

Experiencing Climate Change on the Farm: How Specialty Crop Producers are Adapting in Oregon

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Abstract

The production of specialty crops in the Pacific Northwest is an economically important industry and one that is likely to be heavily impacted by rising temperatures and decreasing snowpack associated with climate change. The purpose of this study was to interview small-scale specialty crop farmers in Oregon's Willamette Valley and Central Coast Range to understand how they are experiencing climate change and what information they are using to make farm-management decisions related to the climate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven specialty crop farmers on farms in Corvallis, OR or at the Corvallis Farmers' Market. The farmers believe that factors such as high temperatures earlier in the growing season, hotter temperatures, increased weather variability, and decreased precipitation are impacting their farms. The interviewed farmers employ multiple strategies to manage the risk of their work, which include incorporating heterogeneity and flexibility into their management, using irrigation and sheltering infrastructure to control the microclimates for crops, and selecting different crops or crop varieties. When considering the information sources farmers use when making decisions about climate and weather, some farmers use short-term weather forecasts, but none rely on longer-term forecasts. As the farmers in this study are all concerned about climate change, having accessible information for the upcoming season and future climate could be helpful if they believe that long-term forecasts are credible.

