

A GROWING CONCERN

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SPRINGFIELD - Agronomist Frank Wann has fooled around with fertilizer for more than two decades - and now his efforts are coming to a big, brassy fruition.

Wann's company, Oregon's Only Organics, just bought a \$1.5 million warehouse on Olympic Street in Springfield, where it will produce mass quantities of plant food. Wann expects sales to pass the \$1 million mark this year, double in 2010 and reach \$20 million within five years.

"It's like moving on to a whole other chapter," he said.

Wann's company, which was started with Springfield garden store owners Scott Ostrander and Ryan Stanley, makes 25 products - some liquids, some granules - meant to goose the energy systems of high value agricultural crops, such as apples, potatoes, carrots, strawberries, leeks, onions and garlic,

Two of the products retail as Zeus Juice, an amino acid elixir, and One Shot, granules that can feed a plant for up to a year after a one-time application, he said.

The company's financials are strong enough that Wann and his partners were able to obtain loans last week from the Small Business Association, Selco Community Credit Union and the Oregon Business Development Loan Fund.

Wann declined to be specific about the amount but said, "Let's put it this way, it's over a million."

The state's portion of the financing package was \$492,000, a spokesman from the Business Oregon agency said.

Wann graduated from Washington State University in June 1984 and worked for years with crops in Eastern Oregon and Washington. He helped found Pacific Calcium, a 25-year-old fertilizer company in Tonasket, Wash.

While maintaining ties to Pacific Calcium, Wann has worked in Western Oregon for the past decade, developing products and often serving as field consultant to organic farms.

He moved to Eugene a year ago because "that's where the customer base is. That's where people are interested in organics," he said.

Wann, 52, said he started his current fertilizer manufacturing business in his 550-square-foot garage. He established supply chains for his base products - bone meal and feather meal.

He buys the bones from soup manufacturers, such as Progresso.

Soup makers put beef and pork bones in steam vats and melt all the meat and fat off them, Wann said. "The bones that are left over, I buy those."

He also buys feather meal from chicken processors. "A city like Portland will go through 150,000 chickens a day. I buy the leftover parts," he said.

Seeking a market for his fertilizer, Wann had tried to sell directly to the farming industry, golf courses, landscape companies, nurseries and municipalities, but with limited success.

"It's not what you know, it's who you know. You've (got to) know the right marketing guy," he said.

Wann has now found that guy in Scott Ostrander, 37, who in early 2008 founded the Oregon's Constant Gardener organic, hydroponic vegetable gardening shop at 423 Q Street in Springfield. The third partner, Stanley, 27, also is a partner in the garden store.

Ostrander has forged a deal with a national distributor in Indiana, Wann said. "We've got it all verbally taken care off," Wann said. The partners will fly to the Midwest later this month to sign distribution agreements.

Now Wann is gearing up for large-scale production.

"We are talking more than tons: Semi loads, let's put it that way," he said. To start, it's at least one tractor-trailer load a week, he said.

He'll need \$300,000 to \$400,000 worth of processing equipment at the newly purchased 20,000-square-foot warehouse on 4 acres east Springfield, a deal that broker Justin Schmick of Windermere Commercial represented him on.

"We will need to add onto (the building) in a year," Wann said.

The company has a half-dozen employees. "I foresee up to 30 people, probably within the next year or two," Wann said.

After that?

"Where do I see it going? Insane," he joked.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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