

# Taking the guesswork out of harvest

Kevin Oldenburg uses expertise to develop weigh-pay system for harvest

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Growers would be able to more accurately pay workers for what they pick, if Kevin Oldenburg has his way.

Oldenburg is CEO of 2nd Sight BioScience. The company recently completed summer trials for FairPick, a weighing system designed to take the guesswork out of paying pickers for hand-harvesting fruits and vegetables.

The system measures weight instead of volume. Pickers wear a radio-frequency identification bracelet or card. They scan their card on a FairPick scale, weigh the fruit or vegetables they have harvested and get a receipt.

“The grower is paying for exactly what the picker is picking, and the picker is being paid for exactly what he or she picks,” Oldenburg said.

Currently, field managers typically use punch cards to record pickers’ information. The information is entered manually to create payroll, with the grower sending the data to accounting, which has to count it again, Oldenburg said.

“The grower hopes they’re on the positive side, they’re not overpaying, and the pick-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

2nd Sight BioScience president and CEO Kevin Oldenburg talks about his company’s FairPick electronic weighing system in Spokane. The system helps pay workers based on the weight of the crop they harvest and digitally tracks the information for growers.

er hopes they’re not being underpaid,” Oldenburg said.

FairPick records the data electronically, sends it to a website and turns it into a payroll report, taking the variables out of the process.

The system also tracks the time pickers work.

“The growers can prove they gave the person a half-hour lunch break,” Oldenburg said. “They can also prove that to meet state law, they’ve given the person two 10-minute breaks, and that those two breaks were paid at their average hourly piece rate. It’s really got a lot of sophistication behind it, to make sure the grower has good documentation. Any time they get audited, they can prove they’ve

met all the requirements for state law.”

The system can be set up in any state, said Oldenburg, who relied on his background in science and technology — he has a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of California-Los Angeles — to develop the device.

“It’s an area that’s really ripe for automation and technology,” Oldenburg said.

The company is taking orders. Oldenburg expects to produce 150 units before harvest next year.

Harley Stoltes tested FairPick on his 6-acre blueberry farm in Bow, Wash., after seeing a demonstration at a trade show.

Stoltes said his pickers

liked the system. They received a printed receipt every time they weighed their berries.

“It gives you a real-time estimate of what each picker is making per hour,” he said. “We want our pickers to make enough money so we have good, stable staff and keep track of what we’re paying. It gives us a really good handle on our costs as we go.”

Stoltes liked Oldenburg’s technical understanding and willingness to listen to feedback.

“To have a device that allows us to actually pay for exactly the mass of what we’re picking is new. This scale gives us that opportunity,” said Robin Graham, who

tested FairPick on cherries in Mattawa, Wash.

“I would imagine any company would want to be able to increase the accuracy of paying their employees,” he said.

Oldenburg’s farming background gives him a better understanding of how growers’ businesses operate than other technical companies, Graham said.

Oldenburg’s career has come full circle. He grew up in a Rhinelander, Wis., dairy family, went to college and graduate school and was looking to get back into agriculture after a career as a scientist.

“It’s just a lot more fun working with farmers,” he said.



## Western Innovator

**Kevin Oldenburg**

Age: 53

Title: President and CEO,  
2nd Sight BioScience

Current location: Spokane

Education: Bachelor’s degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison in biochemistry, Ph.D. in biochemistry from University of California-Los Angeles

Family: Wife, two children.

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