

# Behind the Scenes

July 2019



Dear Friend,

It is finally beginning to feel like summer around here! While the cool weather and sprinkling of rain may have been a welcome surprise this month, the drier, warmer temperatures are coming just in time to set the mood for our upcoming Dry Farming Presentation and Field Tour on September 11. This is the very first event in our 2019-20 **Love Your Watershed** series, and we are excited to be able to open up early-bird registration for our Friends of the LWC! Space is limited, so make sure to sign up soon if you'd like to attend. In other watershed news, Caleb and his crew of volunteer helpers are wrapping up mid-season checks on temperature loggers located in 31 different sites within the Luckiamute River and its tributaries. Meanwhile, Jean-Paul, our restoration contractors, and our project partners are busy with preparation activities at several of our project sites. Though it may seem hard to believe that fall and winter are just around the corner, the months are ticking by quite fast and there is a lot of work to do to get our restoration sites ready for in-water work and planting season! At South Fork Pedee Creek, preparations are going on for a culvert replacement, large wood placement and winter planting work. Meanwhile, at Maxfield Creek, our current focus is on invasive weed control and site prep for our second round of native tree and shrub planting. So if you try to call the office and end up needing to leave a voicemail, don't worry - we will get back to you as soon as we can!

Happy reading,

--Suzanne Teller, LWC Outreach Coordinator (contact me at [Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org](mailto:Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org) or 503-837-0237)

## **LOVE YOUR WATERSHED:** Connecting Communities to their Watershed

Our very first event in our 2019-20 **Love Your Watershed** series is open to our *Friends of the LWC* for early-bird registration! On September 11, we are proud to partner with Oregon State University Extension and Marion and Polk Soil & Water Conservation Districts to bring you an exciting introduction to dry farming. Whether you are familiar with the concept of farming without irrigation or not, this field day at Darlene and Vernor Gowen's farm in Independence is sure to be an eye-opening experience, and may just inspire you to give dry farming a try on your own land. Plus, you will have a chance to do some taste-testing to 'see' for yourself how successfully many vegetables grow in our area without any irrigation at all.

### **Dry Farming Presentation and Field Day**



September 11 @ 4:30 - 7:30pm  
Gowen Farms (9040 Old Fort Road, Independence)

Did you know that it is possible to grow crops and garden vegetables in the Willamette Valley without any irrigation at all? Join us for a fascinating look at dry farming with OSU Dry Farming project leader, Amy Garrett. Amy will share her research, you will hear testimonials from local farmers, and we will tour Gowen Farms to get a first-hand view (and taste!) of dry-farmed tomatoes, squash, melons and more!

**Early Bird registration for Friends only is now open at [www.LuckiamuteLWC.org/dry-farming-earlyRSVP](http://www.LuckiamuteLWC.org/dry-farming-earlyRSVP)**

**Your Land. Your Rivers. Your Community. Your Watershed.**

## **A Watershed Moment for Dry Farming**

by Mitch Lies

The following article is an excerpt from "Dry Farming Gets In Depth Look by Extension," a story originally published in the Linn and Benton County Extension Service publication "Growing."

In the 1970s, just entering farming, Dick Wadsworth watched his neighbors in Northern California regularly produce higher yields and better-quality crops on ground similar to his. That was bad, he said. What was worse: he was irrigating and his neighbors weren't.

"They were so good at what they did, they made my stuff look terrible," Wadsworth said.

Wadsworth, now farming near Veneta, Ore., started picking brains and copying practices. Soon, he too was producing crops under a regime known as dry farming, and pulling in yields and quality similar to his neighbors.

Wadsworth today is among a growing trend of Oregon farmers producing row crops – crops traditionally grown with irrigation – under dry farming. "When I first moved up here 12 years ago, nobody dry farmed," he said. "It still hasn't really caught on, but it is starting to. Interest has increased."

Interest in dry farming Oregon is being fueled in large part by the efforts of Oregon State University Small Farms Extension agent Amy Garrett, who launched a Dry Farming Project in 2013, two years after joining Extension.

Today, the Dry Farming Project has morphed into a multifaceted Dry Farming Collaborative that includes three primary research projects involving more than 30 sites across Oregon and Western Washington. Launched in 2016 under grants from the USDA Risk Management Agency and Northwest Climate Hub, the collaborative soon will have three full years of data to help growers and researchers understand site and varietal suitability to dry farming.

Understanding what soils are conducive to dry farming is a critical first step in determining whether to adopt dry farming, Garrett said. Many soils in the Willamette Valley are well-suited to dry farming due to their deep profile and high clay content which helps to hold a higher volume of water. Instead of irrigating during the dry season, dry farming involves using the residual moisture in the soil held over from the rainy season. Here in the Willamette Valley, we get 40+ inches of rainfall over our winters, which is more than adequate to sustain a wide variety of crops through a dry summer.

That is where another component of Garrett's research comes in — gauging the adaptability of crop varieties to dry farming in Oregon. Among the tomatoes, the Early Girl variety, which is dry farmed extensively in California, is yielding well and showing good quality. And while yields are down in Winter Sweet and North Georgia Candy Roaster, which are the two winter squashes being researched, storage quality is up when they are grown under dry farming.

Growers participating in the Dry Farming Collaborative are also quick to point out the benefits of reduced weed pressure, and fewer issues with molds and fungal diseases.

Sharing information is a critical function of the Dry Farming Collaborative, which regularly features OSU-hosted workshops and field days where results and experiences can be shared among researchers and collaborators. Garrett and others are also creating a robust online resource on dry farming. At <http://smallfarms.oregon-state.edu/dry-farm/resources>, growers can find a cache of information on the practice, including extension publications, books and videos, and research reports.

In the end, Garrett said she hopes Extension's work with the collaborative will help those interested in dry farming determine whether the practice is something they should try, and, if they do, to help them navigate the ins and outs of dry farming.



*There are more than 30 farms hosting dry farm varietal trials in the Pacific Northwest, including Gowen Farms in Independence.*