

Olives: Comparisons drawn to wine industry

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"It took me a long time, it took me a year of daily monitoring," he said. "In that year, I identified maybe a dozen potential sites and then did a little more due diligence in terms of what soils, and looked at well logs to determine what kind of water might be in the area."

Oregon olives are drawing comparisons to the early wine industry in that Caceu and the other growers are taking a chance on the crop growing well here. Caceu said the upside of the gamble makes it worth it.

"The crop is fairly easy to grow and easy to get to the value-added product," he said, referring to the oil made from olives.

Olives take a fraction of the investment to plant than wine grapes and require little maintenance by comparison, Caceu said. Keeping the trees productive generally consists of providing enough water, adding occasional nutrients and light pruning, he said.

He said olives are easy for established farms to incorporate, which is the case at the biggest olive farm in state, Oregon Olive Mill at Red Ridge Farms. Also home to Durant Vineyards, the farm has 17 acres of olives and runs a commercial olive

oil mill.

"This crop, and the value of the product, they fit very well within a small farm concept," Caceu said. "It doesn't necessarily need large acres."

While La Creole Orchards isn't to the point where it can sell oil yet, Caceu is working to get his oil into the hands of chefs and is taking his product on the road for tastings at farmers markets and food festivals.

Experience on the ground

Olive farmers have been experimenting with varieties on their own, using trial and error, more or less. The winters of 2011 and 2013 revealed their missteps.

By the winter of 2011, La Creole Orchards and several other farms were growing Spanish trees that didn't fare well.

Caceu lost all his trees that winter. He and other growers decided to look harder at the types they were planting.

"We said, 'let's go back to the book and see what else.' Maybe we didn't look well enough or we went on wishful thinking. Let's just do more research," Caceu said. "So, we did more research. The first orchard in Keizer, Victory Estates, they had planted 20 or 30 different varieties. From their experi-



La Creole Orchards owner Bogdan Caceu, left, talks with Neil Bell with OSU Extension at the farm on Thursday.

JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

ence, we knew that there were some that were quite resistant."

Growers began talking with farmers in Europe to get a better idea of what would work. Caceu replanted in 2013, with French and northern Italian olive trees.

Those varieties have worked well, Caceu said.

The trees made it through 2013 — another year the state's orchards suffered losses — and this past winter with minimal damage.

Now he's putting hope in science to find a made-for-Oregon olive tree and establish better growing practices.

Turning to plant science

A few members of the OSU research team visited La Creole Orchards last week to film the orchard with a drone and take photos of the trees as part of the olive project.

Neil Bell, Extension's community horticulturalist for Polk and Marion counties, said the research goals are to find a cold-hardy olive tree variety, begin propagation in Oregon, and develop better cultivation procedures. Bell's expertise is in finding cold-hardy plants.

"We've done cold-hardiness on woody ornamental plants. This is the first fruiting plant," Bell said. "It's a woody plant. The same principles that you would apply to an ornamental

plant will work with a plant like olives."

OSU ordered olive tree cuttings of more than 30 cultivars from the University of California Davis, where there's a library of about 100 different varieties.

"Those will be planted in Corvallis," Bell said. "That will form the beginning of the cold-hardiness evaluation."

He said many more cultivars exist in Europe, providing more opportunities to find what Oregon growers seek.

"I guess no one could really tell you which ones are harder than others, other than the ones that have been trialed here," Bell said. "There's good knowledge just from growers experimenting with what would work, but our goal is to find something even harder. If it is out there. We literally don't know."

At the same time as it searches for hardier varieties, the team will research propagation techniques.

"Right now, a lot of the plants are bought out of

California, and they are not cheap," Bell said. "Allowing better information on propagation under local conditions would be good."

Bell said early observations indicate the plants gain hardiness with age, so it could be beneficial to keep the plants in pots for two to three years before putting them in the ground.

Caceu said last winter he wrapped his trees to protect them from the cold, which worked with a few exceptions.

Extension's researchers may find types that don't require that kind of help.

If that happens, that means comparisons to the state's wine pioneers could hold true for Oregon's olive believers.

"I've heard the same thing said that it's 1965 for the wine industry," Bell said. "Some did believe it would work and there were pioneers that got it going. Bogdan is one of those pioneers. He's throwing a lot of time and money into something that is still very much in its infancy."



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Olive trees of different ages are planted on 5.5 acres at La Creole Orchards.

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1		6		7		9	
7	3		4	2		6	8
			9			2	
		6		3	7		
				1			
				8			6
6		5				9	
2				7			
3		8	1				

By Ben Arnoldy

Sudoku

Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

4	3	2	8	1	6	7	5	9
5	6	9	3	7	4	8	1	2
1	7	8	9	5	2	4	6	3
3	4	7	2	8	5	6	9	1
2	1	6	7	4	9	3	8	5
9	8	5	1	6	3	2	7	4
7	9	1	4	3	8	5	2	6
8	5	3	6	2	1	9	4	7
6	2	4	5	9	7	1	3	8

How to do Sudoku

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row, and three-by-three square. See example above.

The Christian Science Monitor

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