southern exposure
WHAT'S NOW, NEW AND NEXT AT SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Life After The Farm: Alumni Spotlight

As students say goodbye to The Farm and step into the next stage of their careers, alumni continue the seeds planted at SOU's educational farm. For recent graduate Duncan Graham, his postgraduate career reveals unique opportunities to explore remote regions in California while contributing to ecological and agricultural preservation. Keep reading to learn how The Farm helped create a foundation within his role as an Agricultural Inspector with the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Duncan's work is a form of early warning for California's agricultural and ecological health. Through the General Detection project, he monitors traps across Marin and Yuba counties for invasive threats such as the Oriental Fruit Fly, Mediterranean Fruit Fly, Japanese Beetle, and Glassy-winged Sharpshooter, pests that can devastate crops and disrupt native landscapes if they go unnoticed. In the Grape Commodity project, he applies the same observational skillset to vineyards in El Dorado, Amador, and Solano counties, tracking the European Grape Berry Moth, False Codling Moth, and Christmas Berry Webworm Moth while scouting vines for phytoplasma-caused diseases.

Early threat detection protects the livelihoods of regional growers and the long-term resilience of the ecosystems surrounding them, safeguarding the food systems and landscapes that present a cascade effect if disrupted. For Duncan, the greatest reward of the role is the access it grants him. His trapping sites often lead him to remote and unexpected corners of the state, offering an up-close view of California's landscapes that most never encounter.

The Farm strives to build leaders amongst the next generation of land stewards. The foundation Duncan built at The Farm contributes to his efficacy beyond Southern Oregon University. Having learned to identify red blotch at The Farm, a common grapevine disease, he entered his position at CDFA already equipped to distinguish it from the phytoplasma diseases inspectors screen for, two conditions that look nearly identical to the untrained eye. It is a clear example of how hands-on learning at The Farm translates into professional readiness.