garden and a container is the only choice, start with a pot that will accommodate several years of growth and then transplant to a larger one. A seven-gallon container should be sufficient for three to four years; a 15 gallon for seven to eight. Once the pot fills with roots, growth will become weaker and he suggests pulling the plant out and pruning the roots severely. The top will have to be pruned significantly, also.

Make sure the pot has good drainage holes and use a soilless

potting mix. Don't overwater. Check by sticking a finger into the soil. If it's dry an inch below the surface, it's time to water. Feed with a thick layer of well-rotted manure on top of the soil, a foliar fertilizer once a month or a balanced (5-5-5) fertilizer in early spring, late spring and summer.

Though not as complicated to prune as other fruit trees, it takes some practice to learn the art of pruning fig trees. First, Renquist strongly suggests growing your fig as a multi-trunked plant. The plant's natural tendency is to branch, so why fight it?

"The biggest thing people do is try to grow them with a single trunk," he said. "You don't need to. With two or three trunks, you can keep the tree lower and have the fruit easier to reach. There's a lot of fruiting wood if you have multiple trunks."

## 'Hamlet' opens this weekend at Cottage Theatre

Cottage Theatre is set to offer one of Shakespeare's most iconic and most quoted plays.

"Hamlet" is a legendary tale of revenge, rich in vivid imagery, complex characters and powerful language, bolstered by Shakespeare's unrivalled humor and wit.

Cottage Theatre's production of "Hamlet" will run for three weekends: Aug. 12-14, 18-21 and 25-28. Shows Aug. 14, 21 and 28 are Sunday matinees that begin at 2:30 p.m.; all other shows begin at 8 p.m. This production is directed and designed by Tony Rust, with lighting design by Amanda Ferguson and costumes by Rhonda Turnquist. This production features Tim McIntosh as Hamlet, Davis N. Smith as Claudius, Tracy Nygard as Gertrude, Patrick Torelle as Polonius and Martha Benson as Ophelia. Rounding out the cast of this classic drama are Mark Anderson, Nathan Blakely, Dale Flynn, Joel Ibanez, DJ Luna, Lisa Mattiello, Glenn Rust and Earl Ruttencutter.



courtesy photo

Tim McIntosh (center) stars as Hamlet in the Cottage Theatre's production of the Shakespeare classic, which opens this Friday. The play also features Davis N. Smith as Claudius, Tracy Nygard as Gertrude, Patrick Torelle as Polonius and Martha Benson as Ophelia.

## OFFBEAT

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the newspaper — were far more likely than the employees would have been to regard the newspaper as a financial asset rather than a public trust.

Now, having made and stuck with a labor-negotiating deal that had brought the Journal to the brink of insolvency, the trustees moved to subvert the other major bequest in Maria's will: the part that specifically prohibited them from selling it to Newhouse.

With the Journal facing bankruptcy and a union strike that they could blame for the situation, the trustees could now plausibly claim that they were faced with a choice of either honoring Maria's wishes and allowing the paper to fold, or selling to Newhouse. Surely no reasonable person would fault them for saving Maria's paper, even though it were necessary to flout her express wishes to do so ... right?

And so, in 1961, the trustees accepted an \$8 million offer from Newhouse ... and Portland became, effectively, a one-newspaper town.

As for the strike, it petered out over the following several years. In 1963 the National Labor Relations Board ruled it illegal. Finally, in the spring of 1965, the pickets called it quits, and both papers became open shops.

(Sources: Diehl, Caleb. "The Newspaper Wars..." Portland Monthly, Dec. 2015; Klare, Gene. "Let Me Say This about That." nwlaborpress.org, 1/01/2002; Diehl, Caleb. "The Portland Reporter," oregonencyclopedia.org)

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**CONTEST RULES:** Visit the Cottage Grove Sentinel Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cottage-Grove-Sentinel/> and upload a picture of your vegetable, fruit or flower garden to the photo album section of the page. In the comment space, describe what makes you so proud of your garden. **The person who receives the most "likes" by August 17, 2016** will win the \$200 gift certificate valid at one of the participating businesses. The name of the winner will be posted on our Facebook page on August 19, 2016. Participants must be 18 years old or more. Employees of the newspaper and participating businesses and their immediate family members are not eligible to participate in this contest.

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