For farmers and ranchers in Wasco, Sherman, and Gilliam counties, summer 2018 was filled with fire, fear and family. Some call the combination of high winds, hot and dry conditions, and fields filled with fuel the perfect storm.

“I grew up here, and there have been hot summers and lots of lightning and fire before, but this time the fires were so big and so fast, they were jumping roads and rivers in a matter of hours,” said wheat farmer Logan Padget of Grass Valley. “We have never seen it quite this bad, not in my memory.”

Padget, 28, is a fifth-generation farmer who grows about 3,200 acres of soft, white wheat alongside his father Darren and grandfather Dale. The three men joined their fellow farmers and firefighters this summer to fight the blazes that broke out in Sherman County, including the Box Car, Jack Knife Canyon, Substation, and Stubblefield fires. Fighting fire is just one of their many duties as a farmer. Every summer, they have full water tanks on their trucks, and they are ready to go at the first sign of smoke.

“We use a lot of social media, cell phones, scanners, and a reverse 911 system out here to communicate with others on fire,” Padget said. “We are a fairly close-knit community; we all know each other and look out for each other. We might not always get along, but if a fire sparks, we are all out there with our water and tractors protecting our farms and families.”

John Ruby, 64, a longtime Wasco County resident and farmer, was found dead near a burned tractor. He was overrun as he tried to clear land to protect a neighbor’s property. The Oregon Wheat Growers League estimates this summer’s fires burned nearly $11 million worth of wheat. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) estimates the fire impacted 31,000 acres of cropland and standing wheat over 86 farms in Wasco and Sherman counties.

The primary concerns now are soil erosion on cropland and rangeland, loss of riparian and upland vegetation, hundreds of miles in damaged fences that protect sensitive areas from livestock damage, and potential for invasive species. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, Democratic U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Republican U.S. Rep. Greg Walden are all working with farmers and ranchers in the area to address recovery efforts and emerging needs.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have resources available, but labor is a concern with limited numbers of contractors available to rebuild. The USDA approved emergency grazing for affected ranchers on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land through September 30. Summer fallow wheat growers also can plant cover crops in burned areas to prevent soil erosion without affecting their crop insurance. Farmer and ranchers affected by the wildfires are encouraged to contact their local county FSA office to learn about what resources may be available.

The fires missed the Padget’s farm this year, and they know they were lucky. They will enjoy the change in season, and try not to think about what summer 2019 may bring.

“I have never been more ready for fall in my life, Padget said.
Oregon Governor Appoints New Members to State Board of Agriculture

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has appointed Shantae Johnson of Corbett and Grant Kitamura of Ontario to serve on the Oregon State Board of Agriculture. Both appointments will be effective November 1, 2018 and they will serve a 4-year term.

“Shantae and Grant reflect the diverse nature of agriculture production in Oregon and I am excited to welcome them to the board,” said Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Director, Alexis Taylor. “I want to sincerely thank Tracey and Laura for their years of service to Oregon agriculture. The Board provides invaluable insight and experience that keep us grounded and connected to the industry.”

Shantae Johnson, co-owns and manages a small urban farm called Mudbone Grown, in northeast Portland. For Johnson farming is more than just a business venture it’s a homecoming, a celebration of her ancestors. Her community-oriented collective farming and farmer training program is designed for and led by people of color and veterans of military service. Her goal is to use the land as a way to teach job skills and self-sustainability. Johnson manages the farm with her partner Arthur Shavers and is the proud mother of six children and a graduate of Portland State University.

Grant Kitamura, is the grandchild of Japanese immigrant parents, who were interned during World War II because of their ancestry. Born and raised in Ontario he has transformed his onion business into a successful, modern enterprise shipping onions nationwide. As part owner of Baker & Murakami Produce Company Grant continues to grow his business through automation, new cultural practices, and creative marketing. He is a graduate of Oregon State University, has been married to Carole for 42 years, is the proud father of three children, and has four grandchildren.

ODA’s Trade Mission Work continues to open markets for Oregon growers

by ANDREA CANTU-SCHOMUS

Oregon’s fresh, high-quality blueberries may soon be available to more than 100 million people living in the Philippines. In August, members of the Philippines’ agriculture trade office visited several blueberry fields in the Willamette Valley to watch the berries go from the field to the package. Of particular interest was the “pest and disease” inspections done by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) as well as reviewing the traceability features that show how the berries are tracked from field to fork, even able to identify the picker.

The Oregon blueberry market is big business. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Oregon ranks second in the nation for blueberry production behind Washington. Last year, Oregon blueberries were valued at nearly $150 million ranking tenth in the state’s top 20 agricultural commodities. With the 2018 blueberry crop in Oregon estimated to be well over 100 million pounds of fresh/frozen product, opening the Philippine market would add an additional high value market for the state’s fresh blueberries—up to 1 million pounds.

International trade deals typically require years of detailed negotiations and trust. Opening the Korean market took ODA more than a decade. Establishing trust takes time. For example, the Oregon Blueberry Commission, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and ODA have been working to open the Philippine market to fresh blueberries since 2014. ODA trade managers and leaders have traveled to the Philippines twice and hosted several in-bound missions to help seal the deal.

“There are few shortcuts to creating long-lasting, lucrative trade deals with our international partners,” ODA Director Alexis Taylor said. “At ODA, we remain committed to this work because international trade is critically important to our agricultural community and the state’s economy. On the national level, we encourage our administration to aggressively seek and maintain international market access for our state’s 225 agricultural commodities.”

USDA and the Philippine government are reviewing information and exploring whether other technical barriers remain. If all goes well, published entry requirements for mitigating pests and disease, and permission to send blueberries based on these requirements soon will be finalized. Four years of hard work and perseverance would pay off. The people of the Philippines could enjoy nutritious Oregon blueberries and the sales will benefit Oregon’s growers and the state’s economy for years to come.

Boards of Agriculture - Continued

Outgoing board members Tracey Liskey of Klamath Falls and Laura Masterson of Portland served two consecutive 4-year terms. New members Johnson and Kitamura will attend their first meeting on November 27-29 in McMinnville.

The Oregon State Board of Agriculture advises the Director and ODA regarding the implementation, and administration of programs and the development of policies designed to improve the agricultural industry statewide. The 10-member board is made up of 9 governor appointees; and the tenth member is the chair of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The ODA director and dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences at Oregon State University serve as ex-officio members of the board without the right to vote.
PESTICIDE COLLECTION EVENTS
by ANDY ZIMMERMAN

Imagine cleaning out a barn or shed and finding containers of pesticides. The label might be missing, or it’s something that no longer is allowed for use, such as DDT. What do you do with these products?

Although proper disposal can be cost prohibitive, there is a free and safe way to get rid of these pesticides. If you are a commercial pesticide user, such as a grower, commercial applicator, research institution or pesticide dealer, you can participate in the Waste Pesticide Collection Program.

The program is part of the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) Program, of which Oregon Department of Agriculture is a member. Collection events have been held throughout the state since 2010. Since the program’s inception, more than 400,000 pounds of pesticides have been safely collected and destroyed or buried, including 70,100 pounds at six events in the current biennium, which began July 1, 2017.

The PSP program was created by the Oregon Legislature to promote the protection of the state’s water resources from the legal storage, handling and application of pesticides.

To participate, the pesticide owner must fill out an inventory sheet and submit it to ODA’s hazardous waste contractor before the collection event; nothing else is required.

“The single biggest surprise is the fact that many people still don’t trust the state to accept this material free of charge with minimal documentation,” says Kirk Cook, ODA’s pesticide stewardship specialist. “People also think if they have really old banned material and bring it to the collection that they will get in trouble. The opposite is true; these are the folks we want to participate. During collection, we always emphasize that fact.”

During the 2015-17 biennium, between 5-7 percent of all pesticides collected were considered “banned,” products that have been removed by the Environmental Protection Agency, Cook says. Those products include 2,4,5-T, Aldrin, Chlordane, DDT, Dieldrin, Endrin, Lead Arsenate, and Heptachlor.

“If the option did not exist for collection and disposal, history has shown us that the material would either be buried or burned in open pits, such was the case prior to existing federal and state hazardous waste laws,” Cook says. “This activity was cited as having caused surface and groundwater contamination as well as air pollution potentially impacting human health. Both of these options are no longer legal under the prohibitions on Land Disposal section of the 1976 federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.”

The next event is scheduled to be in November in McMinnville. Details, including inventory forms, will be provided 30-45 days before the collection at https://oda.direct/PesticideStewardship. Empty, triple-rinsed plastic pesticide containers also will be collected.

For information, contact Cook at 503-841-0074 or kcook@oda.state.or.us.

If you have household pesticides that require disposal, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality offers collection events throughout the year. Cook says. A list of collection events can be found at https://oda.fyi/HHWasteCollectionEvents. Homeowners also can drop off such pesticides at collection sites at many county landfills and transfer stations.

ODA DEPUTY DIRECTOR is Nationally Recognized for Outstanding Service

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) honors one person each year for its James A. Graham Award for Outstanding Service to Agriculture. Lisa Hanson, Oregon Department of Agriculture’s (ODA) Deputy Director, was selected this year and was honored Sept. 12 at the annual NASDA conference in Hartford, Connecticut.

“I am so honored to be recognized for the work I love to do,” Hanson said. “After nearly 22 years at ODA, I can say every day is different, and there are always new challenges and opportunities.”

Former ODA Directors Katy Coba and Phil Ward joined current director Alexis Taylor in submitting a letter of nomination in support of Hanson. Letters from ODA Assistant Director Lauren Henderson and Bryan Ostlund of the Oregon Blueberry Commission also were submitted. In them, Lisa is described as a skilled, compassionate leader able to navigate her team and producers through highly controversial natural resources issues. Hanson also is well known for her successful trade policy development and trade missions overseas.

Hanson joined the ODA team as a commodity commission program manager in 1996. She worked her way up the ranks to the position of assistant director in 2001, then deputy director in 2005. She is a graduate of Oregon State University. At home, Hanson helps raise pure bred Hampshire and Southdown sheep with help from her two daughters (Ellie and Katie) and husband Alan of nearly 25 years.

To view messages of congratulations, follow ODA on Twitter: @ORagriculture and Facebook: ORAgriculture.
Based on 2016 and 2017 data and estimates of value of production from National Agricultural Statistics Service, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon State University, and the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife. See more stats online: https://oda.direct/AgFactsFigures | Created 9/2018