



Oregon Department of Agriculture

ODA home

About Us
Contact Us

Newsroom
News releases and stories of the week
Agriculture Quarterly
Reports, speeches, videos
Public records request
Request popular ODA publications
Subscribe to ODA news and information

About Oregon agriculture
Calendar of Public meetings
Commodity Commissions
Director's webpage
FAQs
Farm Mediation
Grants and financial
New and small farms
Oregon ag laws
Risk Management

Sustainability
Energy and ag

Search the ODA website
Search for jobs
Search for licenses
Search ODA databases
Search for agricultural resources



The Agriculture Quarterly

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- [Oregon blueberries pave a road to South Korea](#)
- [Board of Agriculture Profile: Pete Brentano](#)
- [Director's Column](#)
- [Census of Agriculture reaches out to Oregon farmers](#)
- [Managing risk can be good insurance for Oregon ag](#)
- [Ag producers benefit from WorkSource services](#)
- [Affordable streamside improvements, a win-win for everyone](#)
- [ODA adopts rules for Oregon's new firewood law](#)
- [Oregon farmers' markets open for business over winter](#)
- [ODA seeks concept proposals for 2013 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program](#)
- [Announcements](#)



Oregon blueberries pave a road to South Korea

By Bruce Pokarney

Even to the casual observer, Asia's insatiable appetite for blueberries is overwhelmingly clear. No place is it more obvious than in South Korea and its retail grocery stores. The health consciousness of 50 million consumers runs high in this densely populated country. You will find dried blueberries, blueberry juice, blueberry powder, blueberry confections, blueberry-based cosmetics—heck, you can even purchase dog food that contains blueberries. And, of course, there are frozen blueberries. Imagine a long line that runs out the front door of a Costco as patient customers wait to get their hands on a bulk bag of frozen blueberries. That has actually happened in the capital city of Seoul.



What you are less likely to see is a fresh blueberry. Domestic blueberry production can't meet the demand and doesn't always show up in the stores anyway. For a nation that has a crush on blueberries, you would expect a fresh product to be the rage.

For Oregon's blueberry industry, the opportunity is too good to resist. This past summer, Oregon became the first state allowed to ship fresh blueberries into the Korean market—in fact, the first blueberry production area in the world allowed fresh market access. Nearly half a million pounds found its way across the Pacific Ocean—a relatively modest start to an ambitious plan. It wasn't easy. It wasn't even profitable for Oregon growers and packers this first year. But most everyone will agree, it was worth the trouble and expense to gain a foothold in a market so rich with potential.

Oregon blueberry grower Mark Hurst sums it up best.

"Oregon had this opportunity to be first in Korea, but there is a cost associated with that opportunity. It's all part of being the pioneer, and it is totally worth the effort for the future."

The collaboration between Oregon's blueberry industry, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and South Korean officials was critical during the first year. By all accounts, it was a successful season that paves the way for a pipeline of Oregon berries into Korea for years to come.

One chance to make a first impression

A great deal of groundwork took place before the first Oregon blueberry ever showed up in South Korea. Knowing that you only get one chance to make a good first impression, everyone associated with the effort took the project very seriously.

"Oregon has been a trailblazer, but it hasn't been cheap or easy," says Jim Cramer, Director of Market Access and Certification Programs for the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "Growers, packers, and ODA have all spent a lot of time and effort to make this work."

Recognizing a unique opportunity, ODA worked for years with the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the state's blueberry industry in crafting a deal with South Korean food safety inspection officials to clear the hurdles that have kept fresh berries out of that market. In the fall of 2011, APHIS announced an agreement that would allow Oregon to ship fresh blueberries to Korea during the 2012 season. With the green light, protocols had to be ironed out to ensure fresh Oregon blueberries pose no risk and won't be a vector for pests and diseases that might be introduced to South Korea.

"Our blueberry growers and packers had a lot of extra work to go through in order to do this, but they made the investment to open up a new market," says ODA's Certification Manager Lindsay Eng. ODA developed and implemented a voluntary fee-for-service certification program for growers, packers, and shippers of fresh blueberries intended for South Korea. As it turned out, 42 growers and 9 packers signed on this first year and went through the stringent requirements set forth by the protocol. A total of 271 Oregon blueberry fields were certified.



ODA worked with the Oregon Blueberry Commission to educate growers and packers on what needed to be done in order to ship the berries overseas. Nearly a dozen meetings and presentations featured APHIS representatives as well as an ODA entomologist and plant pathologist talking about insects and diseases of concern. Eng explained MRLs—maximum residue limits—which dictate the acceptable amount of pesticide residues that can be on the blueberries. ODA helped to provide pre-clearance testing for growers and packers to meet Korean MRL issues. Generally, Oregon growers had to treat specific fields of blueberries destined for Korea differently than other fields and had to intensively document their practices, which included trapping and pest control.

"This protocol is one that we don't have to work with in any other market," says Jeff Malensky of Oregon Berry Packing, based in Hillsboro. "From managing the field and showing the Koreans our records to actually having specific fields grown for the Korean market only, we had to make sure we were doing things correctly."

The Oregon Blueberry Commission sponsored a visit by a Korean inspector at the beginning of the harvest season to review the protocol and how Oregon was responding. Dr. Keum Hee Lee received a first hand look at the insect trapping and all other steps taken by growers to ensure Korean phytosanitary concerns are being addressed.

"There is so much involved, but it was a good learning experience for all of us this first year," says Malensky. "Everyone will be much better prepared for next year."



Ringin' off the hook

Connoisseurs of Korean food are familiar with the traditional fermented dish known as kimchi. The spicy vegetable food is so popular in South Korea that many families have two refrigerators—one dedicated to storing kimchi alone. It's not a stretch to say that blueberries are the kimchi of the fruit world in Korea.

"The supply of blueberry products is having a hard time catching up with demand," says Sang Young Oh, a marketing specialist with the US Agricultural Trade Office in Seoul.

It's clear that Koreans have embraced the health benefits of blueberries. Grocery stores and other retail establishments prominently feature blueberry products. Dried and frozen Oregon blueberries—along with other non-fresh blueberry products—have been in the market for years. So the opportunity to import fresh blueberries from Oregon was met with great excitement and anticipation.

"This was a cautious and deliberate first season and we weren't really sure what to expect," says Bryan Ostlund, administrator of the Oregon Blueberry Commission. "But once word got out that we were going to ship to Korea, the phones began ringing off the hook. On a trip overseas in April, we had people lining up to meet with us. We were the popular one at the dance."

As many as 40 buyers contacted Roseburg blueberry grower Paul Norris wanting Oregon blueberries. It appeared that the first year of tapping the Korean market was going to bust out of the gate. Then reality set in. Some of the major buyers weren't able to line up the deals they expected. Despite the newly opened market, Oregon growers and packers had to contend with a tariff exceeding 40 percent. (The tariff will be dropping 5 percent per year until it reaches zero). Also, 2012 was a very good year for domestic blueberry production in South Korea, which made Oregon blueberries even less cost-competitive.

From a financial point of view, the first year was not a moneymaker.

"We all hoped to have moved more fruit than we actually did," says Norris. "We were continually moving small quantities, but there were no real big orders outside of one from Costco in Korea. The frustration for many of us was all the work—monitoring the insects, keeping special notebooks, doing extra paperwork, separating the Korean-bound fruit from the other fruit—it was a lot to do for a market that really wasn't big yet. Still, I think this first year was positive and everyone will agree that getting fresh Oregon blueberries into the country is a good thing for the industry."



Blueberry plantings in Oregon have increased dramatically the past decade. Ten years ago,

production of Oregon blueberries was roughly 20 million pounds. Last year, the harvest was closer to 75 million pounds. Finding a home for all those berries is important. A fraction of that production going to South Korea can help even those growers who don't export by re-directing product that might otherwise be sold domestically.

By the end of summer, Oregon had shipped nearly 489,000 pounds of fresh blueberries into South Korea—a significant start for a market with much potential.

"We made it through year one, things went well, and our growers and packers rose to the occasion," says Ostlund. "That sets the stage for continued growth of the relationship between our production and Korean consumers."

Reports back from Korea indicated that consumers were pleased with the quality of the blueberries they bought from Oregon.

"Did we make a good first year impression?" asks Norris. "I would say mission accomplished."

A sky blue future

Even though nearly half a million pounds of Oregon blueberries were shipped and presumably consumed in South Korea this past year, there was little to no marketing being done. It was more important to see if the protocol and all the work done by the growers would be good enough to avoid problems. They were, and Oregon was able to crack a market it was told a few years ago it couldn't crack.



"Because of Oregon being the first US state to send fresh blueberries to South Korea, it puts the onus on us to develop the market," says Ostlund. "In the short term, Korean buyers would like to see a branded Oregon program for many of the reasons we've seen with other Oregon products over time. Oregon has the name recognition and is looked upon favorably. In Korea, Oregon is associated with fresh, clean, blue water. We can capitalize on that."

In the long term, it's very likely that Oregon's trailblazing into South Korea clears the way for other blueberry-producing states. Washington, California, and perhaps a Canadian province—British Columbia—might all benefit from a more regional marketing effort. Even with the addition of others, Oregon stands to gain a great deal.

Opportunities in the next year or two will justify year one's investment. HF Foods offers school nutrition products that include single serve packaging for school lunches. The innovative company is looking to Oregon's blueberry industry as a source for product and is being held back only by the question of how much fruit can Oregon send them. Shinsegae is one of the largest retailers in the world and is very interested in offering Oregon blueberries for sale in their upscale stores. It's a retailer that can handle a tremendous volume of fruit.

"What I saw in Korea are people that are great to work with," says Norris, the southern Oregon grower who traveled to Seoul with ODA officials in late fall as a follow up to the inaugural shipments. "I think we have the potential to double the 489,000 pounds we sent this first year. We just have to keep giving them quality fruit."

That optimism is shared by Mark Hurst, who collaborated with Norris in shipping pallets of blueberries to South Korea.

"I can remember when we started to ship blueberries to Japan in the early 1990s. It took a few years to get it going. Japan has ended up being a huge market for Oregon and blueberries in general. In the long term, shipping to Korea will be very good as well."

ODA and the blueberry industry agree that Oregon can't just rest on its laurels after year one. There is still much work to do in year two and beyond. The same level of care and consideration will be necessary to build on the foundation laid in 2012. But the fresh Oregon blueberry has already made a name for itself more than 5,000 miles away.

[▲ Back to the top](#)

Board of Agriculture Profile: Pete Brentano

When Pete Brentano was asked to apply for a vacant position on the State Board of Agriculture, he really had to think about it. He was flattered and excited about the opportunity to serve on behalf of all agriculture, but how would it fit into his busy schedule? In addition to managing a very successful but time-consuming nursery operation in St. Paul, Brentano is a 4-H club leader, a volunteer fireman, a member of the St. Paul Rodeo Association, his 12-year old son's basketball coach, and involved in a number of other community activities.



"But I looked at serving on the board as a chance for me to get outside the nursery and learn what is going on in other sectors of Oregon agriculture," says Brentano. "It's such a big, diverse part of Oregon. In our family farming operation, the nursery is contained on one piece of property even though we farm from nearly Newberg to Woodburn. I call the nursery my cubicle because I hardly get off that piece of ground. So I'm happy to be part of the board. I think there's a lot I can bring to the group but also know there's a lot the board will give to me."

Pete Brentano is part of the sixth generation of his family's farming operation. His parents started the current 2,000-acre farm in 1958, both coming from farm families of their own. It started as a dryland wheat operation but was primarily producing row crops while Pete and his three older brothers were growing up. By the time he went to Oregon State University to pursue a business degree, the family was dabbling in one of the state's up-and-coming agricultural commodities—nursery products. It was more of a side interest than anything else. After two years in college, Pete knew he wanted to get back

into agriculture, so he also started pursuing a degree in crop and soil science at OSU.

"About the time I graduated, the family held a meeting to discuss the future of the nursery operation," he says. "We had to decide if we were really serious about getting into the business or should just get out of it. I decided to operate the nursery. We started with shade and flowering trees. The first couple of years, there was a glut of product on the market. It certainly wasn't a flash start for us even though the nursery industry was doing pretty well as a whole."

But hard work and perseverance—along with good product and customer service—have paid off. Brentano's Tree Farm LLC sells to landscapers, wholesalers, garden centers, and nursery brokers. Pete's work and stature in the nursery industry led to a stint in 2006 as president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, an experience he believes will help him with the State Board of Agriculture.

"I've learned a lot about how to look at different aspects of an issue, to realize there are different sides and to always consider how other people view the situation. I've learned to work with people who have different opinions."

While he is interested in all issues that are important to Oregon agriculture, one in particular he carries with him from the nursery trade.

"Adequate transportation and infrastructure is an area of interest to me, making sure agriculture continues to have a good connection with our markets," says Brentano.

It's also obvious that family farming is important to the Brentanos, considering the nursery is actually owned by Pete, his mom, his three brothers, and his two sisters. Pete's wife, Wendy, is also involved in running the nursery. Don't be surprised if their two children, Elizabeth and Zach, someday get into the family business.



Director's Column

(Editor's note: The following is a modified version of an op-ed written by Director Coba for the East Oregonian newspaper.)

For those of us in the agriculture delegation during Governor Kitzhaber's 11-day trade mission to Asia this fall, one of the highlights took place in a retail grocery located in Hong Kong. We were waiting for the governor's arrival to participate in an in-store promotion of newly arrived Oregon pears. It gave us the opportunity to look at the wide array of products for sale, not necessarily looking for other Oregon products. To our surprise, we discovered a display of Tillamook cheese. Though we weren't aware Tillamook exported to Asia, the store manager told us he had been carrying their products for three or four years.

It's no surprise that Asia wants the types of products Oregon can provide. Representatives of Oregon's agricultural industry who participated in the trade mission were thrilled by the unexpected, but familiar label, and the Tillamook cheese sighting opened our eyes to new possibilities for Oregon-grown products.



During this mission, we made three stops—Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. Oregon agriculture is present in all of those markets, but in varying degrees. Japan is still Oregon agriculture's number one overseas market. But clearly, China is growing by leaps and bounds. The opportunities for Oregon agriculture in the Chinese market are huge, but it remains a difficult market in which to do business. We are very active in Hong Kong because it is often easier for Oregon producers and processors to develop a relationship with someone there and ultimately move the product into China.

On this mission, three agricultural sectors were represented—potatoes, dairy, and wine. Potatoes and wine are involved in all three markets, to some extent. For dairy, this was the maiden voyage into export markets. The last five times I've been in Asia, I've been asked, by overseas buyers and others, whether Oregon has dairy products to offer. There is demand and clearly a growing population that wants access to a variety of dairy products—shelf-stable milk, whey powder, cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. For dairy, the purpose of the mission was to do market reconnaissance. What's in the market? What is it selling for? How is it being sold? Do we in Oregon think we can be competitive in those markets? The resounding answer to that last question is yes. The next step is to focus on priorities— which products? Which markets? You can't do it all at once, so let's be very strategic. We will move forward hand-in-hand with industry. So much dairy production takes place in Morrow County, anything that helps sell Oregon dairy products in general will help Eastern Oregon's agricultural economy.

On the potato side, we connected with existing market outlets—wholesalers and retailers. In Japan, the governor met with Calbee Foods, which owns a processing facility in Boardman as a joint effort with R.D. Offut. That facility processes 100 percent of the product that goes into a snack food sold in Japan stores called Jagabee. It's a little package containing a shelf-stable French fry-type product. Three Mile Canyon Farms in Boardman provides 100 percent of the organic potato product that is processed at the facility in Boardman, frozen, and shipped over to Japan for further processing. Calbee Foods sees the market growing for their products. As a result, the processing line in Boardman is scheduled to expand next spring.

This was Governor Kitzhaber's second trade mission of his current term and eleventh overall trade mission that he has led to either Europe or Asia. Agriculture has been involved in all of those trade missions. I've been involved in several of them. The governor has become very knowledgeable about agriculture as part of Oregon's economy and how important our international markets are for Oregon agriculture. He has shown a real willingness and desire to do everything he can to help advance agriculture's opportunities in those markets. Having the governor overseas promoting Oregon agriculture is a huge benefit for our industry.

I always come back from these trade missions with a great sense of pride for the ODA marketing staff. Their hard work in planning and carrying out these important ventures makes the missions effective. I

also have pride for Oregon agriculture itself. There is nothing quite like seeing first hand how well our high-quality products are received and what great opportunities exist beyond our borders.

 [Back to the top](#)

Census of Agriculture reaches out to Oregon farmers

The most ambitious and important agricultural survey of all is getting underway in Oregon and the rest of the fifty states as the 2012 Census of Agriculture reaches out to every farmer and rancher in the United States.

Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, encourages the state's producers to cooperate with the census being conducted by the US Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

"There are many reasons for our producers to provide the information requested by the census, but the most compelling is that information about our agriculture is key for policy makers to make good and informed decisions that affect the industry," says Coba.

The Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years, and even though this one is considered the 2012 Census, the actual results and reports won't be completed until early 2014. That's because of the huge amount of information and details that need to be gathered and analyzed.

"The census provides a comprehensive snapshot for Oregon all the way down to the county level and gives all kinds of information about the farm population," says Chris Mertz, state director for the Oregon Field Office of USDA-NASS, whose staff is responsible for conducting the census in Oregon.

Questionnaires, which were sent out in December to all farmers on record, need to be completed and returned by February 4, 2013. Timely, complete, and accurate responses to the questions in the agricultural report forms are essential.

"It would be worth their while for farmers and ranchers to complete the survey," says Mertz. "There are many policy decisions that are made at the national and state level that will result from the survey. Federal, state, and local decision makers use the information to serve local farmers and develop programs that assist them in times of need. We need data that is as accurate as possible because it definitely helps the agricultural community and population in general by presenting the real story of agriculture in Oregon and the US."

The census asks a lot of questions about crops, livestock, land use, ownership, equipment, chemical use, and demographics. The last census introduced questions on organic commodities, energy, conservation methods, and community-supported agriculture. New this time around, producers will be asked about on-farm renewable energy production and land use practices. Many of these questions will simply ask for a yes-no response, but could lead to more detailed questions in subsequent surveys in the near future.

This year, questionnaires have been mailed out to more than 38,000 farmers and ranchers in Oregon. The 24-page questionnaire should take about a half an hour to complete. Once again this year, the Census of Agriculture offers respondents an online option.

For census purposes, a farm is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold or normally would have been sold during the census year.

"That's especially important in Oregon where we have so many small producers who report between a thousand and \$10,000 in annual sales," says Mertz.

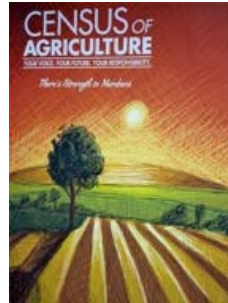
The law requiring farmers and ranchers to complete the census forms also protects confidentiality and privacy of information they supply. Individual forms cannot be seen by anyone but sworn NASS employees.

The agriculture census is the only source of uniform data down to the county level on agricultural production and inventories. Originally taken every ten years, farm census data has been collected every five years since 1920. Historical census data is actually available from as early as 1840.

For now, information about 2012 is all that's needed from Oregon's farmers and ranchers.

Information about the 2012 Census of Agriculture is available at <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>.

 [Back to the top](#)



Managing risk can be good insurance for Oregon ag

By Stephanie Page

Think insurance isn't an option for your type of ag operation? It's worth taking a second look. Insurance is a valuable piece of a farm risk management strategy addressing production, financial, marketing, human resources, and legal risks. Several newer insurance tools are available through the Farm Bill, and can be a good fit for operations that have traditionally not used crop insurance programs. These include tools to insure revenue and to manage input and sale price risks.

Two revenue protection programs, Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) and AGR-Lite, can be a good fit for specialty crop operations to insure against market fluctuations as well as natural disasters. Through these programs,



farmers can select an insured revenue level based on the past five years' revenue.

"I thought it was a pretty good tool for us," says Greg Bennett, a specialty crop grower in Brooks. "With the types of crops that we grow, like blueberries and onions, that are really intense high-value types of crops, we never really had anything before besides the major catastrophic crop insurance. That never really worked unless there was a county disaster declaration. I did that a couple times and then they have you fill out all this paperwork. You take it down and you might get \$1000, which is hardly worth your time."

Bennett reports that the AGR claims process has been simple and has helped to take some of the swings out of some relatively high-risk crops.

"I want to keep my target level higher and hope I don't use the insurance. But if your target level is higher, it's not a matter of if you're going to use it but when you're going to use it. We're always going to have a stumble somewhere along the way whether it's market issues or weather issues. I've just plugged it into our operation and it's a line item for doing business. There are such slim margins in agriculture now, just one stumble can put you backwards pretty quick."

Jo Lynne Seufer with USDA-Risk Management Agency reports that participation in AGR and AGR-Lite has declined a bit in recent years in Oregon because some participating farms have seen declines in the five-year income average that they would enroll to protect. As incomes recover from the recession, participation will likely increase again. "I see opportunities going forward for a variety of diversified operations, including small and large farms," explains Seufer. AGR sales close January 31 and AGR-Lite sales close March 15.

Greg Bennett reports that he decided to opt in this year, even though the target level was relatively low. "Given the wet springs we've had and how hard it can be to get everything planted, we decided to go ahead and do it and we were glad we did." Even if your operation is relatively diversified, "If you get hooked up with a good agent who handles the AGR programs, he can link you up real quickly with the programs, plug some numbers in for the last five years and see how it would fit for you. You can go back and see whether it's a good fit for you, and whether it would have helped you or not."

The Livestock Gross Margin-Dairy program is another tool available to manage risk. It allows producers to hedge against feed price increases or milk price decreases during their elected contract period by locking in a margin based on milk prices and feed prices.

"Livestock gross margin is a tool that will protect both sides—inputs and sale prices," explains Jo Lynne Seufer. "It's similar to a combination of broker "put" options and "call" options. Some folks ask, why don't I just do a put or a call option on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange? Well, you have to do a large volume in the Exchange, but you can buy this policy for as little as one head or one hundredweight of milk."

The program has not been used much in Oregon. According to Seufer and George Harris, an insurance agent with Northwest Farm Credit Services, this is most likely because of past funding constraints in the program. However, Harris notes that the funding has increased. "We still have availability for sales, which provides the dairymen a greater opportunity to hedge their risk," says Harris. Dairy LGM sales occur on the last business Friday of each month.

Seufer explains that the program may be a better fit for some of the smaller dairies. "There are significant limits on the size you can insure—240,000 hundredweight limit per crop year, which is pretty limiting. New England producers were involved like crazy."

Another program, the Livestock Risk Protection program, has been a great fit for lamb producers in Oregon. It is available to beef and lamb producers and allows participants to lock in a beef or lamb price based on market rates at the time of enrollment. "This covers just one side of producers' risk—sale prices," says Jo Lynn Seufer. Lamb LRP is available only on Mondays, unless there is a holiday, and cattle and swine are available every weekday unless there is a holiday.

While beef producers have other options to cover price risk, there is no Chicago Mercantile Exchange price for lamb. "The Livestock Risk Protection program is the only hedging tool that a lamb producer has to protect themselves," says George Harris. "It has been very popular over this last year. This summer, we had prices that were close to \$140/hundredweight and now we're hearing \$100 for a coverage price. Those that have participated in it have received some substantial indemnity payments."

Reed Anderson, owner of Anderson Ranches in Brownsville, can attest to the benefits of the program. "We use it for risk management and we think it's a tremendous tool," he explains. "I've got on the phone when I thought the policies were good and encouraged people to buy them and explained it to them because I thought it was such a great idea."

Anderson is surprised that participation in the program hasn't been even higher, but speculates that this may be due to marketing schedules, the newness of the program, or the up-front cost of premiums. "Your livestock have to fit the mold or the dates of the policies, and if your marketing scheme doesn't fit those, then there is not much you can do about it. If you can insure your lambs and you're going to market them in a 13 week time period this is a way to insure against any price drop. But sometimes it's hard for some people to ride out that premium check."

Jo Lynne Seufer speculates that participation in these programs is very good in the Midwest because producers there participate so heavily on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and are very comfortable dealing in corn and soybean futures. She says it's important to understand the tools well, so that you make sound decisions on when to participate. Her advice to producers: "Do what you feel comfortable with."

In addition to the programs described in this article, several other newer tools are available through USDA-RMA. It's worth learning about them through workshops or through your insurance agent and evaluating whether they can be a part of your overall risk management plans.

Reed Anderson says it can appear frustrating to participate in a program and add the cost of premiums to other input costs, but it is well worth insuring against a loss. "When you experience a loss—you buy lambs for \$2 a pound and sell for \$1 a pound—those don't leave your memory quite so fast."

 [Back to the top](#)

Ag producers benefit from WorkSource services

By Todd D. Brown, Oregon Employment Department

Which sector of Oregon's economy fared better than most during the Great Recession? This may surprise you—agriculture. According to a recent study by Oregon State University, agriculture's percentage of the net state product is 15 percent—up from 10.6 percent cited in a similar OSU study done in 2008. While the actual dollar value of agricultural goods and services fell to \$22 billion during the recession; "the percentage gain did not decline as much as other industries," said Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) analyst Brent Searle.



The study, commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, underlines the importance of agriculture to Oregon's economy, and firmly plants the industry at the heart of Oregon's improving economic climate.

As Oregon continues to develop innovative new agricultural processes, one thing remains constant. Farms, nurseries, and vineyards need effective workers to harvest the crops, tend the fields, and create those agricultural products that have made Oregon a leader in nursery products, fruit, nuts, grass seeds, wheat, and wines. But where can agricultural employers recruit workers, set competitive wages, and get advice on meeting labor laws and rules?

The Oregon Employment Department operates 38 WorkSource Centers throughout the state, and has business representatives who work to discover employer needs and provide workforce solutions. Many of these representatives specialize in the agricultural industry and each center has a designated staff person to work with agricultural employers and workers. WorkSource services to both employers and job seekers come without a fee, and include recruiting services, economic and workforce information, help organizing employment-related matters, and coordinating services with other organizations serving the agricultural community.

Agricultural employers are often challenged to find workers quickly, especially when harvest time is rapidly approaching. But according to State Monitor Advocate Fernando Gutierrez, who monitors WorkSource services to agricultural employers, "I ask them if they have tried our recruiting services and they reluctantly say 'no' in part because of all the bureaucratic paperwork and the response times." Fernando works hard to change that perception, explaining that services to agricultural employers have improved and the process simplified to provide timely employee referrals.

In the past year alone, WorkSource has placed nearly 3,000 workers from their applicant base of over 6,000 workers who indicated they are farmworkers. Staff also opened over 900 job listings with agricultural employers. In addition, the WorkSource network includes various training organizations and resources that can help workers get needed training, like a pesticide certification or earn their General Educational Development (GED) credentials.

Find your nearest WorkSource Oregon Center at www.WorkSourceOregon.org.

For additional information on agricultural programs at WorkSource Oregon contact:

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 [Back to the top](#)

Affordable streamside improvements, a win-win for everyone

By Amanda Garzio-Hadzick

Farmers and ranchers value clean water and healthy natural resources but may think they can't afford to improve their streamside areas in order to help protect Oregon's water quality. However, improving streamside vegetation (aka riparian vegetation) can be simple, inexpensive, and only take a little bit of land.



Healthy streamside areas are an important part of achieving the clean water that supports Oregon's diverse agricultural production and other natural resource uses. Oregon law requires farmers and ranchers to allow streamside vegetation to establish to help provide clean water.

Some streamside areas can be improved by pulling back cropping or changing grazing management in order to let vegetation establish naturally. These "passive" approaches to restoration can be a relatively quick and cost-effective way to restore a streamside area.

Many producers have improved the streamside areas on their own, but technical and financial help is

available. The local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Watershed Council, or OSU Extension agent can provide assistance developing and implementing a plan. Financial assistance, cost-share, and grants are available through a variety of programs to help make these plans become a reality. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is a state agency that offers a variety of grant programs to help Oregonians take care of local streams, rivers, wetlands, and natural areas.

A popular funding source is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), a voluntary land retirement program that helps agricultural producers protect streamside areas and wetlands.

"The cost-share provided by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and OWEB provides the major portion of the cost of restoration and, along with additional incentives, may cover all costs," says Lois Loop, from the Oregon FSA State office. Loop also points out that participants in the CREP program also receive an annual rental payment loosely based on the productivity of the acreage that has been taken out of production. "CREP is a good fit for a majority of locations where there is a degraded streamside or an area that has been annually tilled right up to the stream bank," she explains. As of July 2012, Oregon CREP had more than 40,000 acres enrolled under 1,607 individual contracts located in 34 of the 36 counties.



Improving streamsid es can also be a relatively feasible way to address problems that can be costly for farmers.

"By making improvements to your streamside areas, farmers and ranchers could protect water quality by stabilizing the streambank, filtering nutrients and pollution, trapping sediment, and slowing the heating of stream water," says Ken Diebel, CREP technician with the Baker SWCD. "In addition to protecting water quality, high quality streamside areas protect valuable farmland by preventing erosion. "Still not convinced to take the first step toward improving your streamside area? All the potential benefits can outweigh the cost. Diebel points out that streamside areas can provide high quality forage. So with proper grazing management, livestock producers can improve animal health and weight gain.

"OSU ag economists have found that cross fencing to facilitate rotational grazing, providing off-stream water, strategic placement of salt, and herding to benefit streamside areas can pay for themselves because calves gain more weight and cows are healthier and easier to take care of during the winter months," he explains. "Additionally, healthy vegetation can bind soil in its roots to help prevent streambank erosion and healthy vegetation can also reduce weeds on your land."

Oregonians value the many benefits that healthy streamside vegetation provides to water quality. Streamsid es can also add value to an ag operation and the benefits of improving streamside areas may outweigh the costs.

"Having a healthy riparian area can go a long way to having a sustainable and economically viable farming or ranching operation," says Diebel. "You can have your trees, fish, and farming too!"

 [Back to the top](#)

ODA adopts rules for Oregon's new firewood law

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has finalized the rules for a new state law addressing imported firewood that is in effect as of January 1, 2013. Oregonians now have a choice to buy local or buy firewood that has been heat treated and labeled as pest free.



"The rules prohibit firewood from outside the Pacific Northwest unless it has been treated at a temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit for one hour to kill all the pests inside it," says Dan Hilburn, director of Plant Programs with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "That's very important because there are invasive pests and diseases outside of our region that could travel to Oregon on firewood."

The 2011 Oregon Legislature passed the firewood law and gave ODA regulatory authority. For the past year, ODA has been working on the rules that go along with the law. Following a public comment period, the agency has now finalized those rules in an effort to diminish the possibility of dangerous insects hitching a ride to Oregon on firewood.

"We think these rules will be put into place just in the nick of time," says Hilburn.

Oregon consumers should look for two types of firewood available for sale.

"There will be wood that is cut in Oregon, Washington, or Idaho that is allowed without heat treatment," says Hilburn. "That is the best firewood. If it harbors any insects, they are the ones that are native to Oregon. Those are not a threat to our forests. The other kind that will be available to consumers is firewood coming from outside the Pacific Northwest which will be heat treated. It will have a label stating that it is pest free."

Even though local firewood is not required to be labeled, commercial sellers can choose to do so anyway. A product label is allowed to claim an approved Pacific Northwest firewood. A pest free label, however, will require the same heat treatment needed for firewood originating from outside Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

States with invasive species problems like emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, or sudden oak death have plenty of dying trees that are cut for firewood and then moved. These trees die in the first place because of the insect or disease, which can then show up hundreds of miles from any local infestation as people take the wood with them or sell it far from the source. It has happened in other parts of the country; it can happen in Oregon.

"Emerald ash borer started out in the Detroit, Michigan area and has been spreading about 20 miles a year on its own," says

Hilburn. "The bug flies and spreads naturally. But there have been infestations showing up in campgrounds well in front of the leading edge of natural spread. Ash is an excellent firewood, so trees that are dying in Michigan often end up in the back of a pickup truck or in an RV that goes camping in Missouri or Pennsylvania, as an example. You can tell the insect is being moved with the firewood because it shows up first in campgrounds."

Emerald ash borer, which has become a poster child for how firewood can be a vector for invasive species, has killed millions of ash trees in Michigan and parts of Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Ontario. The insect has been found in several other states. Even though Oregon is about 2,000 miles away from the main activity, the pest could easily show up on firewood.



Other unwanted pests can be readily transported on firewood. Even though California has regulations prohibiting the transportation of firewood from quarantined areas for sudden oak death, nobody can guarantee firewood will not cross the Oregon border. Asian longhorned beetle has been found in the Midwest and New York, and represents a major threat to Oregon's native trees. A wood wasp not native to Oregon is destroying pine trees in New York and Pennsylvania.

Firewood often comes to Oregon over great distances, even if it doesn't seem economical. A quick survey conducted by ODA at just a handful of stores in the Salem area found commercial firewood from six states and Canada. The wood came in small bundles and nearly all carried live insects. Fortunately, none were found to be the serious invasive bugs Oregon does not want.

There is also the possibility of families moving from back east to Oregon, bringing with them nearly everything in their possession— including firewood.

The state's new firewood law is the first major legislative victory for the Oregon Invasive Species Council. OISC has done significant outreach and education prior to the law coming into effect, including a major "buy it where you burn it" campaign two years ago that featured billboards and radio ads.

"This is the kind of regulation we hope will simply guide people's behavior," says Hilburn. "ODA will be checking labels as we go about our other business to make sure people are complying, but everyone agrees the best way to enforce this law is to get the word out."

A handful of other states have enacted their own firewood importation laws. Neighboring Washington and Idaho will be watching closely as Oregon moves forward with its law to help protect its natural resources.

With the camping season at an end, the attention now shifts to homeowners who heat with wood or simply enjoy a crackling fire as the weather gets colder. They'll be looking for a source of wood for fuel. Oregonians now can help do the right thing.

"I look at it like the Smokey Bear campaign, which is designed to get people to pay attention and put out their fires," says Hilburn. "This law is protecting our forests from another threat, the threat of invasive species. We need people to make sure they are buying local wood or buying wood that has been heat treated."

[▲ Back to the top](#)

Oregon farmers' markets open for business over winter

The bounty of locally grown Oregon agricultural products is usually in full bloom in late spring, summer, and early fall. But that has not discouraged several farmers' markets throughout the state from opening the doors well into late fall with some operating all through the winter months. For those markets, their vendors, and their customers, the season is ripe with the opportunity to provide many of the same experiences as a warm weather farmers' market.



"The tremendous popularity of our farmers' markets apparently does not follow a traditional calendar," says Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture. "It doesn't surprise me one bit to see successful efforts to extend the season for fresh, locally grown products."

Some 23 Oregon farmers' markets operate at least through most of November with a handful staying open year round. The rest of the state's 120 or so farmers' markets will stay dormant until next spring. But for consumers and vendors alike who want to continue enjoying the farmers' market experience, chances are there's one nearby still open.

"The diversity of Oregon agriculture and the different regions of the state make it all possible," says ODA trade specialist Laura Barton. "Oregon is one of those states that has really broadened the season by running right up to the holidays or beyond."

It's true that the number of fresh fruits and vegetables drops along with the temperature, but customers should still be able to find something to purchase.

"It includes products that were perhaps harvested in the spring and summer that have turned into value-added products like jams and chutneys," says Barton. "But there are also winter squashes freshly picked as well as pears and apples that were harvested in the fall and stored. Also, don't forget Oregon hazelnuts, which were just harvested not that long ago."

Look for such seasonal items as heirloom beans or legumes that are dried and sold at farmers' markets along with processed grains that are good for holiday baking. Many markets feature vendors with artisan cheeses, craft beers, wine, and cider. Some small-scale ranchers bring in meat products, including heirloom turkeys. Soon after Thanksgiving, the holiday season will be in full display. Nursery

products and greenery provide a colorful purchase item this time of year. To supplement the items for sale, some markets add crafts to the mix. All in all, it makes for a vibrant winter market experience.

Finding fresh produce is not out of the question. Some market goers have been surprised to find bright red, juicy strawberries in the dead of winter and think they must have come from California.

"We have some farmers who extend their growing season by using hoophouses, greenhouses, and even hydroponics to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables," says Barton.

One of the pioneers of the winter farmers' market is the one in Portland's Hillsdale neighborhood.

"We began our winter season back in 2003 because farmers and customers asked us to run winter sessions," says Hillsdale Farmers' Market Manager Eamon Molloy. "We have many of the same vendors and have added others since that time. We have a wide variety of produce, meats, cheese, seafood, eggs, and prepared foods. The variety of produce is more than many might think. Even in some of the worst weather conditions over the past few years, farmers have managed to bring in greens, as well as root crops, wild and cultivated mushrooms, winter squash, apples, pears, and nuts."

Not surprisingly, attendance at winter farmers' markets depends on the weather, even though some markets operate indoors. Molloy estimates his market's attendance in the winter is about 60 to 70 percent of that during the summer. The McMinnville Public Market touts being Oregon's first and only year round rural market.

"Winter is actually our busy time," says market manager Shannon Thorson. "First, there are fewer markets open this time of year and secondly, there is less to do in the winter, so people flock to our place."

The Salem Public Market—Oregon's oldest farmers' market—is another year round, heated indoor venue.

"By keeping our customers coming in all year long, we don't have to remind them it's time to start coming to the market again," says manager Bruce Hunt. "If they like what we are providing, we shouldn't deprive them for three or four months during the winter."

Among markets in the suburbs, Troutdale and Oregon City go year round.

The Oregon City Farmers' Market also features an innovative program aimed at kids called the P.O.P. Club—Power of Produce. It rewards youngsters ages 5 through 12 who come with their parents to the market. Kids receive a "passport to health", which is stamped each time they visit, and tokens that can be used to buy fresh fruits, vegetables, or food plants. After so many stamps, kids receive a "market surprise" (which we don't want to spoil in this story!). Local businesses and the Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District have provided funding for the P.O.P. Club this season.

Such programs dovetail nicely with farm to school efforts in Oregon.

"The winter farmers' market programs are introducing kids programs, especially since many schools are building school gardens and trying to connect kids with where their food comes from as well as getting them to eat healthier," says ODA's Barton. "Other attractions to winter farmers' markets include chef demonstrations using those products you can find over the next few months."

From Newport to Woodburn, Corvallis to Hines, and many other locations around Oregon, the farmers' market season will not rest.

For a complete listing of Oregon farmers' markets, including those with winter operations, go to <http://oregonfarmersmarkets.org/directory/directory.html>

 [Back to the top](#)

ODA seeks concept proposals for 2013 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is now accepting concept proposals for project ideas as part of US Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program for 2013. Approximately \$1 million is expected to be available to agriculture industry associations, producer groups, processors, commodity commissions, non-profits, for profits, and local government agencies in Oregon. Funding for Oregon's program is contingent upon federal funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

Specialty crops are defined as commonly recognized fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and nursery crops. Oregon ranks fifth in the nation in production of specialty crops.

ODA is requesting three-page concept proposals from applicants describing their proposed projects. Concept proposals can be submitted online and must be received by Tuesday, February 19, 2013 at 12:00 noon Pacific Standard Time.

ODA staff is available to provide applicants an understanding of the 2013 granting process and requirements. Directions on submitting concept papers and other information is available at http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/ADMD/pages/grants_spec_crops.aspx or by contacting ODA's Agricultural Development and Marketing Program at 503-872-6600.



 [Back to the top](#)

Announcements

Oregon Invasive Species Council Meeting and Awards Dinner

Date February 12, 2013
Location CCBI Building, 626 High St NE, Salem, OR
Website <http://oregon.gov/OISC>

Specialty Crop Block Grant proposals due

Date February 19, 2013 (see story above)

Oregon State Weed Board Meeting

Date February 20-21, 2013
Location Oregon Department of Agriculture, Basement Hearings Rm, 635 Capitol St NE, Salem, OR
Website <http://oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS>

Women in Agriculture Conference

Date February 23, 2013
Phone Margaret Viebrock, WSU Extension, at 509-745-8531
Website <http://www.WomenInAg.wsu.edu>

Oregon Small Farms Conference

Date March 2, 2013
Location Corvallis, OR
Website <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfc>

State Board of Agriculture

Date March 5-7, 2013
Location Salem, OR
Website <http://oregon.gov/oda/pages/boardoverview.aspx>

Ag Progress Awards Dinner

Date March 20, 2013
Location Mission Mill, Salem OR
Website <http://oregon.gov/ODA>

Oregon Ag Fest

Oregon Ag Fest is an activity-filled festival where kids (and grown ups too!) can touch, taste and experience life on the farm.
Date April 27-28, 2013
Location Oregon State Fairgrounds, Salem, OR
Website <http://www.oragfest.com>

Agricultural Education Award

The Agricultural Education Award's purpose is to reward student organizations, non-profit organizations, or classrooms that promote and educate Oregonians about agriculture and extend the Oregon Ag Fest mission beyond its annual, two-day, interactive event.
Nominations will be accepted up until the end of the day, March 15, 2013.
Website <http://www.oragfest.com/resources/agaward.php>

Check out all the ODA public meetings

Website <http://oregon.gov/ODA/Pages/meetings.aspx>



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