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Salute to Agriculture

- Area fruit growers rebound after tough 2017
- Family makes dream ranch a reality
- Mormon Crickets on the march
- Local farmer buys produce stand

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Pluots ripen on the trees at Kelley Orchards south of Weiser off of Hill Road. The many varieties of fruit grown at Kelley Orchards and neighboring Brooke Orchards look good this year. Ron Kelley said to expect a really good crop of peaches. The Kelley's operate a barn store for retail. Photo by Steve Lyon

Weiser-area fruit growers expect good crop this year

It's a rebound year after a cold snap in 2017
by Steve Lyon

Weiser-area fruit growers saw OK numbers of sweet cherries in late June and are anticipating a decent crop of peaches, pluots, nectarines, apricots and more shortly.

Brooke Orchard south of Weiser grows a variety of sweet cherries. The first to ripen were the Kiona, followed by Bing, and then the big reddish-purplish Benton.

The Rainier cherries are usually the last to ripen. The rows of cherry trees are netted to keep the birds from helping themselves.

Rich Brooke, who owns Brooke Orchards with his wife Kathy, began harvesting the first of the cherries around June 27. It was not a bumper crop by any means, but it was a lot better than 2017.

The Brookes sell a lot of cherries fresh from the orchards to customers who see the signs along U.S. Highway 95, turn off on Cox Road and find their retail shed located about halfway between Weiser and Payette.

Those loyal customers start calling the Brookes in May asking about the cherry crop and harvest dates. They have sold out of the U-pick bing cherries this year. It's a short window of time to harvest the cherries and it was over by about July 4th.

There were some Bentions and plenty of Rainiers and Sandra Rose varieties. The cherries were good sized and tasty, he said.

"The crop was light this year and for a while I thought we would not have any, but God has been good to us and it

turns out we have had enough for everyone so far," Rich said in an email to customers before the season ended.

Just down the road, Kelley Orchards had plenty of tart pie cherries that they began selling at the barn on June 29. Owners Ron and Kimi Kelley were offering U-pick pie cherries for \$1 a pound or \$2 if they pick the cherries for as long as they last. In Idaho, the cherry season can be fairly short.

In late July, Kelley Orchards will harvest pluots, peaches and nectarines, and the quality and quantity of fruit ripening on the trees looks good. The Kelleys sell fresh and dried fruit and berries at their barn store at the orchards off Hill Road. They also sell at the Saturday Capital Market in Boise starting in July.

All the elements came together this year for the fruit crop for both the Brookes and the Kelleys. The winter was not too harsh. Although frost threatened on a couple of occasions in the spring, which is the worst thing for fruit trees starting to blossom, they got through that without a disaster.

The Brookes were worried about a freeze-out of cherries earlier this spring when temperatures dipped into the 20s, but the trees did just fine.

It is a turnaround from last year, which was a near total loss for local fruit growers. One particularly cold sub-zero night in January severely damaged the buds on the trees. The result was that in the spring of 2017 the trees had no fruit at all.

Brooke said his 20 acres of fruit orchards off of Hill Road have en-



In June, Michael Brooke, who helps out at the family fruit business, Brooke Orchards, checks out the sweet cherry crop. The cherry harvest was better than 2017, when local orchards harvested virtually nothing, but not as good as 2016, a big year for cherries. Brooke Orchards grows Bings, Kionas, Bentons, Rainier and other varieties. The harvest season is pretty much done this year. *Photo by Steve Lyon*

dured minus five degrees before during winter months and still had fruit the following summer. The negative 20 degrees in 2017 was too much.

“It’s a whole different season than last year. There is a lot of fruit out there,” Ron Kelley said.

It’s often feast or famine for fruit growers. In 2016, the cherry trees at Brooke Orchards were loaded with fruit, so much so the branches were almost touching the ground.

Brooke took out some nectarines and apricot trees to plant some new trees. Some of the nectarine trees were damaged from previous winters and replaced with a block of apricots. The apricots and cherries will ripen at about the same



time. New trees take a couple of years before they start producing abundant fruit, he said.

After the cherries, apricots, plums, peaches and nectarines are gone, Kelley and Brooke or-

chards will be ready to harvest the apple crop in September.

Both grow the honeycrisp variety of apples. Some apples are sold locally and some go to a packing house.

Brooke Orchards has a new variety of apple called the evercrisp, a cross between the honeycrisp and Fuji.

The two orchards off Hill Road south of Weiser are just about the only commercial fruit growers left in Washington County, an area that once boasted orchards that grew dozens of varieties of apples and other fruit.

Call ahead and find out if they have any fresh fruit for sale at 208-642-1907. Kelley Orchards can be reached at 208-642-7265.

Vandal Clean Energy Club promotes biodiesel

The Vandal Clean Energy Club is bringing attention to the fact that biodiesel is an important product, and the University of Idaho is the leader in research.

Biodiesel is a renewable fuel made from vegetable oils or animal fats that can run diesel engines. The oil is reacted with alcohol and a catalyst through a process called transesterification to produce a diesel fuel.

Biodiesel reduces greenhouse gas emissions nearly 80 percent over petroleum diesel and does not put out the thick black smoke petroleum diesel does.

It also causes far less damage than petroleum diesel does if spilled or released to the environment and is safer than petroleum diesel because it is less combustible, according to a news release.

It is not only cleaner for the air,



University of Idaho students study crops that could be used to produce biodiesel fuel for vehicles, such as canola, above.

but it is cleaner for diesel engines. Biodiesel, which is competitively priced with petroleum diesel, can improve diesel engine performance, make engines run a little quieter, and extend their life.

“One of the most understated advantages of biodiesel, however, is its significant economic opportunities

for rural communities and farmers by creating a market for crops,” said Emily Kaschmitter, president of the CEC.

Kaschmitter is from Grangeville, where there are near growing conditions for canola, a potential source of biodiesel fuel.

“Most people have heard of biodiesel but few know it is an important international industry or that it was developed right here at the university,” says Chad Dunkel the biodiesel lab manager at the University of Idaho.

Biodiesel is made at the university from used oil gathered at the Sodexo campus kitchens that runs several campus vehicles. One of the University’s goals is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Dunkel said that using biodiesel goes a long way toward achieving that goal.



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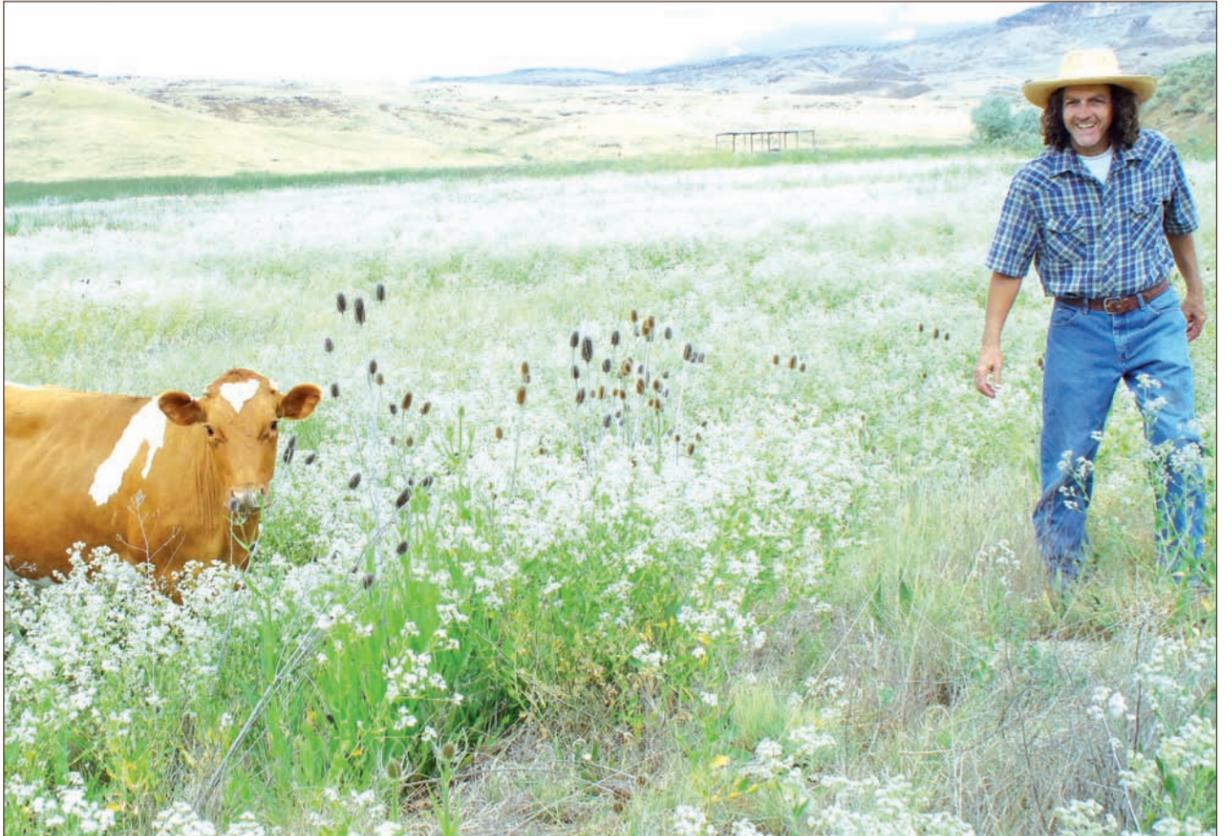


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David and Darlene Hall moved their family to Weiser from the Bay Area, seeking to start a ranching life and raise their own food. They found some acreage in the county and learned the ranching life. For the most part it's working out as the ranch becomes more self-sustaining with cows and chickens that can produce meat, milk and eggs, along with growing their own vegetables. *Photos by Nicole Miller*

The dream of owning a ranch becomes a reality

Family works hard to raise their own food

by Nicole Miller

When David Hall, his wife Darlene and their three children Michael, 19, Myles, 14, and Carolyn, 13, moved here from the Bay area, he had been working in the wastewater treatment industry for 30 years and had no ranching experience.

But what had begun as experience with wilderness and survival camping had grown into a dream, and the drive to fulfill that dream and God had led Hall and his family to 95 beautiful acres of ranch land here in Weiser.

The dream was to create a mostly self-sustaining ranch raising their own milk, meat, eggs, and vegetables. With three guernsey cows, jersey steers, a 1940s milking machine, chickens, a garden, a mulberry tree, one horse, and the teachings of multiple friends throughout the ranching industry, the Halls are not only living their dream, but the dream is growing.

The family each has their own part in the dream. The oldest, Michael, is going to college in Florida now, but helped with the ranch work when they first moved to Weiser, and Michael helps with milking while Carolyn is the baby calf-whisperer, bottle feeding and taming the babies.

The goal of self-sustaining ranching, came about from having always bought grass fed beef and raw milk, so there was a strong desire to raise their own to make sure they had the good food they wanted to put into their own bodies.

"My health has improved from having this milk," Hall said.

After having their first milk cow go dry, Hall began looking for a local source of raw milk and found that there were no local dairies certified to sell their milk closer than New Plymouth or Parma. He realized that they would need to eventually have all three cows in milk at different times, but one cow, when in milk produced more milk than his family needed.

Discussing this with his friends in the ranching community, the Hall's decided they could fill a community need while continuing to grow their dream.

Through help from the more experienced ranchers, the Hall's went through the process to get their guernsey milk tested for sale in accordance to the small farm exemption standards. Through IDAPA 02.04.13

"Rules Governing Raw Milk," the Dairy Bureau governs the production, processing and sale of raw milk and raw milk products for human consumption, but not intended for pasteurization. Any producer selling unpasteurized milk or unpasteurized milk products in Idaho must have a Small Herd Exemption.

The Small Herd Exemption animal limit allows the Halls no more than three milking cows. All animals participating in the program will be tested annually for brucellosis and tuberculosis. All products for sale by producer will be collected monthly by an ISDA inspector and tested for bacteria, somatic cell count, drugs and coliform by the Idaho State Dairy Lab.

So even with the small herd exemption the process is complicated and restricted, but even with one cow, Halls were able to sell to a few regular customers this last fall and expect to get as much as 24 gallons a day which will allow them to grow their

customer base and continue to keep their family well stocked.

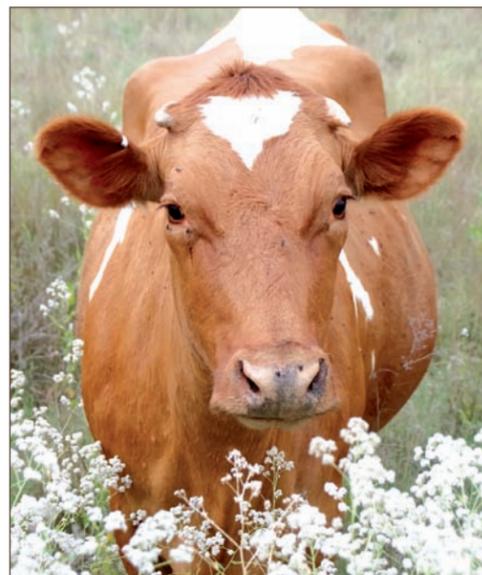
The Halls are planning on having milk available in a cooler at Peoples Furniture eventually and even plan to pursue getting other milk products including butter, yogurt, and kefir certified for sale as well. Hall feels that Weiser is a good-sized town for their to be a demand for the unique product.

"You can't get this milk in the store, or really anywhere local," Hall said.

Besides being fresh and raw, guernsey milk is unique because most of the milk in the stores is holstein milk. Guernsey milk has a golden-yellow tinge due to a high content of B-carotene, a provitamin for vitamin A. The milk also has a high butterfat content of 5 percent and a high protein content of 3.7 percent, and contains three times as much omega 3 as other milks.

Hall said that the more time they spend on their little ranch, the more the dream of the ranch grows. Every time they looked for land, they ended up looking in Weiser, and felt the town was where they belonged. They fell in love with Weiser and knew their dream could come true – they could have a ranch and still be involved in a wonderful community.

"No more bridge tolls, no more freeways, no more commuting. We truly are Dreamy Ranchers and we feel very blessed," Hall said.





Sheep graze on a pasture in the county as a striking rainbow appears to drop from the sky down behind the hills outside of Weiser. Photo by Royce Nowlin

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Mormon crickets like the one above were first seen as early as this spring above Mann Creek Reservoir and at the upper end of Monroe Creek Road north of Weiser. Officials are concerned that the crickets appear to be coming down to lower elevations over the past couple of years. *Courtesy photo*

Annual infestation of Mormon crickets seen north of Weiser

One property owner in county said this is third year the crickets have moved in

by Steve Lyon

Mormon crickets appeared earlier this spring in areas of Washington County around upper Monroe Creek Road and above Mann Creek, and this is the third year the destructive insects have invaded one homeowner's property.

Woody Woodcock recently told county commissioners that Mormon crickets are back for a third year where he lives near Upper Monroe Creek.

He said he wanted to start a dialogue with county officials about short and longer-term efforts to control cricket numbers.

He showed commissioners photos of the cricket infestation in the upper Monroe Creek area, describing it as something out of a science fiction movie.

He has tried to control the insect hordes as they arrive on his property, but they keep coming.

Last year the crickets hatched in May and the numbers slowly built up through June. This year he saw them come out in March after a relatively mild winter. The crickets appeared to be heading to the southwest and are coming down to lower elevations.

"If we don't start fighting them, they are going to come lower," Woodcock said.

One issue Woodcock raised with commissioners is where the crickets are coming from based on his observations. It appeared the crickets were migrating off of public land managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, he said.

Various means of controlling the bugs were discussed, including the most effective pesticides. It was suggested that Woodcock contact state lawmakers that represent Washington County if the cricket problem persists.

The state agriculture department has in the past employed aircraft to battle infestations over large areas.

The Idaho Department of Agriculture also has a complaint form that landowners can fill out if Mormon crickets or grasshoppers become bad.

The ISDA will supply insecticide bait to kill the crickets at no charge for farms and ranches that are at least 5 acres or larger.

The bait can be effective if the crickets will stop and eat it, experts said. If they are on the move, they can march right over a strip of bait. The extent

of damage to fields is related to how quickly farmers get bait out to kill the insects.

The severity of Mormon cricket infestations can be cyclical. The crickets are flightless, ground-dwelling insects native to the western U.S. They eat native, herbaceous perennials (forbs), grasses, shrubs, and cultivated forage crops, reducing feed for grazing wildlife and livestock.

Migrating crickets damage forage plants, small grains, alfalfa, and most other crops. Crickets have a migratory habit, staying at one site usually three or four days. They crawl and hop, moving during daylight hours when skies are clear and temperatures range between 65 degrees to 95 degrees.

In addition to damaging crops, the crickets are also a nuisance in large numbers. There have been reports of campgrounds overrun with crickets that are deserted because nobody wants to put up with the insects crawling on everything.

In large numbers, the crickets also can present a traffic hazard if they migrate in large numbers across a road or highway. If enough of the crickets are smashed on the road, the pavement can actually become slippery for drivers.

Southwest Idaho was the only region in the state in 2017 where there were complaints filed with the state ag department about Mormon cricket numbers. Washington and Owyhee counties were the center of cricket activity.

There were 78 landowner complaints in southwest Idaho and 63 landowners met the department of ag requirements and received carbaryl bait.

The total cricket bait distribution in southwest Idaho in 2017 was 76,430 pounds, a big increase from 12,770 pounds in 2016. Nearly 47,000 pounds of bait were distributed in Washington County alone.

The state received the first complaint from the Cambridge area last year on May 3, and most of the cricket activity was north of Weiser.

The crickets also showed up in large numbers along Highway 70 near Cambridge, prompting the Idaho Transportation Department to warn motorists about potentially slick roadway conditions as the migrating bugs were squished on the pavement.



The 2014 farm bill allows research to be done on cultivating industrial hemp. The prospect of widespread hemp cultivation got a boost recently with the passage in the U.S. Senate of legislation that defines hemp as an agriculture commodity and removes it from the list of controlled substances. Currently, products containing hemp can be sold in the U.S. but the hemp must be imported. *Courtesy photo*

Industrial hemp cultivation gets a boost at federal level

Some U.S. senators say U.S. farmers to grow crop that currently must be imported

by Steve Lyon

One Idaho lawmaker as recently as 2017 talked about introducing legislation to legalize the cultivation of industrial hemp – or at least move in that direction – but took no action during the 2018 session.

There has not been any strong political push in Idaho to recognize industrial hemp, a cousin of the marijuana plant, as a potential crop into the mainstream of agriculture, although there are farmers in the state who are in favor of growing the crop and there is a market.

An estimated \$500 million worth of hemp is imported annually into the U.S. from foreign sources. Industrial hemp is used in more than 25,000 products, including everyday items like hemp shampoo and hemp seed bread that can be purchased at a local grocery store.

Hemp products are a \$400 million market that is growing at 10 percent annually, according to various sources.

While there has been no movement at the state level on hemp, there has been recent bipartisan legislative efforts at the federal level in Washington, D.C., to allow industrial hemp, a “high-less” cousin of the marijuana plant, to be grown widely.

One of the biggest proponents of allowing farmers to grow industrial hemp has been U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who included some hemp-favorable parts in the 2014 Farm Bill and pushed the Hemp Farming Act earlier in 2018, which does a couple of things to further the hemp cause.

The Hemp Farming Act also had backing from Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who for many years has promoted the idea of growing industrial hemp in his tobacco-growing state. The legislation has passed the Senate and must be reconciled with a House version.

The legislation defines hemp as an agricultural commodity and removes it from the list of controlled substances. It also gives states the chance to become the main regulators of hemp production.

In addition, hemp farmers would be eligible to apply for crop insurance and allow hemp researchers to secure competitive USDA grants for research on the crop.

“I’m proud to have worked with my colleagues to get the bipartisan Hemp Farming Act through the Senate. It marks a long-overdue, huge step forward for American-grown hemp,” Wyden said in a news release.

Hemp proponents cite the expanding market for hemp-based products and gives farmers another crop to plant for diversification. In years when commodity prices for wheat or corn are down, industrial hemp could provide income as an alternative crop.

What’s more, backers of industrial hemp production note that farmers would not have to invest heavily to grow or harvest it. It is a low-maintenance crop and the equipment used to harvest it is similar to the equipment used for corn and soybeans.

The Idaho Farm Bureau has supported industrial grade hemp pro-

duction as a matter of policy with a couple of conditions. The IFB also supports the requirement that growers of industrial grade hemp register their fields with the appropriate regulatory or enforcement agency. Hemp grown as a crop would need to be at or below 0.3 percent THC content.

The IFB is in favor of authorizing the University of Idaho and the Idaho Department of Agriculture to conduct research and pilot programs on industrial hemp production to determine suitable varieties to meet market demand.

The 2014 farm bill included provisions that allowed state agriculture departments and universities to grow industrial hemp for research. Some university extension offices have developed research programs to evaluate industrial hemp as a commercial crop and study best practices in profitably growing it.

However, under current federal law, farmers in states that allow industrial hemp research and pilot programs must still seek a waiver from the Drug Enforcement Administration or risk raids and seizures by federal agents.

There are test plots of hemp that have been grown in the neighboring state of Oregon but none in Idaho yet.

“Without publicly available research, farmers are unlikely to gain crucial production knowledge and will be left out of this market opportunity,” according to the University of Vermont, one of the public institutions that is doing research on widescale hemp cultivation.



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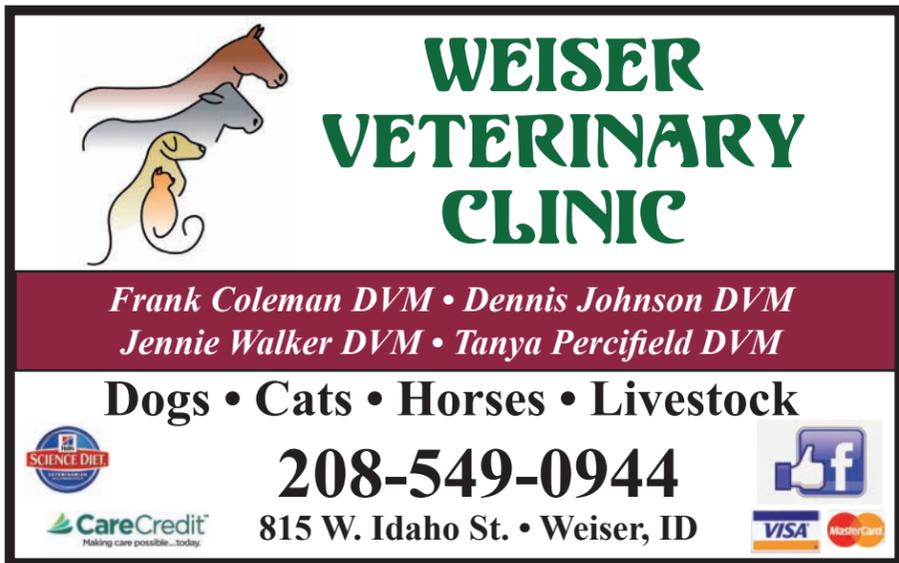
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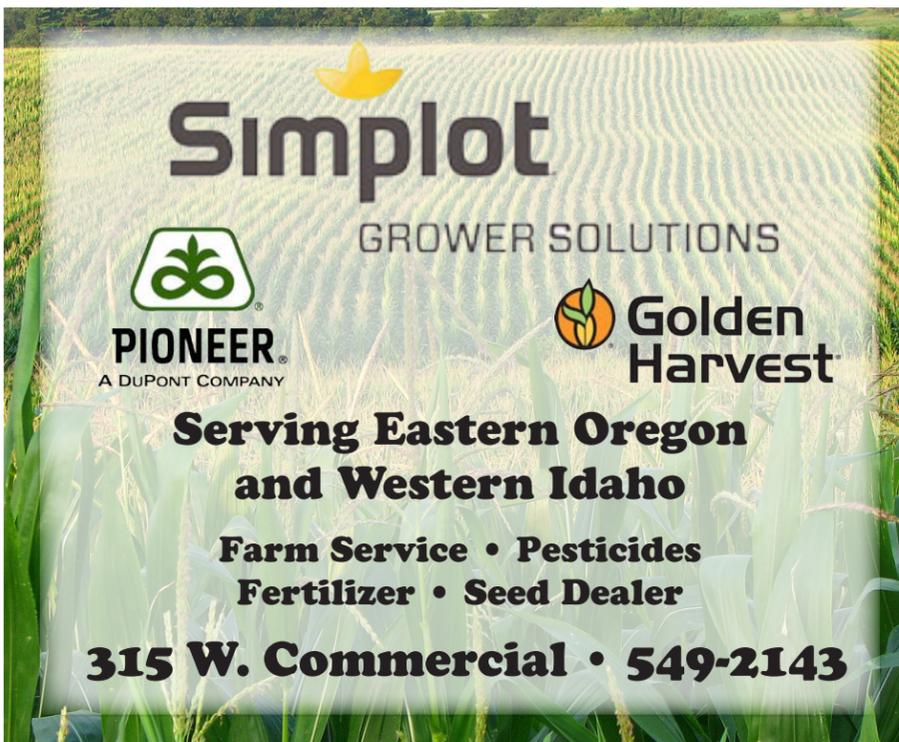


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Galen and Jenny Crawford, along with children Stella and Gia, are expanding their farming business to include the AC&D farm produce stand in Fruitland. They will sell the fruits and vegetables they grow in the area at the produce stand, straight from the field to the consumer.

Crawfords expand into the produce business

Local farmers bought popular fruits and veggies stand in Fruitland
by Nicole Miller

Weiser High School graduate Galen Crawford grew up learning to farm from his grandfather on the Oregon Slope. Crawford's wife Jenny also grew up on her family farm.

Now, they are raising their two daughters, Stella and Gia, with the traditions and work ethic they each grew up with as they expand their business and with the purchase of AC&D Farm produce stand in Fruitland.

Crawford said he is lucky to get to farm some of the most fertile soil in existence on the Washoe Road. They are not only able to grow a large variety but also high quality without pesticides and only with commercial fertilizer.

Instead of pesticides and weed control sprays, Crawford uses plastic sheet mulching and drip irrigation. They are able to use about half as much water and hand weed the rows.

Crawford began farming produce for commercial sales of watermelon, pumpkins and winter squash to local grocers such as Albertsons and Winco. People would stop by the farm when they saw all the produce Crawfords were growing and ask to buy it directly from them.

This year, Crawfords were lucky enough to have the opportunity to expand their produce stand when the AC&D farms business became available.

"It offered the perfect opportunity in a prime location on prime real estate," Crawford said. "They created a great business and we were able to jump into that opportunity and add to it with our experience and product."

The location is not only convenient but also is a draw for consumers because there are three quality produce stands all in that

same area. While one might think that would hurt business, Crawford believes it actually helps business. Shoppers have found a one stop area where they can find the variety they want by stopping by all three stands.

Open July through at least Oct. 31, depending on when the season winds down, Crawford said that their produce stand will offer tree fruit, berries, peppers, herbs, and even more selection than consumers have been able to find at the previous location of Crawford Farms as well as this location under the former ownership.

In the fall, Crawford Farms will offer over 60 varieties of pumpkins. They specialize in pumpkins people would not be able to find elsewhere, like oversized white pumpkins or knobby goblin-esque pumpkins, and pumpkins in every color you can imagine.

They also plan to celebrate the fall harvest season with a petting zoo and corn maze and other activities for the family similar to what has been offered in recent years at the AC&D stand.

"We want to offer the variety of quality produce at wholesale pricing. The communities in the area have been super supportive and this business will help us not provide great products in a convenient location at an affordable price, but will also help us be even more involved with the wonderful community this area of the Treasure Valley is known for," Crawford said.

The grand opening of the stand is set for July 21-22. The stand is open seven days a week and the hours are 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, with the possibility of the hours expanding if the need arises.