As the temperatures warm and minds shift to gardening, be aware of what you’re adding to your soil. A little research now can help you avoid headaches later.

One of the things consumers can do to avoid potential herbicide contamination is to ask compost suppliers about their steps to ensure they offer a safe product.

“Some compost suppliers perform what is called a bioassay to check their product for herbicide contamination,” said Toby Primbs, ODA’s Pesticide Enforcement Program Manager. “A bioassay is basically a test of compost to determine if there is herbicide contamination. This test is performed by growing a sensitive plant – for example, pea plants – to see if the compost affects the plant’s growth.”

Also, keep in mind composts are soil amendments, so mix the material into the soil. Don’t plant directly into the compost.

“Composts can vary some depending on what organic material is utilized to produce the compost so that one might see some different results from different composts,” Primbs said. “Having too much compost in your mix can lead to issues such as stunted or stressed plants.”

“How to Use Compost in Gardens and Landscapes,” an Oregon State University Extension publication, offers ways to select the compost that fits your needs, how to use it, and how to avoid problems.

In 2020, the Oregon Department of Agriculture found some garden soil/compost products contaminated with the herbicide clopyralid after the agency received complaints.

Clopyralid is a type of herbicide that kills broad-leaved weeds such as dandelions, clover, and thistle. Trade names for products containing clopyralid include: Confront, Curtail, Redeem, and Stinger. Clopyralid affects only susceptible plants, which include: legumes (peas, beans, lupine), composites (sunflowers, marigolds, lettuce), nightshades (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers), and buckwheat.

Clopyralid can cause symptoms in susceptible plants at low levels, and it breaks down slowly during the composting process, especially if temperatures are not adequately high.

ODA, the Department of Environmental Quality, and the others involved in responding to the contamination from 2020, have also collaborated to reduce the risk of compost contamination in the future. This includes working with the compost industry to step up prevention efforts, submitting comments to the EPA on the herbicide involved in the issues, and conducting education to herbicide users.

OSU Extension also published “Herbicide-Contaminated Compost and Soil Mix: What You Should Know — and What You Can Do About It” to assist consumers. It discusses how to identify herbicide damage and other causes of plant damage, the steps you can take should you notice a problem and your options.

To report suspected pesticide contamination:

- Call: 503.986.4635
- Email: naturalresource-complaints@oda.state.or.us
- Visit: https://oda.direct/PesticideFertilizerComplaints

For more information about compost, go to:

- https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9307
- https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9308

5 KEYS TO SUCCESS

1. Before you purchase a bulk load of compost or soil mix, contact the vendor. Ask how they handle herbicide contamination risk. Have they reduced potential sources of contamination? Bioassay tests use plants such as peas grown in the compost or soil mix to check for abnormal growth caused by herbicide contamination. Chemical lab testing might not indicate herbicide contamination.

2. Perform your own bioassay test. Ideally, test the material before applying a compost or soil mix product to your garden or landscape.

3. Watch your plants for herbicide injuries such as distorted growth and cupped leaves.

4. If you observe these symptoms, rule out other sources of herbicide damage. Were herbicides applied nearby? Could that have damaged your plants?

5. Contact the vendor if you determine that contaminated compost or soil mix is the cause. Letting them know about the situation helps others avoid the problem.

Source: Oregon State University
**2021 Legislative Update**

The Oregon Legislature convened the 81st Legislative Session on January 21 this year, not in Salem but online. The State Capitol remains closed due to COVID-19 mitigation measures, and much of the legislative business is being conducted virtually. With over 2,000 bills introduced, committees have been busy collecting public testimony and debating policy matters before them. Legislators are in the building for floor votes and limited in-person business. So far, no announcement has been made on increasing in-person work during the session.

Significant issues put forward by the Governor and Legislators are in debate this session. Policy considerations range from wildfire recovery and prevention, social justice reform, housing accessibility, environmental and natural resource concerns, and agency budgets. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) is tentatively scheduled to present our agency budget in mid-April. The traditional budget presentation is done in person over the course of about two or three days, but this year’s virtual format is new to us. We are working hard to ensure our agency and all the services we provide are represented accurately.

In addition to policy and budget work, the legislature will conduct the once-in-a-decade process of redistricting state and federal district maps. Redistricting is the process by which new congressional and state legislative district boundaries are drawn. The Senate and House Special Committees on Redistricting have begun their work on redrawing the district lines. A statewide public engagement session has begun to collect feedback and testimony from all Oregonians. To find out more information and how to be a part of this process, please visit [https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/redistricting](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/redistricting).

The 2021 Legislative Session constitutionally ends on June 27, 2021. There is a lot of work to be done between now and then. I appreciate all the engagement and support of Oregon’s agriculture community.

Sincerely,

Alexis M. Taylor

---

**TEN OREGON WOMEN WERE CHOSEN FOR THE FIRST WOMEN’S FARM2FOOD ACCELERATOR**

**BY ANDREA-CANTU SCHOMUS**

Earlier this month, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Foundation, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) and the Washington State Department of Agriculture, launched the first Women’s Farm2Food Accelerator. The Farm2Food Accelerator will help women farmers and entrepreneurs with food and beverage products explore expanding into new markets.

The NASDA Foundation chose 10 applicants from both Oregon and Washington.

Elise Higley owns and operates Oshala Farms near Grants Pass with her husband Jeff. She was chosen as one of Oregon’s participants. Elise makes 80 different varieties of herbal teas. She grows all her own ingredients from seed, harvests, dries, and processes each of her teas on her 150-acre farm. Elise says she is honored to be chosen and looks forward to learning how to take her business to the next level. “We just launched our product line nationally,” said Elise. “I hope to learn all about the requirements for nutritional labeling, so we can better market our products at a national level.”

Participants will receive training beginning in March and finishing up in September on the topics of marketing, product development, food safety, packaging and pricing, and pitching to buyers. The valuable training will help women farmers and entrepreneurs launch new products or enhance existing products.

In its first year, the Accelerator focuses on supporting women farmers who grow specialty crop ingredients for a value-added product. A value-added product is defined as a product that has changed in its physical state or form, such as milling wheat for flour or making strawberries into jam. Specialty crops include fruit, vegetables, herbs, and nuts. Participants are also owners/operators of small-scale businesses with less than $500,000 in annual gross sales and less than 20 employees.

**2021 NASDA FOUNDATION WOMEN’S FARM2FOOD ACCELERATOR OREGON PARTICIPANTS:**

- Pleasant Valley Organics, Gresham, OR
  » Aurora Ashkar
- Circle A Bees, La Grande, OR
  » Caroline Barnes
- Oshala Farm, Grants Pass/Appelgate, OR
  » Elise Higley
- Minto Island Growers LLC, Salem, OR
  » Elizabeth Miller
- Chef Kristen Inc, Jacksonville, OR
  » Kristen Lyon
- R & Arie LLC, Portland, OR
  » Reeba Daniel
- Margalaxy LLC, Portland, OR
  » Margaux Miller
- Chow This! LLC, Milwaukie, OR
  » Maria Rice
- Kiger Island Blues, Corvallis, OR
  » Mindi (Marilyn) Miller
- Elysian Acres, Jefferson, OR
  » Jennifer Skouras
OREGON TASTE CONNECTS CONSUMERS TO FRESH OREGON GROWN FOOD

The first statewide directory of fresh local food producers in Oregon launched this week as a public service in support of Oregon's local food systems. OregonTaste.com is a free searchable online directory that promotes the state's farmers, ranchers, fishers and other food producers by connecting them directly to area consumers. The pandemic has shown more than ever the importance of supporting our local food systems. The idea for OregonTaste.com was born out of this increased need to connect more consumers to more local farms and the foods they create.

Submitting a listing is fast, free and easy! If you are a producer of Oregon grown food, submit your business at https://oregontaste.com/submit-a-business. To update a listing that already appears in the directory, email info@oregontaste.com to submit your updates. If you are a consumer, make sure any of your favorite farmers, grower's, ranchers and fishers are listed.

Oregon Taste is a project of James Beard Public Market in collaboration with farm and food organizations across the state that share the commitment to bolstering Oregon's local and regional food systems. To connect with your local food community visit OregonTaste.com today and share it with your networks.

The directory will soon expand to include links to food products manufactured or processed in Oregon; wine, beer, spirits and other beverages created in the state; listings of local food events; and listings of the state's food-related non-profits, agencies, and food organizations.

For additional information, questions, comments or suggestions, email info@oregontaste.com.

CURRENT PARTNERS INCLUDE:
Oregon Farmers Markets Association, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Travel Oregon Food Trail Program, Gorge Grown Food Network, Food Roots, High Desert Food and Farm Alliance, Travel Portland, Oregon Pasture Network, Central Oregon Locavore and North Coast Food Web, Oregon Farm to School and School Garden Network (OFSSGN)

VACCINES FOR OREGON AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

BY ANDREA-CANTU SCHOMUS

For the past year, agricultural producers and processors have used masks, plastic shielding, temperature checks, and endless sanitation as their weapons against COVID-19. As vaccine supplies continue to expand, more people are eligible and business owners like Grant Kitamura, general manager and part-owner of the onion packing firm Baker & Murakami Produce Co. in Ontario, Oregon, are making time for employees to get vaccinated.

“Once a week, our county health department announces when they are holding a vaccination clinic,” said Kitamura. “We go over who is eligible with our employees, and for those who choose to get vaccinated, we let them go during their shift because these clinics are only offered during work hours.”

Kitamura makes it clear that the vaccine is not a job requirement, but is strongly encouraged. He says he doesn’t tally how many of his employees choose to get vaccinated, but he makes sure the information they need to stay safe and get vaccinated is available in English and Spanish.

“We have several people in management who are bilingual. We are doing our best to share information, prevent the spread, and allow people to get vaccines when they are available to them,” said Kitamura.

Reports show Latinos and other people of color are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Craig Yano, owner/operator of Alta Farms LLC and Westwind Produce, just outside Ontario, agrees. “I do believe there are inequities,” said Yano. “For the Latino population, COVID has been harder for them. Many live in multi-generational homes, and that makes it more difficult to self-isolate. Also, hourly jobs that demand you to be there makes it difficult to get away and get vaccinated.”

Working with the Malheur County Health Department, Yano scheduled a Thursday off on his farm and let his employees know that vaccine was available and if they were interested, they could go — it was not a job requirement. Yano is a caretaker for his 93-year old father, and the two were recently vaccinated. He says that as more employees become eligible, they will make time for them to get vaccinated if they choose.

“The only way to get back to normal is to get vaccinated,” says Yano. “We are a small operation, and we have more flexibility, and I felt like it was important to give my employees the opportunity.”

In Oregon, all migrant and seasonal farmworkers, seafood and agriculture workers, and food processing workers will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccines no later than March 29, 2021. Yano and Kitamura say they will again make time available to their employees to stop the spread, protect their communities, and keep their employees healthy.
On February 11, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) removed the quarantine on the Oregon mink farm previously affected by SARS-CoV-2. ODA placed the farm under quarantine on November 24, after ten mink samples tested positive for the virus. The Oregon Health Authority also asked those working on the farm to self-isolate and provided training on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Health officials believed the mink contracted the virus from caretakers.

During the quarantine, ODA conducted 5 rounds of SARS-CoV-2 testing at the farm. The USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) confirmed the last two rounds of samples, showed the virus no longer detectable among the 62 samples collected. Per USDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, ODA required two consecutive rounds of negative testing for SARS-CoV-2 before lifting the quarantine.

“Getting to this result involved a big group of hard-working people from several agencies both state and federal, not to mention the cooperation of the farmer,” said Dr. Ryan Scholz, state veterinarian, ODA. “We followed the guidance provided by USDA and CDC, the farmer cooperated, the virus was not detected in nearby wildlife, and sequencing showed that the SARS-CoV-2 virus on this farm did not mutate. This is a best-case scenario.”

ODA is not identifying the farm’s location because, in this case, the affected facility is small. Therefore, disclosing any individually identifiable information could reasonably result in disclosing an individual’s medical information, precisely an individual’s COVID-19 status. ODA believes that the COVID status of an identified person is considered personal information that should not be disclosed to the public and would be an unreasonable invasion of privacy under ORS 192.355(2). Therefore, ODA is not releasing this information. According to the USDA, controlling the virus in people is the best way to mitigate the virus from spreading to animals.