

We love our kids



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Plastic cups shoved into the fence at the tennis courts at Hermiston High School offer a message of encouragement from the school's staff.

Blueberry production in Eastern Oregon could get a boost from HAREC research

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

City slickers might think farming involves just sticking seeds in the ground and deciding how much to water them, but anyone who works in agriculture knows it's a lot more complicated than that.

"I wish it were that easy," horticulturist Scott Lukas said.

Lukas is one of many researchers at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center who help area growers refine their craft. This spring, he started a three-year research project testing the most efficient way to acidify soil for organic blueberry crops.

Eastern Oregon is ideal in most ways for growing blueberries, Lukas said, including its climate. However, one of the big reasons Hermiston isn't famous for its blueberries is that the plants need a pH of about 4.5 to 5, and local soils are more of a 7.5 on the scale (a seven is neutral). If farmers have a more cost-effective way to acidify their soil, it could mean more blueberries grown in Eastern Oregon.

"About 10% of the state's (blueberry) acreage is on the east side, and I think there's a lot of room to expand on that," Lukas said.

The research, which is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's organic transitions program, could also be applied to other regions of the country with similar soil.

HAREC, which is one of Oregon State University's extension centers across the state, serves nearly half a million acres of farmland in Eastern Oregon and Washington's Columbia Basin. At any given time, the Hermiston station's researchers are conducting



Photo contributed by Scott Lukas
Blueberry plants growing at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center will be used in a series of experiments on how to create the best soil conditions for their growth.



Photo contributed by Scott Lukas
Specialized irrigation systems at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center allow for very targeted watering regimes in different parts of the experiments.

a variety of experiments involving everything from preventing specific plant diseases to the best way to drip-irrigate onions.

Lukas helps farmers find the most cost-effective ways to increase the yield and quality of high-value irrigated crops, while reducing negative environmental impacts. He

has done research around reducing the amount of fertilizer running off into groundwater, for example, which helps farmers save money by wasting less fertilizer, while also protecting the critical groundwater management area.

In order to facilitate research on many crops at once, each individual plot

at HAREC has the ability to have its own irrigation regime, with a dozen different options.

While Lukas's current blueberry research will go on for three years, the plot he is setting up will run other blueberry experiments for two decades.

"Maybe in five years, the needs of the blueberry growers will be something else," he said.

His current research is divided up into 12 different experiments with adjusting soil pH, each of which will be run four times, using different rows in order to make sure the results of the experiment hold true through different variables.

"It's a very intensive chemistry lesson," he said.

The lessons learned will be passed on to area growers for their benefit. If all goes well, it could mean more blueberry crops popping up around the Columbia Basin in the future, and more success for current blueberry farmers.



HH file photo
The Department of Motor Vehicles office in Hermiston shortly after its opening in 2018.

License reinstatement program helps Umatilla County residents

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A Hermiston resident has her driving privileges back for the first time in more than two decades, and she hopes her story can help others in similar situations.

Sheena Tarvin said she is now enrolled in the state's Driver's License Reinstatement Program, which was created several years ago but only became available in Umatilla County in August.

"My license is freed up, and that's huge," she said. "What a blessing."

Oregonians who had their license suspended for nonpayment of tickets can contact the Department of Motor Vehicles at 503-945-5000 to determine which circuit courts have judgments against their license. They can then call the Oregon Department of Revenue's Other Agency Accounts line at 503-945-8199 to make a \$200 down payment and set up a payment plan to pay off the rest of the sanction against their license over time.

Once they're enrolled in the program, the Department of Revenue will notify the circuit court where the sanctions were applied, and the court can notify the DMV that those sanctions can be lifted, as long as the person doesn't miss any payments.

Tarvin was profiled in the *Hermiston Herald* in February as the Oregon Legislature discussed a bill that would prevent residents from losing their driver's license over nonpayment of traffic tickets. That bill was one of many that fell by the wayside when a walkout ended the session early.

Tarvin owed a little more

than \$1,000 on what at one point had been a \$9,000 debt. The debt started in 1998 at age 18, when she didn't pay a ticket for not wearing a seat belt and it got sent to collections. Then she got another ticket for driving on a suspended license.

High medical bills for the premature birth of her daughter, followed by a drug addiction, divorce, unemployment and homelessness, all got in the way of paying the growing debt. Tarvin eventually got clean and got housing, but she said not being able to drive herself to places like counseling appointments, support groups and court dates made that recovery process much more difficult.

When she got her \$1,200 stimulus check at the end of April, she said, she rushed to the DMV to pay off the last \$1,100 of her debt, even though there were a lot of other things she also needed the money for. The DMV informed her that instead she could pay just \$300 now, and then set up a \$100-per-month payment plan to finish up the rest.

"Once you sign up, they will free up your license, as long as I keep my payments up — and they are going to be kept up," she said.

Tarvin said she hopes by sharing her story, other people might be inspired to check if they are eligible for the Driver's License Reinstatement Program, which applies to people whose license was suspended because they have a sanctioning debt from an Oregon circuit court.

For more information, visit oregon.gov/DOR/programs/gov-research/Pages/license-reinstatement.aspx.

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PET OF THE WEEK

Little Meno is approx 1 1/2 years old, he is blind and weighs only 4.8 pounds. He needs a home with little to no stairs, and no small children due to his size. He does love to have a small dog companion to play with. He enjoys cuddling and being carried around. He needs someone who is experienced with blind dogs.

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If interested please go to fuzzballrescue.com and fill out an application. If you are not able to adopt, but would like to foster or donate, visit fuzzballrescue.com or you can mail in donations to Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue, PO Box 580, Hermiston, OR 97838

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