

RFC offers training for beginning farmers

BY ELIZABETH TOBEY

While the Rogue Valley may be known agriculturally for its wine and, increasingly, its cannabis, one locally based nonprofit is working hard to cultivate a different type of crop: the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

Rogue Farm Corps (RFC) got its start right here in the Little Applegate Valley in 2004, when a group of local food producers saw the need for beginning farmer training. Most of them were first-generation farmers and recognized that because farmland is no longer being handed down generation to generation the way it once was, knowledge about how to farm is no longer being passed down either. Because of this, many beginning farmers, who often didn't grow up farming, have to learn the hard way.

The group in the Little Applegate, seeing how useful mentors would have been to them as they began their farming career, committed themselves to mentoring the next generation. Thus, RFC was born.

Fourteen years later, RFC has grown from the original Rogue Valley Chapter to include chapters in the South Willamette Valley, the Portland Metro Area, and Central Oregon. But the need for beginning farmers has also become all the more urgent. According to the latest US Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture, the average age of farmers in the state of Oregon is approaching 60, sparking concern for how we will steward our agricultural

lands and continue to produce food in the years to come.

In 1920 approximately 30 percent of Americans were farmers. As of 2012, less than one percent of the population were principal farm operators and the farmers over 65 outnumbered the farmers under 35 by a ratio of 6 to 1. Though these are national statistics, the Applegate Valley is not that different. Without concerted effort, our agricultural and food production lands could turn over to developers and corporate interests.

RFC is working to shift these numbers by training the next generation of farmers and ranchers through two main educational programs: (1) the Internship Program, a season-long, entry-level training designed for beginning farmers who are seeking a starting point in agriculture, and (2) the Apprenticeship Program, an advanced-level training program serving farmers who have a year or two of experience and are seeking managerial experience and business training.

Both of these programs are grounded in experiential education. Around the state, interns and apprentices enrolled in RFC's farmer training programs work alongside Host Farmers in order to gain real-world experience in what it takes to be a farmer and a part of a local food system.

In addition to hands-on training, students also attend classes on topics such as farm business, tractor maintenance, soil science, and animal



Participants in RFC's internship and apprenticeship programs tour Wandering Fields during a class in weed management and tool use.

care. This region is fortunate to have so many incredible small farms, and students are able to visit many of them, including Forage and Plow, Barking Moon, Willow Witt, Wolf Gulch, and others, for farm tours, classes, and a chance to hear directly from a wide variety of farmers about their story. Together, the internship and apprenticeship programs equip participants with the knowledge and experience they need to start successful and sustainable farming businesses.

Because the future of farming is directly dependent on having fertile topsoil, abundant fresh water, and a livable climate, RFC trains all of our interns and apprentices to be not only successful farmers but also responsible land stewards equipped to help build a more just, equitable, and Earth-sustaining food system.

In 2016 RFC added the Farm Preservation Program in order to educate the public about the expected mass transition of farms and ranch land, to facilitate that transition by working with farmers and ranchers to plan for succession, and to help aspiring farmers with access to land.

Here in the Rogue Valley, our Host Farmers are By George, Sun Spirit, Oshala, Wandering Fields, and Easy Valley. So next time you see them at market or out delivering fresh food to restaurants and stores around the valley, be sure to thank them for working with RFC to help protect the future of our food system!

You can learn more about Rogue Farm Corps and the work they're doing at roguefarmcorps.org.

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Trebuchet, wine, and pumpkins at Harvest Festival

BY STEVE IVES

Sometimes it's just for the fun of the thing.

Saturday, October 6, marks LongSword Vineyard's fourth annual Harvest Festival featuring Pumpkin Chunkin'. This unique event traditionally provides a host of fun fall activities like pumpkin painting, listening to live music, and, of course, imbibing delicious wine.

For the past three years, guests have also enjoyed hurling pumpkins into LongSword's back field using giant slingshots. While LongSword's slingshots are still available, this year brings a twist to the Pumpkin Chunkin' part of the event: The gentlemen of the Sterling Creek Men's Literary Appreciation Association (SCMLAA) have built a brand-new trebuchet to toss those holiday gourds.

All proceeds of the separate trebuchet Pumpkin Chunkin' will be donated to the Siskiyou Upland Trails Association (SUTA), the volunteer organization that maintains the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail and is building and maintaining the new Jack-Ash Trail. SUTA's mission is to ensure the availability of local hiking, biking, and equestrian trails for generations to come.

Inspired by their love of good books, juvenile fun, and perhaps an adult beverage or two, the SCMLAA guys constructed a medieval marvel. The trebuchet, a counterweight-powered catapult, stands a whopping 16 feet high and is capable of hurling a modest-sized pumpkin 100 yards downrange. Prizes will be awarded for the most accurate and longest flings, as well as the most creatively decorated projectile.



Taking a break from building a trebuchet for LongSword Vineyard's Harvest Festival are SCMLAA members, from left to right, Jim Reiland, Clint Driver, Bjorn Everson, and Steve Ives.
Photo: Neal Anderson.

Roots Music will entertain revelers between 1 - 4 pm and a favorite local food truck, Wok Star, will be on-site as well. LongSword is generously supplying paint and supplies for the kids (and adults!) to decorate their pumpkins.

This free, family-friendly event runs from 12 - 5 pm at LongSword Vineyard, 8555 Highway 238, just

Harvest Festival

The Harvest Festival showcases the most recent vintages of LongSword's small-batch creative wines, available for sampling at the tasting room for \$5. Live music from Sweet Grass Original

west of Ruch. Come support a great organization working to maintain recreational opportunities here in our local area and have some fun doing it!

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