

# *Ioka Farms*

## *Annual News*

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# Production Update

The ongoing narrative amongst farmers in the Willamette Valley has been one of opposites and extremes in regards to grass seed yields and weather patterns. This was further reinforced by the results of our 2024 harvest. In comparison to 2023, most likely our worst yields in history, 2024 provided some of our best yields ever.

Many factors come into play for setting up a good or bad grass seed yield. The first contributing factor is fall weather patterns. Perennial crops need a decent amount of fall rain in order to recover before cold weather arrives. The fall of 2023 provided that in abundance. Crop recovery was great and new fall plantings took off to outcompete the pests and cold weather. Spring time provided good natural irrigation for established crops and new seedings of fine fescue. It seems like no matter what we do, more or less fertilizer, different farming practices etc. the biggest single factor to having a good crop is the right weather at the right time. We do our best to try and mediate the effects adverse weather can have on our crops, but at the end of the day mother nature is the biggest influence on whether our crops thrive, or struggle to survive.



Trevor Duerst swathing Hunter Forage Brassica with his daughters Hazel and Wesleigh.

Unfortunately, seed movement is still stagnant. Carryover seed from two years ago is still in the marketplace. Even with the short crop from 2023, markets have not yet corrected and we may be two or more years away from getting to normalized seed movement. This has created a challenge for us with finding enough covered space for seed storage. Our warehouse is still full, and with the large seed crop from 2024, we will be looking to fill every nook and cranny with cleaned, bagged seed. One of our hay sheds at the farm location is now dedicated to cleaned seed storage. With the good seed yields of 2024, the other two hay sheds at our farm are being used for bulk, non-cleaned seed storage. Seed companies are slowly moving out their product, but some is just being transferred to other long term storage. The east coast market is the largest consumption area of cool season turf grasses that we produce. Their spring weather is a large contributing factor to the amount of seed that gets shipped out of our warehouse. Hopefully they will have favorable weather that will encourage homeowners to get outside and either renovate, or plant a new lawn.



A sick Jefferson tree, struggling to leaf out in the spring. In the background is a healthy Eta tree that shows no signs of stress or decline.

We're learning a lot about hazelnuts every year, specifically the lasting effects extreme weather can have on them. If you are a local and drive by our orchards, you may have noticed some sick looking trees in our State Street orchard. That field has the variety Jefferson, a newer cultivar developed by Oregon State University. Over the past four to five years we have noticed a fair amount of tip and branch die-back and overall decline in the health of the trees. Every fourth row and fourth tree is a pollinator tree which are older cultivars, Eta or Theta. Those trees are healthy and beautiful which leads us and researchers from OSU to believe that the Jefferson variety is very susceptible to abiotic factors (i.e. drought and heat stress). The trees are healthy in the shady spots of the field and as you proceed up the hill to where the aspect ratio of the afternoon sun is more prevalent, the trees get worse. We dug out a few trees and sent them to the OSU lab for diagnosis. Their conclusion was that stress was the only contributing factor to their decline. No insects or pathogens were found and the roots looked healthy. There is not much that we can do to cure the problem, other than prune out the dead wood to encourage new growth. We did some experimenting with side-discharging the fine fescue cover crop grass clippings onto the bare tree row to attempt to conserve moisture. We also did some trialing with some sun protectant products. Both of these practices are unproven, but in theory would be of benefit to alleviate stress. But again, as with seed crops, hazelnuts also are effected most by environmental factors. Hazelnut yields on our farm were down significantly on our Jefferson variety compared to last year.



Side-discharging grass clippings onto hazelnut rows with prototype mower.

Hazelnut pricing is on the rebound over the past two years. The 2024 base price was set higher than 2023 and we expect that the hazelnut marketing companies will be selling into up markets going into the spring. This should provide growers with additional bonuses, putting them back into a profitable position for the first time in three years. Harvesting of the hazelnuts went smooth thanks to mostly dry conditions for the first picking. After the tough harvesting conditions we had in 2023, we added a second Monchiero harvester to speed up the process.

It's a little lonelier around the production office and shop this year. David has had a recent sudden decline in health so he and Rita are now retired and staying close to home. David jokes that he was planning to retire at 85. He's 84 now so he came real close to staying in the workforce until his decided age. Sadly, John Duerst passed away right after harvest wrapped up. We're down to two generations managing the farm now. We are certainly very thankful to Dave, Rita, and John for the lifetime they spent building the business.

# Farewell John

On August 28<sup>th</sup> the Ioka family lost one of our founders. John Duerst passed away peacefully at the age of 89 after spending several weeks trying to overcome Interstitial lung disease. John's story was featured in the 2021 edition of this newsletter and can be found on our website [www.iokafarms.com](http://www.iokafarms.com), below is his obituary. We all miss John here at the farm. John had been retired for many years, but still made daily trips to the farm and called his sons multiple times a day to check in.



John Duerst, 89, passed away surrounded by his family on August 28, 2024, leaving a legacy of generosity and leadership within his family, community and the agriculture industry. John Duerst was born in Stayton, Oregon on December 13, 1934, in the Brown House. Growing up at the tail end of the depression and the start of World War II, he understood shortages, gas and sugar rationing. He lived and farmed most of his life in the Silverton Hills and went to the original Silver Falls School until 5th grade. He then attended 6th grade at Eugene Field after the district boundaries were changed, Silverton Junior High School 7th – 8th, and then to Silverton High School where he graduated in 1952.

John married his high school sweetheart Shirley (Doerfler) Duerst, July 27, 1957, at St. Boniface Catholic Church in Sublimity. Soon after they were married, they lived in Sacramento, California where he worked as a warehouseman at Aerojet General until Bruce was born. They moved back to be close to family and he worked as a manager for 11 years at the United Flav-R-Pac Cannery in Salem until he could farm full-time. Together they raised 3 sons and were married 52 years until Shirley's passing on January 9, 2010.

In 1967 John and Shirley joined with David and Rita Doerfler to formalize Ioka Farms, Inc. where he was Vice President. John was retired, but still advised with the 3 generations currently operating the family business. John started selling Northrup King seed packets when he was about 10 years old, and continued to help build Ioka Farms U.S. and International seed business during his career. John was proud to work with and help transition Ioka Farms to his kids and grandkids. He did a great job of keeping in touch with his sons, and called each of them daily. He would often ask, "What do you know?" or, "Did you sell anything today?" He was always available for advice, and supportive of his family throughout his life. He had a great sense of humor and a sharp mind to the very end.

He served and led his community in many ways over his lifetime in the Oregon National Guard, Silverton Volunteer Fire Department, Union Hill Grange, St. Paul's Catholic Church, Oregon Fine Fescue Commission, Oregon Seed Council, Board Chairman for Oregon Meadowfoam Growers and Natural Plant Products, Victor Point School Board Chair, Foothills Growers Group, Farm Credit Advisory Board, Marion County Soil and Water Conservation Board Chair, OSU Extension Service Advisory Board, and was awarded Seedsman of the Year in 2004 and OSU Diamond Pioneer Agricultural Achievement in 2010.



John loved to travel. Some of his most memorable trips were to National Parks like Glacier and Mt. Rushmore, Chemeketa Ag Farm Tours to Puerto Rico, Florida, and Washington D.C., Australia, New Zealand and Cruises to Alaska and thru the Panama Canal. He could often be found at the casino, for "free shows", playing pinochle, solitaire or Words with Friends online. He shared these activities with his wife Shirley, and after her passing, companion Joyce Krueger and later with companion Bev Barham. He also enjoyed walks with his dog Libby, and living in the Mt. Angel Grandview community for the past 5 years.

John was predeceased by his parents Frank and Frances (Freeman) Duerst, sisters Audrey Fields, Fern Bachelder, grandson Austin Duerst and wife Shirley Duerst. He is survived by: Brother and Sister-in-law: David (Rita) Doerfler. Nephews: Mike (Natalie), Dan (Vicki), Roger (Sue) Bachelder, and Don (Debra) Doerfler. Nieces: Teresa Doerfler-Stackpole and Michele (Dick) Fennimore. Sons: Bruce (Karen) Duerst, Doug (Tracy) Duerst and Rob (Mindy) Duerst. Grandchildren: Trevor (Katy) Duerst, Cody (Sophia) Duerst, Casey Duerst, Dillon (Meghan) Duerst, Alex (Rachel) Duerst, Emily Duerst, Miranda (Hank) Ulven, Alexa Duerst, Connor (Madelyn) Duerst and 10 Great Grandchildren.



# Marketing Update

Riding on the shoulders of a lack-luster harvest from the 2023 crop, we were pleasantly surprised to have had significantly higher yields than expected with good quality and germination in 2024. Our inventory struggles of last year weren't as challenging as we thought they were going to be. With the help of our New Zealand partnership, we were able to provide our customers with the cultivars they needed.

Stephen Bennett from PGG Wrightson's Seeds in New Zealand came to visit the Farm and Marketing offices in September of 2024. Visits like these are highly valuable to our operation giving us insight to world and domestic markets. During this visit we learned about the opportunity to provide new cultivars to our customers. We are excited to announce the additions of Knight, Tribute, and Mohaka to our portfolio.



Knight is a certified Italian Ryegrass which is very similar to Crusader. Tribute is a certified White Clover with medium to large leaves, and Mohaka is a tetraploid perennial ryegrass, replacing Ohau. We are looking forward to seeing these new great products in the field.

Currently the conditions of turf markets are sluggish as mentioned in the 2023 marketing update. Inventory management of certain cultivars have remained a challenge. Logistical hurdles have created difficulty in finding space in our warehouse once the seed has been cleaned. Seed companies are still requesting seed lots to be re-cleaned due to stringent quality standards driven by the market. We are reminded now more than ever "quality is remembered long after price is forgotten". It is crucial to keep fields clean going into 2025 harvest.

Forage seeds continue to be a brighter spot in our markets. Customers are renovating pastures and searching for new cultivars to increase productivity for the benefit of their operations. We work closely with our clientele to get them the right product for their situation, setting them up for continued success.

Our team worked hard throughout the year to maintain the productivity we built last year. We had some role changes in the office, we traveled to meet with customers and attended industry meetings. Emmelia Nightingale has been promoted to be our Supply Chain and Logistics Coordinator. Brandon Bishop was also promoted and is now the International/Domestic Sales and Marketing Manager. Nika Rodriguez is the newest addition to our team, as our Sales and Marketing Support Administrator.

Brandon Bishop went to Kentucky to visit and re-engage with one of our PGG distributors. It was a great learning opportunity for Brandon as he was able to learn about the differences between the southern state's agriculture performance demands compared to what we experience here in the Pacific Northwest.

Our team continues to be very involved in industry organizations. We attended events with the Pacific Seed Association, Oregon Seed Association, Agriculture Transportation Coalition, Oregon Dairy Farmer's Association, Oregon Seed League as well as university and commission meetings. Our office strives to be well-informed and engaged within our community.



Rob, Jennifer, and Brandon attended the Western Seed Association meeting in October, meeting with domestic and international clients. This helps us retain as well as recruit new customers throughout North America.

We increased our marketing efforts to different channels utilizing digital marketing and print and web advertising. You might have seen our ads in Progressive Forage, Graze Magazine, Capital Press, Hay and Forage Grower Magazine, The Stockman Grass Farmer, and Grower's Guide. We also continue to be active across our social media platforms.

With a new beginning in 2025, we look forward to positive market upswings in the turf sector, continued growth in forage markets and new opportunities in international markets. Our farm is built on the back of diversity, strengthened with dedication, upheld with integrity and fueled by teamwork and a true love for this industry.

# Marketing Update

## Jennifer to the PSA Board

In February this year, Jennifer Wall of Ioka Farms was elected to serve on the Pacific Seed Association Board of Directors. The PSA's mission is to represent the common interests of the seed company members, seed support members and state seed associations in the Western U.S., Canada and Mexico; to educate and communicate to members legislative and regulatory issues affecting the seed industry and to take action when required to protect the interests of the seed industry; to provide educational, networking and recreational opportunities to all parties interested in the seed industry at the PSA annual convention and at other PSA functions. Congratulations Jennifer!



## Rob back to the OMG Board

This last spring Rob Duerst was asked to begin serving on the Oregon Meadowfoam Board again. Rob spent 20+ years serving on the board in the past and had stepped down in 2022. He was asked to come back for a 3 year term, after being a member of the interviewing panel that helped successfully hire a new CEO for the Meadowfoam board. Congratulations Rob!



## Welcome Nika

Ioka Marketing is pleased to announce Nika Rodriguez as our new Sales & Marketing Support Administrator.

Nika previously worked at Oregon Community Credit Union, where she gained experience in working closely with clients, building and strengthening relationships. Prior to OCCU, she worked in numerous industries, from financial institutions, to retail, always highly focused on providing exceptional client services.

Nika resides in Silverton with her husband, Jose (JR), and her 4 children, Arika, Jordan, Eevee, and Jojo.

Outside of the office you'll find Nika at one of her kid's sporting events such as a SHS football game, or baking in her kitchen.

Nika expressed her appreciation and excitement to join us, and she looks forward to her future here at Ioka.

Welcome to the Ioka team, Nika!



## Drone Photos

Brandon Bishop has been busy running the drone over the past harvest season. Below you'll see some samples of the amazing scenes he's captured. Make sure to follow us on Facebook and Instagram to see more!



# Generation 2-Doug Duerst

Over the years we've introduced you to many of the family members and owners of Ioka Farms. This year we highlight Doug Duerst, in generation 2.

Doug Duerst is the second son of John and Shirley Duerst. He is the production manager at Ioka and has been working on the family farm for his entire career. Doug spent his childhood like most farm kids, doing chores with grandpa, tending the turkeys and collecting eggs. Throughout his school years he spent summers driving swathers and combines and helping with many other various farm tasks. For a short time in grade school, Doug was in 4H and showed a steer at the county fair. Livestock was not long-lived at Ioka as we started transitioning into more field crops as Doug was growing up. After graduating high school in 1978, Doug attended Chemeketa for just under two years. College became secondary for Doug in 1979 when he and his brother entered into the Ski-Doo snowmobile dealership and began operating B&D Ski-Doo out of the shop location.

In 1981 Doug and Tracy were married. They have two children, Alex and Emily. They have lived just east of our seed cleaning plant on Riches Road since they were married.

Doug was an early adopter of technology and interested in harnessing that technology to streamline processes and efficiencies. He was the family videographer starting in 1983 with his first beta camcorder. Most of his family vacations can be relived nearly in their entirety thanks to his recording efforts. Computers are of interest to Doug and he worked to create an Access database for our farm crop production budgeting, organization and recordkeeping. That Access database was the foundational part of what we use today in our cloud-based software called Airtable. He was also responsible for adopting new technology for our chemical records and field task recording. Farm Works was used starting in the mid 90's, now we use a program called Ag World which is cloud-based.



Doug, wife Tracy, children Emily & Alex



Doug with grandson Cole



Doug with granddaughter Hailey

Mechanical technology has also intrigued Doug over the years, specifically with combines. On a trip to the Peace River area in Canada, Doug saw that grass seed growers there had New Holland combines with a self-leveling shoe called a TX-66. We were very limited in our combine choices in the hills since we had to run machines that had factory sidehill kits. Seed loss occurs when your combine is not running level with the slope of a hill. The New Holland combine offered the advantages of a full self-leveling combine, but instead of tilting the entire machine, only leveled the internal components which limited seed loss. We bought two TX-66 combines in 2000 and the New Holland dealership offered to send Doug, David and Don on a trip to the New Holland combine factory in Belgium. While there, they revealed the next new machine they were bringing to market called the CX-840, one of the first machines to utilize Controller Area Network (CAN) bus technology. This technology vastly improved the machine monitoring functions and Doug worked to make all of the features usable for our farm. We began to track yield data recorded by the combines and utilized the several loss monitors on the CX-840 machines that we upgraded to in 2003. We've had several updates of the CX combine fleet on our farm, each time advancing the technology included with the later machine. Most recently we have updated to two CR model New Holland rotary combines that have the ability to perform machine adjustment automation. Doug, alongside the New Holland engineers has been working for the last two years to attempt to fine tune the automation feature for grass seed. Doug has been the go-to guy for other farmers with New Holland combine questions because he has been dedicated over the years to know all the functions and features of the machine.

Doug has spent many years volunteering his time with the Oregon seed industry. In 1990 he served a four-year term as a director on the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District. He served on the Fine Fescue Association in the late 80's then the Fine Fescue, Ryegrass, and Tall Fescue Commissions. He was the Oregon Seed Council president in 2000 and served on the Seed League board of directors. He has served on the OSU Seed Services advisory board, the Seed Council Public Relations committee and is currently *(continued on next page)*

# Generation 2-Doug Duerst

the chairman of the Seed Council Insurance Workgroup committee. In 2016 he was awarded the Seedsman of the year award in honor of his outstanding commitment and years of service to the Oregon seed industry.

Doug's hobbies have included road cycling, riding motorcycle, and snowmobiling. Now he focuses on spending time with his three grandkids and traveling in his free time but occasionally still gets the motorcycle out for a short ride. He and Tracy enjoy traveling and exploring new sites to hike around Oregon. They have traveled to many different countries and try to take several trips a year to different destinations in the U.S. Doug is also passionate about investing and fiscal responsibility. He has a wealth of knowledge about the stock market and is actively involved in options trading.

Doug has spent his entire life in the grass seed industry. He has forged many relationships over the years which has put Ioka Farms in a positive light at the local, national and global level. Foreign grower groups reach out to Doug if they will be traveling to the US and he is always happy to host them. He has a real passion for agriculture and our business, which will keep him involved with the farm for many years to come.





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