



YOUR NWREC NEWS

"Making science a daily part of your life"

Summer 2025



From the Director's Desk...

After almost a year and half under the supervision of interim directors, this summer the Center finally welcomed its new permanent director, Dr. Steve Young. Coming from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Steve brings a background of science-based pest management, agronomy, and horticulture along with a bit of technology to his agricultural research leadership. With experience working in research, extension, and education, Steve has a good handle on every aspect of the Center and its approach in addressing the needs of stakeholders.

In his position, he hopes to increase the Center's visibility to the public and expand its services while furthering the critical research and extension programming that takes place here. He is excited to serve in a leadership role and be able to work with such a dynamic team. In addition, the diversity of clientele and their strong support is especially appealing to Steve as they span the agricultural, nursery, and natural resources communities often with deep cultural and social roots. He is hoping to continue building relationships and those the Center has yet to reach in both rural and urban settings. "We need everyone involved if we're going to solve some of the most challenging issues facing food and plant production systems in the Willamette Valley and neighboring regions, including the city of Portland", he says.

A tall order, but with the team assembled at the Center and the backing of the College of Agriculture, it fits with Oregon State University's strategic plan of [Prosperity Widely Shared](#).

In this issue:

From the Director's Desk: Short description of article
PAGE 2

Special Feature: Short description of article
PAGE 4

Season Highlight: Short description of article
PAGE 6

Meet the Students: Short description of article
PAGE 10

Science You Can Use: Short description of article

Special Feature: A Conversation with Richard Montecucco

Canby-based vegetable farmer Richard Montecucco sat down to discuss his experience growing produce at the Center, what he has learned from the research here, and what he hopes to see from the station in the future

Canby-based grower Richard Montecucco grows rhubarb, parsnips, red beets, rutabagas, and turnips at the Center alongside his other locations. He has been renting organic plots at NWREC since 2020. The majority of his crops are sold wholesale fresh market with 70 to 75% going to California and the rest staying local. He started growing organically in addition to conventional farming in 2010 and cumulatively he grows about 150 acres of organic vegetables across his properties, 20 acres of which are at the Center.

What challenges and what advantages have you had farming at the Center?

Richard started renting plots at the Center because he was looking to expand and the station already had an organic certification which would have taken three years to acquire had he expanded elsewhere. Given the quality of the soil and the fact that rent and water costs are equivalent to other locations as well as the fact that researchers benefit from having the land managed when it's not being utilized by farmers, it was a win-win situation. When Richard started, he was interested in learning the effects of intensive farming on soil health. His farms harvest in wintertime when the soil is muddy, which is harsh on the ground. He's hoping research can provide insight into what happens to his soil after years of farming intensively and what he can do better.

Currently he's working with researchers in testing the Center's farm droid on 10 of his acres. This is his second year using the droid but his first using it on a significant acreage and comparing it to conventional seeding and weeding methods. He's hoping to find out whether it's feasible to reduce labor costs while maintaining yields. The largest expense challenging Richard and farmers like him are the increasing labor costs as a result of Oregon's new overtime laws. Technology that can minimize labor costs for growers could be critical for the future of farmers.

You farm in several locations, is there anything you've done differently at the Center that has improved your practices elsewhere?

Richard says that he generally treats all of his crops the same across locations but likes to pilot small changes to see what could be more effective and worth implementing on a large scale. This year he has started prepping seed bed a few weeks in advance and getting irrigation out early to spur weed germination, planting through the weeds and then controlling them with organic herbicides before the crop plants come emerge.

How has your engagement with faculty and staff at the Center helped you be more successful? What knowledge did they provide that you found especially useful?

Some research at the station has already been helpful to Richard's growing strategies.

Insights provided by [Kristie Buckland](#), Vegetable Specialist at the Center, helped Richard figure out that it was seed corn maggots that had decimated his parsnips one year, prompting more research into how seed corn maggots could be managed across both conventional and organic crops. Former researcher at the Center, Amy Dreves also used the flight patterns of cabbage maggots to guide Richard's turnip planting schedule.

Based on your experiences at the Center, what changes, if any, would you like to see here?

Richard would like to see research at the Center that responds to the needs of farmers. "Researchers should know that the research that they're doing has to 100% benefit the farmers. If it doesn't benefit the farmers there's no point in doing it." With that, he hopes to see more communication between researchers and farmers. Research doesn't always translate to insight for growers unless there are channels where that information can be passed along. He wants to know what's happening at the Center and what that means for him. "Does the research they're doing...is it going to benefit the farmer? and beyond that, is it feasible for the farmers to do?...If I take this plot and multiply it by one hundred, what's my return?" Richard emphasizes that research has to be applicable and feasible for farmers to implement. He believes that a stronger involvement of farmers at the Center can be mutually beneficial. More communication would mean researchers could discuss their findings to guide farmers, and feedback from farmers would allow researchers to respond to growers' most pressing needs.

Meet The Students

Students play a critical role at the Center. Learn about some of the dozens of students who intern every summer.



Craig Williams (left) is a sophomore studying Rangeland Science at Eastern Oregon University. In his position at the Center, he monitors and manages orchard crop plots for pest damage, disease, and to ensure proper irrigation. Collecting data, caring for live lab samples, and problem solving are all skills he hopes to apply to a career in rangeland management or conservation.

Drew Wright is a senior studying Mechanical engineering at the Oregon Institute of Technology and interns at the Center over the summer managing farm crew projects. He says that his experience managing responsibilities within a group will be valuable to his future career as an engineer pursuing design component optimization.

Season Highlight: Blueberry Open House

Aurora, OR – Over 130 people gathered for the annual Blueberry Field Day at Oregon State University’s North Willamette Research and Extension Center. The audience enjoyed a beautiful summer day outside looking at new selections in the breeding pipeline, seeing new facilities for processing, hearing scientific presentations, viewing advanced crop management technology, and eating a delicious barbecue lunch. Growers, researchers, and practitioners gained insight on managing pests, such as spotted wing drosophila, making precision applications to combat weeds, and harvesting using the latest machinery, to name a few of the topics. This glimpse into the latest on improving blueberry production practices is what the Blueberry Field Day is famous for and will continue to be in serving as a venue for sharing and engagement. A huge thanks to the presenters, organizers, and sponsors that helped to make the field day possible.

Science You Can Use



Plant Health Tip

Summer Irrigation: Summer irrigation practices that wet plant foliage—such as overhead sprinkler systems—can create ideal conditions for foliar and root diseases caused by *Botrytis* spp. and *Phytophthora* spp. To reduce disease pressure, irrigate early in the morning to shorten leaf wetness duration, improve air circulation around plants, and sanitize tools between uses. More irrigation tips from [OSU PNW Plant Disease Handbook](#)

– Contributed by [Luisa Santamaria](#), Nursery Pathology Specialist , Bilingual Educator



Winter Vegetables – Time to Plan(t) Ahead

Now is the time to plant overwintering cauliflower, sprouting broccoli, cabbage, and radicchio. For the latest on key varieties and planting windows for successful winter production, check out the [Winter Vegetable Production on Small Farms and Gardens West of the Cascades](#). Find out more on seasonal recipes and nutrition information specific to Oregon at the Culinary Breeding Network's [eatwintervegetables](#).

– Contributed by [Heidi Noordijk](#), Small Farms Coordinator



Hazelnuts – Dieback/Dead Buds

In spring, significant dieback and dead buds have been noticed on hazelnut branches. The occurrence had been unexplained until the recent discovery of a new fungal plant pathogen, *Cryptosporiopsis tarroconensis*. The disease is widespread in the Willamette Valley and symptoms are the worst on the varieties 'McDonald' and 'Jefferson' with severe impacts on yield. New research is helping to understand further the disease cycle and management and how the pathogen may have first arrived in Oregon.

– Contributed by [Nik Wiman](#), Hazelnut & Orchard Specialist