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The GROWERS' GUIDE

Volume 43

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Number 12



Jamie Kress, president of National Association of Wheat Growers and Rockland, Idaho, wheat farmer, participates in a panel discussion with Rob Brenneman, president of the National Pork Producers Council and Dave Walton, president of the American Soybean Association, in Washington D.C. (National Association of Wheat Growers)

NAWG president: 'It's just a heavy time'

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

ROCKLAND, Idaho — Jamie Kress, the president of National Association of Wheat Growers, was burning grasses off a new farm when the U.S. House of Representatives passed its first farm bill in eight years on to the Senate.

She and husband Cory recently purchased a farm that had been in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Part of the process of returning it to

production includes burning off the grasses that have been growing there for years, Kress said.

Kress stayed closely connected with NAWG's team, constantly receiving updates on farm bill movement throughout the spring.

"I was elected to this executive board in 2023 — I did not think I would be telling you that the farm bill is still important right now," Kress told Capital Press in April, several weeks

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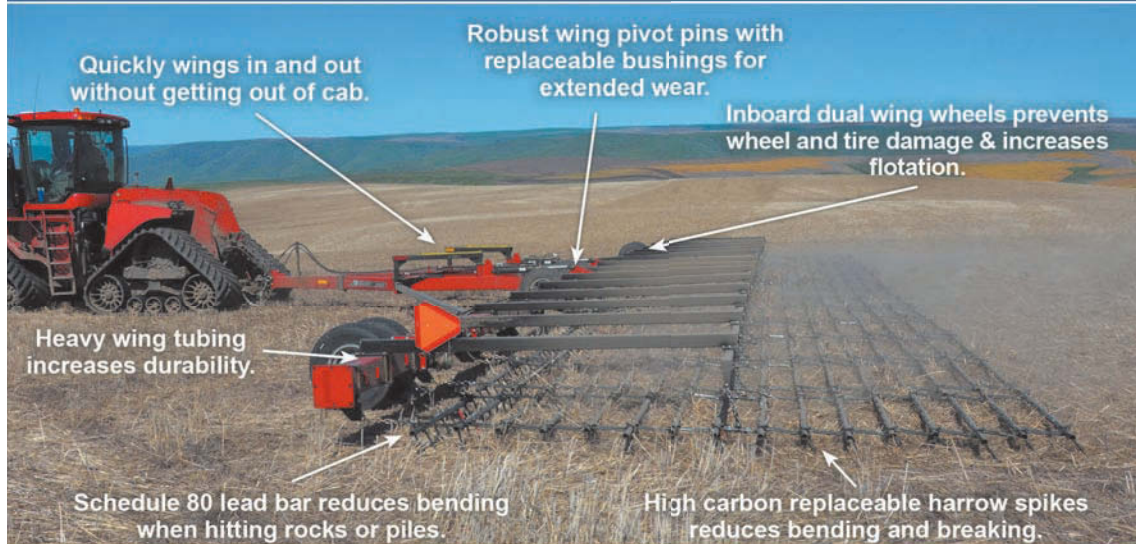


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Kress:

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before the House took up discussions, following three extensions of the 2018 bill.

The Kresses raise winter and spring wheat, winter and spring canola, safflower and dry green peas on about 8,500 dryland acres in “a high desert environment.” Most of the wheat they raise is consumed domestically. Roughly two-thirds of that acreage is in production each year as they rotate with fallow periods.

Kress previously served as president of the Idaho Grain Producers Association, where she was the first woman president in the organization’s history.

“Jamie Kress’ leadership style comes from having lived the life of a grower herself,” said Amaya Aguirre-Landa, Idaho Grain Producers Association executive director. “She understands, firsthand, the challenges, risks, and decisions farmers face every day, and that shows in how she connects with people. For Idaho and U.S. wheat farmers, her leadership means having



Jamie Kress, a Rockland, Idaho wheat farmer, serves a one-year term as president of the National Association of Wheat Growers. (Courtesy National Association of Wheat Growers)

someone at the table who not only advocates effectively, but with real-world perspective and credibility. She listens, she relates, and translates those shared experiences into meaningful action, making her a true asset to wheat growers across the country.”

Kress spoke with Capital Press by phone April 7, with follow-ups April 29-30. The interview has been edited for length, clarity and to reflect updates as the House passed its version of the farm bill 224-200.

Q: What are your thoughts on the House pass-

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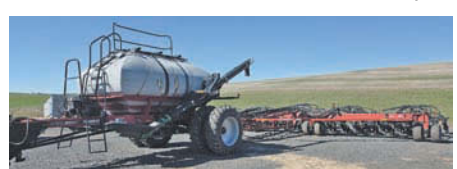
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Kress:

continued from A2

ing the farm bill?

Kress: I'm thrilled with the House passage today (April 30). It's a significant step in the entire process and hope to see the Senate continue with the momentum.

Q: As you entered your presidency, have your goals or priorities changed based on current market and industry conditions?

Kress: My goals are the same as they were when I began serving on the board. That is really to continue to represent fellow farmers and friends in the industry.

Even with market changes and political disruptions, the need for consistent, strong leadership out of our national organization doesn't change. That's my main focus, ensuring that our national organization stays strong, so we can continue to represent, regardless of the ups and downs that occur in our industry.

Q: What is the outlook for your farm this year? Do you expect to be profitable?

Kress: Being extremely profitable is off the table, right? This year is the type of year where we're going to do everything we can to control our expenses, but we have to stay smart about it. So even though fertilizer is expensive, that doesn't mean we stop



Jamie Kress, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers, on her farm in Rockland, Idaho. (Courtesy Jamie Kress)

using it, because we need that for the crop.

The biggest factors on our farm are going to be weather-related. If we have timely rains, heat at the right time, we don't freeze or have a frost at the wrong time, then obviously we'll have ideal yields. That's going to carry

us more than anything – if we can get good-yielding crops, that's going to be our best chance at making a profit.

Q: Cory is on the Idaho Wheat Commission board at the same time you are NAWG president. How do you both balance those responsibilities with farming and family?

Kress: Cory represents Idaho growers on the U.S. Wheat Associates board of directors as well. So it can get tough schedule-wise, trying to balance, ensuring somebody's here to be getting things done on the farm.

But there are times when he and

See Kress, Page A5

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Kress:

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I are both gone together. He and I have different sets of meetings, but we often find ourselves having those meetings in the same town.

We actually enjoy it — it makes it a little bit easier to not feel like you're away from the family so much when the family's with you.

We just have one daughter left at home, and she actually travels with us quite a bit. She's actually clocked a lot of time in Washington D.C.

Q: NAWG met with White House officials and the Trump administration in Washington D.C. earlier this

year. What is NAWG's message to the administration?

Kress: We have some excellent trading partners and good relationships, we want to continue to maintain those as the administration looks to create new trading relationships and reviews the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement this summer. Our message there is, let's protect the markets we already have and actively partner with them in opening new markets.

Another big conversation that started back in January and has continued regularly is around the price of fertilizer, moving specifically to the countervailing duty issue, where

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Rep. Glenn "G.T." Thompson, R-Pa., and chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, with Jamie Kress, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers and Rockland, Idaho, wheat farmer. Kress and NAWG welcomed passage of the House version of the farm bill April 30.

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Kress:

continued from A5

we know it's in the best interest of agriculture to let those duties sunset or to revoke them.

We're working with them on the definition of what is "processed" and what is "ultra-processed"? With the new dietary guidelines, it's important to us that wheat products still have a place on the menu at our schools, in the military and prisons — the places where the government

can specifically set the menu — and (wheat products) are not necessarily demonized with current rhetoric.

Q: Are the new guidelines actually having an effect?

Kress: We haven't seen an impact yet, because the new recommendations haven't quite made their way into the institutions yet.

But with that change in dietary guidelines, where we saw the recommendations for the amount of whole grains reduced, and then having that label or assumption applied to

wheat — that once you make flour that is refined and eventually enriched, the assumption or unofficial language that "Hey, this isn't good for you" — we are concerned that that will lead to less demand for wheat in the institutions that have to abide by dietary guidelines.

Q: Is there anything else we should include?

Kress: For me personally, it feels good to be part of the national organization and actively doing what we can as fellow farmers to help everyone in the country be successful.

Increasingly I see that there's a lot of heaviness or weight on agriculture right now. Whether it's demeanor of a farmer, or issues with mental health and even folks committing suicide, it's just a heavy time.

Agriculture is always tough because there's so many things out of our control, and we're used to that. But as we have prolonged periods of economic turmoil, I am seeing the weight of that increasingly showing on the farmer.

And so I hope the work we do at NAWG can bring a little bit of hope to my fellow farmer. There really are people, all farmer volunteers like myself and NAWG and U.S. Wheat staff ... We've got people who are working for the farmer 24-7 to allow it to continue to be a viable business in the United States.

Q: Do you have a message to farmers?

Kress: Just to stay positive and take care of each other.

On my own farm and for many of us in East Idaho, we are in the midst of some really frustrating weather.



Jamie and Cory Kress with daughter Hailey. "Genuinely, one of the things our family loves the most is mountain biking," Jamie Kress said. "We were looking for a hobby that the whole family could do together. It's a good mix of loving the hobby and loving the people you do it with." (Courtesy Jamie Kress)

JAMIE KRESS

Title: President, National Association of Wheat Growers; co-owner, Kress Ag.

Age: 44

Hometown: Aberdeen, Idaho

Current location: Rockland, Idaho

Education: Studied accounting and business management, Ensign College, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Family: Husband Cory, married 25 years. Son Tyson studies engineering at Utah State University and works on the farms in the summer. Daughter Hailey is a senior at Rockland High School.

Hobbies: "Genuinely, one of the things our family loves the most is mountain biking. We were looking for a hobby that the whole family could do together ... It's different scenery – sometimes it's good for the farmer to get away from the farm for a minute, right? We all love nature. All the places we go are just beautiful and good for the soul. And then on top of that, we're just having fun together. It's a good mix of loving the hobby and loving the people you do it with."

Website: <https://wheatworld.org/>

The plants were farther along than usual for this time of year, and then we just had this weather setback in the last 10 days.

One night, for example, we were in the teens for probably 20 hours. We're still freezing hard every single night and the plant growth has slowed down a little bit.

It feels like there's just a lot of headwinds this spring, whether it's availability or

price of fertilizer or these abnormal weather conditions, market opportunities – it's just still a really rough time in agriculture.

We've weathered many storms and I'm hopeful we can weather this one as well. But it definitely means watching out for the neighbor and being a good, tight-knit, close community, where we can take care of each other as farmers in the meantime.

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It's the Pitts: My hero

By Lee Pitts

My idol in the cattle business was Henry Miller.

At one time in the 19th century Miller controlled 14 million acres all over the West and it was said that he could ride in his buckboard from Baja California to British Columbia and sleep in a Miller and Lux bunkhouse and eat his own beef every night.

Although I have reservations about that claim. I don't doubt he could sleep in a Miller and Lux bunkhouse every night but I do doubt he ate his own beef every night. Having heard all the stories about Henry's stingy nature there's no way he'd eat his own beef... it would be that of his neighbors!

We're talking about a man who fired a cook because his potato peelings were too thick and a carpenter who used new lumber to make a wire gate. Being a suboptimal spender myself you can see how I stand in awe of Henry Miller. After all, I'm guilty of recycling deformed paper clips, making change out of the plate in church and using toilet paper that was previously hanging from trees the day after Halloween.

Hoping to follow in Henry's frugal footsteps I tried to eliminate any expense. One of the costs that gnawed at me every year was paying the vet to preg check my cows, even though my vet had never been wrong and was so good he could tell me the sex of the unborn calf about 50% of the time.

Still I tried to come up with a cheaper option. I could have gone to a school to learn how to preg check but then I'd be stuck with a hotel bill, plane ticket and the cost of the school. So I started researching other ways to find out if a cow was infected with progeny.

An old cowpoke once told me about "bumping" a cow. At what you think would be the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy you're supposed to lay your hand on a cow's flank and jab her in an inward and upward trajectory. If the cow is pregnant you should feel the fetus rebounding back against your hand. I experimented with a cow I knew was in the family way and all I felt was a quick kick in the knee.



Lee Pitts

Next I read that if you take a little milk from a cow who just weaned her calf and put that milk in a glass of water you could tell her pregnancy status. If the drop of milk goes all the way to the bottom of the glass and does not diffuse the cow is definitely pregnant. If the molecules of milk go their separate ways the cow is open. Once again I experimented with a cow who'd just weaned her calf but not only was she dry as a bone I got another nasty kick, this time in the groin.

In a spark of genius I applied a more scientific approach and came up with a theory that the cows who stayed around the weaning pen the longest bawling for their calves were the best mothers and therefore were also my best fertile Myrtles. So I wrote down the ear tags of all the cows figuring that the cows only bawled for a day or two and then left to go graze were bound to be open. This made a lot of sense to me but I had not tested my thesis and therefore I had to pay the vet to preg check once again which caused great discomfort in the wallet area.

You can imagine my surprise when the ear tag numbers did not correlate with the vet's pregnancy prophecy. In fact, the vet came up with exactly opposite results and the old toothless cows that stayed around the weaning pen bawling for seven days were open. As were some shelly old cows that looked like they'd been on Ozlympic®. I refused to admit that my theory was wrong and to prove it I kept those cows the vet called open and eventually I had to admit that either they were fifteen months pregnant or my theory was no good.

Asking myself what Henry Miller would do in a similar situation I decided to fire the crazy fool who came up with the idiotic theory in the first place.



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- NEW MACDON FD240 40' FLEX DRAPE HEADER, Claas mount..... CALL
- 2018 GLEANER 598, 1064hrs, RWA, duals, chopper, overhauled..... CALL
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- 2014 KUBOTA BX2370, 4wd, 23hp, loader, mower deck..... \$12,500
- 1976 IH 1086 TURBO, 140hp, 5347 hrs good rubber..... \$14,500
- 1969 FORD 4000, gas, 55hp, 2wd, loader..... \$5,500



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- 2018 BRENT V1000 BANK OUT WAGON, 1000bu, tarp, PTO..... \$49,900
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2020 RBR VENTURI, 810 bed, 1889 Hours.....
\$199,500



2019 RBR VENTURI 380, Cummins diesel, Allison automatic, 4 wheel drive, air ride, RA-885 Salford 3 bin bed, 72' spread width, electric tarp, Alliance flotation tires, lightbar, Viper 4, 2,724 Hours
\$153,000



2020 RBR ENTERPRISE VENTURI 400, Case IH Flex Air 810 70' Boom, Raven Viper 4, 4 wheel drive, Electric Roll Tarp, Foot or Hand Throttle control, 2070 Hrs.....
\$162,000



2018 TerraGator 8400B, Sisu diesel engine, CVT transmission, Air Max Precision 2 dry air flow system, 70' stainless steel boom, electric roll tarp, Raven Viper 4 controller, Raven Smarttrax auto steer, 2177 hours.....
\$146,500



2017 TERRAGATOR TG8400B, diesel engine, CVT transmission, Air Max Precision 2 dry air flow system, 70' stainless steel boom, micro ingredient bins, electric roll tarp, Raven Viper 4, Smarttrax AutoSteer, 3,387 hours
\$138,000



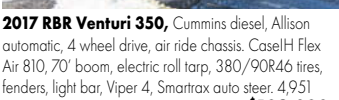
'20 CASE IH TITAN 4540, Diesel Engine, Automatic transmission, 2 speed rear end, Case 810 Flex air, Bed extensions, 70' boom, Electronic roll tarp, Viper 4 controller, Auto Steer, 2511 Hours **\$173,000**



'20 CASE TITAN 4540 FLOATER, DIESEL ENGINE, CASE 810, Triple Bin air bed, 70' Boom, Variable rate, Raven Viper 4, Auto Steer, Tip top bed extensions, Electric roll tarp, 2770 Hours ...
\$189,000



2017 JOHN DEERE F4365 HI-CAPACITY NUTRIENT APPLICATOR, 3440 Hrs, IVT transmission, AutoTrac guidance, Starfire 6000 receiver, DN495 New Leader MultiApplier.....
\$144,000



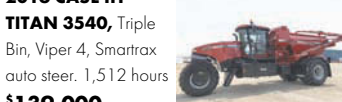
2017 RBR Venturi 350, Cummins diesel, Allison automatic, 4 wheel drive, air ride chassis, Case IH Flex Air 810, 70' boom, electric roll tarp, 380/90R46 tires, fenders, light bar, Viper 4, Smarttrax auto steer, 4,951 hours
\$109,000



2016 CASE IH TITAN 3540, Triple Bin, Viper 4, Smarttrax auto steer, 1,512 hours
\$139,000



2021 TERRAGATOR TG8400C, low hours, Diesel engine, Raven Viper 4 Electric Roll Tarp, New Leader NL4500G4 Edge-14' with 4 bin MultiBin Applier, 2216 Hours.....
\$162,000



2016 HYUNDAI HL730-9A WHEEL LOADER, EROPS, cummins diesel engine, 8' bucket, 2.5 cubic yard, 5684 Hours
\$57,000



2017 TERRAGATOR TG8400B, Airmax Precision, 70' boom, Viper 4, 3254 Hours
\$98,000



'15 TERRAGATOR 8400B, 3,222 Hrs, AGCO Power 8.4L 6-Cyl, Diesel, CVT Transmission, Viper Pro, New Leader L4000G4 MultiApplier Dry Box
\$125,000



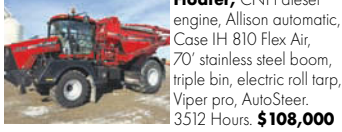
2017 RBR VECTOR 350, Cummins diesel engine, Allison automatic transmission, New Leader L5000 Viper 4, 2,216 hours.
\$134,500



2013 Case IH 4530 Floater, CNH diesel engine, Allison automatic, Case IH 810 Flex Air, 70' stainless steel boom, triple bin, electric roll tarp, Viper pro, AutoSteer, 3512 Hours. **\$108,000**



2018 John Deere F4365 with AB485 Twin Bin Air system, 70ft booms, 4740 Gen 4 Integrated Display, Auto steer, Tarp, Lincoln Lube System, Premium Cab, Premium Radio, LED Field Lights, Beacon Light, New Fan and Housing, 2724 Hours
162,000



2016 Case IH Titan 4540, Case IH Diesel Engine, Allison 6 speed automatic transmission, Fenders, Case IH FLX810, Air Boom Spreader, 70 Ft. Viper 4, Raven Smarttrax Light Bar, Electric roll tarp, 3246 Hours
\$96,500



2017 CASE IH 4540, diesel engine, Allison automatic, 810 Flex Air, 70' boom, micro ingredient bins, Viper 4, 4,590 Hours
\$92,000



2015 Case IH Titan 4530, diesel engine, Allison automatic, Case IH 810 Flex-Air, 70' boom, electric roll tarp, Viper Pro, Smarttrax auto steer, 2,491 hours
\$124,500



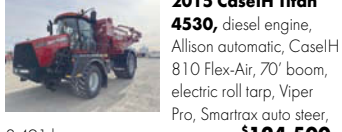
2019 TERRAGATOR TG8400C, Cummins diesel, 3446 Hours, Diesel Engine, CVT transmission, Airmax Precision, stainless steel booms, Micro bin with yellow and white rollers, Electric roll tarp
\$152,000



2013 Merritt Heritage Grain Trailer, 39 foot trailer, air ride suspension, electric roll tarp, back and front Rapat conveyor tender system.
\$37,500



1969 LUBBOCK NH3 TRANSPORT TRAILER, 10,400 gallon, Blackmer pump, tank volume gauge, WK 265 PSI, MC331, OAL 463, OD 84.4, Shell Thk .401, Head Thk .250, tandem axle, spring suspension, National Board #1390.
\$45,000



2014 CASE IH TITAN 3530 LITTER BED, diesel engine, Allison automatic transmission, Raven Viper Pro monitor Smarttrax autoSteer, Chandler CL Fertilizer, Litter Compost, shavings spreader, 16' length, twin Hyd spinners, 3,255 hours, Cracked front windshield.
\$142,000



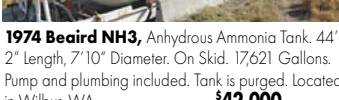
1974 Beaird NH3, Anhydrous Ammonia Tank, 44' 2" Length, 7' 10" Diameter, On Skid, 17,621 Gallons, Pump and plumbing included, Tank is purged, Located in Wilbur, WA.
\$42,000



2019 TERRAGATOR TG8400C, 2648 Hours, Diesel Engine, CVT transmission, Viper 4 monitor, auto steer, Airmax Precision 2 bed, 70' stainless steel booms, Micro bin, Auto greaser, Electric roll tarp
\$178,000



2018 TIMPTE DRY TRAILER, 40' aluminum hopper trailer, hydraulic dry tender belt can be run off truck hydraulic wet kit or self contained gas engine, electric roll over tarp, sight glass windows, tandem axle, air ride suspension
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Kitchen Corner: Beefing up three taco variants

By Dana

Here are some variants on the classic taco from the Cattlemen's Beef Board and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Cali-Caribbean steak street tacos

Ingredients:

- 1 pound boneless beef Tri-Tip Steaks, cut 1 inch thick
- 2 large navel oranges
- 1-1/2 tablespoons extra light olive oil
- 3 teaspoons jerk seasoning
- 2 cups baby arugula
- 1 Fresh California Avocado, peeled, sliced
- 16 white corn tortillas (6-inch diameter), warmed
- 1/3 cup chopped salted cashews

Cooking:

Cut one orange in half; squeeze juice from one half to measure about 3 tablespoons. For dressing, combine juice, olive oil and 1 teaspoon jerk seasoning in small bowl. Mix well; set aside.

Rub beef steak on both sides with remaining jerk seasoning.

Place steak on grid over medium, ash-covered coals; grill steak, covered, 10 to 14 minutes (over medium heat on preheated gas grill, covered, 10 to 14 minutes) for medium rare (145°F) to medium (160°F) doneness, turning occasionally. Carve steak diagonally into thin slices.

Meanwhile, peel remaining orange and orange half;



Cali-Caribbean steak tacos

- paprika
- 2 teaspoon Mexican oregano
- 2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 8 corn tortillas
- 3 tablespoons Cotija cheese

Cooking:

In a 6-quart electric pressure cooker add in beef Cross Rib Roast, guajillo chiles, onion, crushed tomatoes, beef broth, chi-

See Kitchen, Page A11



Birria tacos

cut into sections. Place in medium bowl with arugula and avocado. Add dressing; toss gently.

Stack two tortillas for each taco. Top one side of tortillas with beef slices, arugula-avocado mixture and cashews; fold in half. Serve immediately.

Birria Tacos

Ingredients:

- 1 beef Cross Rib Roast,

Chuck Arm Roast or Chuck Shoulder Roast (about 2-1/2 pounds)

- 3 dried guajillo chiles, seeds removed
- 1 Spanish onion, diced
- 1 cup crushed tomatoes
- 1 cup low sodium beef broth
- 1/2 cup chipotle peppers in adobo sauce
- 1 tablespoon garlic
- 3 teaspoon chile powder
- 3 teaspoon smoked

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VIEW OUR SPECIALS!

Idaho Potato Commission wins ag marketing award

Capital Press

The National Agri-Marketing Association gave the Idaho Potato Commission top honors at the Best of NAMA Awards ceremony, held April 15 in St. Louis.

The commission received first place, best of show and grand champion awards for its Hidden in the Data campaign. The campaign, created to support conversations with retailers, produce buyers and category managers, “transformed IPC’s proprietary retail insights into a compelling visual campaign that demonstrated how Idaho potatoes can help drive performance in the produce aisle,” according to a news release from the commission.

Grand champion is the competition’s highest honor. The grand champion is selected from the year’s

top best-of-show category winners.

The recognition reflects IPC’s continued commitment to championing the Idaho potato industry while “evolving how the brand shows up in today’s marketplace,” according to the release.

“We don’t create campaigns with awards in mind, so recognition like this is especially meaningful,” commission president and CEO Jamey Higham said. “Our focus is always on doing strong work that supports our industry and the people behind it. It’s rewarding to know that effort was recognized among the best in the business.”

The competition included leading organizations and brands, underscoring the significance of IPC’s achievement on a national stage, according to the release.



Idaho Potato Commission president and CEO Jamey Higham, commission board chairman Daren Bitter, and Dennis Hardy, president of IPC branding and marketing agency EvansHardy+Young. (Courtesy National Agri-Marketing Association)


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Cumin-seasoned steak tacos with spicy grilled corn salsa

Kitchen:

continued from A9

potle peppers, garlic, Chile powder, smoked paprika, oregano, pepper, cloves, bay leaf and cinnamon stick. Close and lock pressure cooker lid. Stew on high-pressure setting on the pressure cooker; program 80 minutes on pressure cooker timer. Once the timer goes off continue to cook for another 20 minutes to release the pressure naturally. Use quick-release feature to release any remaining pressure; carefully remove lid.

Remove roast and set aside; remove chiles, bay leaf and cinnamon stick; discard. Next shred the roast and remove any unwanted fat.

Heat non-stick skillet over medium-high heat until hot; add olive oil. Dip both sides of the tortilla into the top of the braising liquid and add it to the skillet. Pan fry on one side for 30 seconds to 1 minute and then flip over. Add some of the shredded beef, and cheese. Fold over and cook until pan-fried on both sides, about 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a plate and serve alongside a small cup of braising liquid for dipping.

Cumin-rubbed steak tacos with spicy grilled corn salsa

Ingredients:

1 pound beef Top Sirloin Steak Boneless, cut 3/4-inch thick

Avocado Cream (recipe follows)

8 small corn tortillas (6 to 7-inch diameter), warmed

Lime wedges (optional)
Spicy Grilled Corn Salsa:

2 medium ears fresh sweet corn, in husks

1/2 cup seeded and chopped tomatoes

1 medium jalapeño pepper, finely chopped

1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro

1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

1/4 teaspoon salt

Rub:

2 teaspoons ground cumin

1 clove garlic, minced

1 teaspoon brown sugar

1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper

Cooking:

Pull back husks from corn, leaving husks attached. Remove and discard corn silk. Bring husks back up around corn; tie in place with kitchen string or strips of corn husk. Soak corn in cold water 30 minutes or up to several hours.

Meanwhile prepare Avocado Cream; set aside.

Combine rub ingredients; press evenly onto beef Top Sirloin steak; set aside.

Remove corn from water. Place on grid over medium, ash-covered coals; grill, covered, 20 to 30 minutes (over medium heat on preheated gas grill, 15 to 25 minutes) or until tender, turning occasionally. Place steaks on grid over medium, ash-covered coals. Grill, covered, 7 to 11 minutes (over medium heat on preheated gas grill, 8 to 13 minutes) for medium rare (145°F) to medium (160°F) doneness, turning occasionally.

To prepare Spicy Grilled Corn Salsa, remove and discard husks when cool enough to handle. Cut corn kernels from cobs; place in medium bowl. Add tomatoes and jalapeño. Stir in cilantro, lime juice and salt; set aside.

Carve steak into thin

slices. Season with salt, as desired. Serve beef in tortillas; top with Spicy Grilled Corn Salsa and Avocado Cream. Garnish with lime

wedges, if desired.

Avocado Cream: Combine 1/3 cup coarsely mashed avocado, 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilan-

tro, 1 tablespoon reduced fat sour cream, 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice and 1/8 teaspoon salt in small bowl.



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Washington Farm Bureau takes heart as Colorado amends ag overtime law

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

The Washington Farm Bureau's top lobbyist said she

is encouraged by Colorado legislators voting to roll back their state's overtime law for farmworkers.

The Colorado House voted

33-32 on April 16 to raise the overtime threshold to 56 hours from 48 hours a week.

The Senate passed the bill in March. If Gov. Jared Polis, a

Democrat, signs the bill, Colorado will be the first state to backtrack on agricultural overtime.

Lawmakers who supported the bill argued the 48-hour threshold actually lowered farmworkers' earnings.

"It's refreshing to see a legislature reassess the unintended consequences and seek to make changes," Farm Bureau government relations director Breanne Eley said. "I'm happy farmworker voices who say overtime has impacted them negatively are finally resonating."

The Colorado House passed the bill after a long debate. Opponents said the legislation perpetuates historic discrimination against farmworkers.

The bill, however, enjoyed bipartisan sponsorship, including from the top-ranking Democrat and top-ranking Republican in the Senate.

"The data shows farmworkers are making less," said House co-sponsor Rep. Matthew Martinez, a Democrat. "Working at multiple farms and ranches just to earn the same wages is neither fair nor equitable," he said.

Bill supporters also made the case that the 48-hour threshold accelerated automation and the corporate ownership of farms, Colorado Farm Bureau Vice President for Advocacy and Strategy Ashley House said.

Farmworkers provided compelling testimony about their desire to work more hours during peak seasons to

save for slow winter months, she said in an email. "I think we tried to show how (agricultural overtime) had real unintended consequences for both farmers and farmworkers," she said.

Colorado passed an overtime law in 2021 and phased it in. The 48-hour threshold had been in effect for one year. Washington's 40-hour threshold has been in place since 2024. Washington Democrats have declined to consider Republican-sponsored legislation to raise the limit to 50 hours for 12 weeks a year.

Democrats also control the Colorado legislature, and most Democrats voted against raising the overtime threshold. Nevertheless, the bill came up for a vote. In Washington, bills not supported by a majority of the majority party don't have a chance.

Eley said she's hopeful more Democrats will support a seasonal lifting of the overtime threshold. She noted the Legislature passed a bill this year directing the state Department of Agriculture to look at costs imposed by state regulations on packaging, fuel and labor.

"I think there has been thoughtful movement in the Democratic caucus," Eley said.

The Washington Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that workers at dairies were entitled to time-and-a-half after 40 hours. The Legislature then phased-in overtime for all farmworkers.



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Washington plant turns inedible food into natural gas and fertilizer

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

LONGVIEW, Wash. — A Massachusetts-based company has opened a plant capable of annually converting 100,000 tons of inedible food into renewable natural gas and fertilizer.

The alternative is dumping the food into landfills to rot. “We’re rescuing it,” Divert Inc. co-founder and CEO Ryan Begin said.

The 66,000-square-foot facility, positioned about 40 miles north of Portland and 125 miles south of Seattle, opened a few weeks ago. The plant will take in food that can’t be sold or donated from grocery retailers, such as Albertsons, Kroger and Target.

The renewable natural gas will be piped to Cascade Natural Gas lines. “It’s reliable. It’s always on,” Begin said.

Diverting food waste from landfills will offset 23,000 metric tons of greenhouse gases a year, according to the company.

Divert estimates the plant will annually produce 450,000 pounds of fertilizer. The plant is currently producing conventional fertilizer, but plans to produce more-valuable organic fertilizer.

Divert plans to distribute the fertilizer through wholesalers, Begin said. “We’re looking for partners



The Divert Inc. plant in Longview, Wash., converts food waste into renewable natural gas and fertilizer. (Photo courtesy of Divert Inc.)

right now,” he said. “At this point, I don’t think we’ll have the scale for a retail product.”

The company opened a similar plant in Turlock, Calif., in 2024 and plans to open a third plant soon in Lexington, North Carolina. Begin has ambitions to eventually have 30 plants.

“Right now, the tailwinds are very strong,” Begin said.

The tailwinds include laws that require grocery retailers to keep inedible food out of landfills. Washington in 2019 set a goal to reduce food waste in landfills by 50% by 2030.

The state is 19% of the way there, according to a Department of Ecology

report released in December 2025.

At a ribbon-cutting ceremony April 29, Kate Brouns, Gov. Bob Ferguson’s senior climate and science policy adviser, said Divert’s plant will help the state achieve its goal.

Union leaders joined the celebration. The plant got through Washington’s rigorous permitting process, said Mike Bridges, president of the Longview/Kelso Building and Construction Trades Council. “We’re struggling to get projects through,” he said.

Begin co-founded Divert global investment firm, in 2007. Ara Partners, a acquired Divert in 2017.

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Farm bankruptcies surge, but below peak

By Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Press

Sharply rising farm bankruptcies reflect growing distress in the agricultural economy, though they haven't approached peak levels seen in earlier years, according to federal data.

Last year, 315 operations filed for Chapter 12 bankruptcy, a specific category for family farms, up from 216 filings in 2024 and from the most recent low point of 139 filings in 2023.

The increase hasn't been spread evenly across the U.S., however, with the biggest upticks occurring in the Midwest and Southeast.

Growers in southern states such as Arkansas and Georgia, which had the most Chapter 12 filings, produce more rice, which hasn't received as much emergency federal support as Midwestern commodity crops, said Allen Featherstone, an agricultural economist at Kansas State University.

Net farm incomes in the U.S. are expected to drop by



Last year, 315 operations filed for Chapter 12 bankruptcy, a specific category for family farms, up from 216 filings in 2024 and from the most recent low point of 139 filings in 2023. (Courtesy Washington State Department of Agriculture)

more than \$1 billion in 2026, to a total of \$153.4 billion, according to USDA.

However, the decline in the agriculture industry's net income is probably leveling off, buoyed by nearly \$10 billion in "bridge assistance" in last year's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, as well as federal disaster payments, Featherstone said.

"It's going to be frustrating to the farm producers. They would prefer to get it from the market than from the government," he said.

While crop losses have reduced farm revenues, the

surge in farm bankruptcies is also a consequence of growers taking on more debt and taking longer to pay it off, according to an American Farm Bureau Federation analysis.

The volume of agricultural operating loans has experienced "pronounced" growth as farmers try to keep pace with rising expenses, which will likely persist despite federal assistance, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

"Looking ahead, however, weak crop prices are likely to continue weighing on finan-

cial conditions in the sector and could keep demand for financing elevated," according to the bank's analysis.

As the total volume of loans made by the Farm Credit System, a national network of agricultural lenders, has grown from \$398 billion to \$456 billion since 2023, the proportion of non-performing loans has more than doubled, to more than 1%, according to federal data. Non-performing loans include those with payments that are past due, or that are in default or approaching it.

Not a record

Even so, the number of Chapter 12 farm bankruptcies is still considerably lower than at other periods in the past quarter-century: Such filings reached 599 in 2019 before declining, and topped 700 in 2010 and 2003, according to federal data.

Unlike Chapter 7 liquidation bankruptcies, the Chapter 12 category allows farms to reorganize while protecting them from creditors.

An added advantage is that

growers can "cram down" their debt to match the amount they owe with the current value of their assets, such as machinery, which may have declined since it was bought.

The Chapter 12 numbers don't necessarily reflect the total number of farms seeking bankruptcy protection, which shields their assets from foreclosure, due to restrictions on this category of filing.

For example, operations with more than \$12.5 million in debt don't qualify for Chapter 12 treatment, and may have to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which is commonly used by businesses trying to reorganize.

Similarly, a majority of an operation's income and debt must be tied to agriculture to be eligible for Chapter 12, which excludes many producers who are increasingly reliant on off-farm income, according to AFBF.

"So, many families may face the even more difficult decision to sell land, limit production or close their farm altogether," according to the group's analysis.

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U.S. Wheat says that 69% of winter wheat production areas are under drought, which is driving future prices up. (Courtesy Washington State Department of Agriculture)

69% of U.S. winter wheat under drought

By **Matthew Weaver**
Capital Press

About 69% of the U.S. winter wheat production area is under drought, according to U.S. Wheat Associates.

Wheat futures continue to rise, as dry conditions remain the driving factor, U.S. Wheat market analyst Luke Muller said in his May 1 price report.

U.S. hard red winter wheat on the Kansas City Board of Trade increased 24 cents to \$6.83 per bushel, according to U.S. Wheat.

In the Pacific Northwest, soft white wheat is about \$6.30 per bushel on the Portland market. Most of the region is abnormally dry or has moderate drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

General break-even price is \$7.71 per bushel, according to Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

The majority of the price increase has been driven by the futures market, with basis — the difference between the local cash market and the futures price — by and large remaining stable, Muller and U.S. Wheat director of communications and outreach Julia Debes told Capital Press.

“U.S. prices have drifted higher relative to other origins, with markets digest-

ing the drought in major winter wheat producing areas,” Muller and Debes said. “Other competitors in the Northern Hemisphere remain in fairly good condition.”

Drought severity

Severity of drought differed in localized regions, Muller and Debes noted.

“We are nearing the point of precipitation coming too late for some of the crop,” Muller and Debes said. “Scattered rain events occurred last week in the Plains, and, in years like this, depending on where the spots of moisture were received, we’ll see greater variance in production across fields in the affected areas.”

About 69% of the winter wheat crop was previously under drought conditions in December 2022.

Weather is normally the dominant factor influencing prices this time of year, as the industry gauges how much of an impact rain or lack of rain will have on final production numbers.

“The total acres of winter wheat grown in the country cover a great geographic area,” Muller and Debes said. “In general, this diverse growing area, along with healthy carry-over stocks, helps mitigate major production swings.”



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Animal activists target veterinary medicine, alliance says

By **Matthew Weaver**
Capital Press

Animal activist groups have targeted veterinary medicine in recent years, says a national nonprofit agricultural group that monitors activist campaigns.

Washington State University in March canceled the equine part of its large animal surgery elective course, citing threats to student safety following an email campaign by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and Our Honor, a “compassionate veterinarian group.”

“We are not pursuing any criminal charges related to the emails,” Pam Scott, WSU vice president of system communications and strategy, told Capital Press.

In a statement at the time, university officials said they had already decided to discontinue the equine component of the elective course following the spring semester.

Animal Agricultural Alliance, based in Arlington, Va., has seen targeting of other research institutions and research involving animals, its president and CEO Hannah Thompson-Weeman told Capital Press.

WSU has “kind of a unique twist” with a veterinary education component, Thompson-Weeman said.

“But there has been a broader trend involving some of the same voices,



Hannah Thompson-Weeman is president and CEO of Animal Agriculture Alliance. (Animal Agriculture Alliance)

same organizations targeting veterinary medicine as a whole,” she said.

For example, activist groups targeted the American Veterinary Medicine Association’s “depopulation guidelines,” or mass euthanasia of animals to control disease spread or minimize public health and safety risks during emergencies. The response has involved “very personal protests,” with protestors showing up at the association CEO’s home, Thompson-Weeman said.

Small animal vets vs. large animal vets

The groups are trying to

involve small animal veterinarians in the campaign against large animal production and food animal vets, Thompson-Weeman said.

Groups such as PETA or Our Honor argue that large-animal veterinarians or food animal veterinarians should not be needed because animals should not be used or raised for food, Thompson-Weeman said.

“Training more veterinarians, and having large animal veterinarians, isn’t something they believe would be really necessary except for probably maybe companion purposes,” she said.

Do none of these activists have pets of their own?

“They certainly have pets; it’s hard to speak for what exactly their individual motivations would be,” Thompson-Weeman said. “Certainly the use of animals for research or teaching is not going to align with their mindset that we just shouldn’t be using animals for any purpose.”

Some “very extreme” mindsets don’t believe animals should be kept as pets, “don’t believe it’s the right of a human to own an animal in any way,” she said. “Although it’s certainly taken to an extreme, that mindset is out there.”

‘Extreme voices’

WSU has not commented

further beyond its initial March announcement.

“We certainly don’t believe that the decisions of teaching settings such as this one, farms or brands, as they’re deciding their sourcing policies, should be dictated by these extreme voices who have this ingrained mindset and are trying to advance that narrative,” Thompson-Weeman said.

Protestors aren’t looking for common ground or continuous improvement, she said.

“From our perspective, allowing the efforts of these types of groups to steer our decision making is highly problematic,” Thompson-Weeman said. “We certainly understand concerns for safety ... but ultimately we need to be able to make the best decisions for ani-

mals and operations without concern about the potential influence of these types of extreme voices.”

The alliance recommends transparency, “talking about what we do and why we do it, and what the value is of these types of educational opportunities,” she said.

Message to farmers

The alliance offers media training and resources to help people be comfortable before a crisis hits.

“I don’t want you to take from this that ‘I should go off the grid, and go underground, and not be talking about what I do, and not give interviews to the media, and not give farm tours,’” Thompson-Weeman said. “What we’re doing when we allow them to own the narrative is letting that be the only voice that people are hearing.”

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HB4 wheat proceeds in U.S. despite Argentina company's financial struggle

By **Matthew Weaver**
Capital Press

Efforts to develop the first commercial GMO wheat trait in the U.S. are "proceeding as planned" despite financial difficulties for the Argentina company that owns the trait.

USDA in August 2024 approved HB4, the first GMO trait ever deregulated in the U.S. for wheat, from Bioceres Crop Solutions, based in Argentina.

Bioceres and the Colorado Wheat Research Foundation announced in September 2025 that they would jointly develop and commercialize HB4 wheat in the U.S.

HB4 is a transgenic wheat trait that incorporates drought tolerance transferred through a sunflower gene, and has demonstrated up to a 43% yield improvement in targeted environments.

The foundation is advancing HB4 trait introgression into germplasm while coordinating early breeding efforts with seven public wheat breeding programs, Brad Erker, executive director of the foundation, told Capital Press. The participating states represent roughly 70% of U.S. wheat acreage.

Domestically, breeding, field testing, quality evaluation and seed production activities are expected to take another five to seven years, Erker said.



Brad Erker is executive director of the Colorado Wheat Research Foundation. (Colorado Wheat Research Foundation)

Internationally, all conditions in the wheat industry's Principles for Biotechnology Commercialization must be met, he said. The principles require regulatory approvals in key export markets before launch.

"Until approvals are pursued in major markets such as Japan, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, and others, it's premature to establish a timeline," Erker said.

Financial concerns

Bioceres CEO Federico Trucco announced in March that the company was navigating a "challenging and clarifying" financial period.

Trucco pointed to a "difficult external environment – most notably, sustained pressure on Argentine farmer economics driven by

commodity price weakness and the well documented tightening of credit conditions in our core market."

"Our financial statements disclose that substantial doubt about the Company's ability to continue as a going concern remains after considering management's plans," Trucco stated. "We are not minimizing this conclusion – it reflects real uncertainty about our ability to secure additional financing, and we are addressing it with urgency."

Bioceres must run and improve the continuing business and develop "sustainable capital structure for the long term," Trucco stated. "These are not easy tasks and we are not pretending otherwise."

"What gives us confidence is the quality of our technology platform, the loyalty of our farmer and partner relationships, and the improving macroeconomic environment in Argentina as we enter the second half of the fiscal year," Trucco stated. "We believe the continuing Bioceres business has the foundation to generate sustainable profitability and cash flow, and our near-term focus is on demonstrating that through results."

The Colorado foundation's project "will continue as planned as long as Bioceres is able to continue making investments and making progress in this specific project," Erker said.

"There is broad support for the

effort across multiple states and breeding programs, which provides stability for the project as it progresses," Erker said. "We need to remember that breeding work takes a long time and we are just at the very early stages today."

'Strong interest'

Nearly half of U.S. wheat is grown in counties that average 45 bushels per acre, or less, Erker said. A drought tolerance trait could have a real impact.

Wheat is one of the last major crops to adopt transgenic technology, losing acres to other crops that have benefitted over the last 10 to 20 years, he said.

"The broader conversation is about whether wheat should have access to the same technologies that have improved resilience and profitability in other crops," Erker said.

HB4 wheat is expected to provide potentially about 20% "meaningful yield benefits" in yield-limiting environments. It would be valuable in environments such as the Southern, Central, High and Northern Plains, and particularly relevant in regions like Colorado, where drought is a regular challenge.

"Our five-year average yield is about 29 bushels per acre, so improved drought tolerance could help stabilize production," Erker said. "There is strong interest among Colorado farmers

because of that potential."

Interest from Pacific Northwest breeding programs has been limited, largely because drought is less of a concern in many PNW production areas, Erker said.

Washington Grain Commission farmer surveys in 2025 showed growers may be interested in the technology, but only if customers accept it.

Some key customers are reluctant to embrace the technology, although they do accept other GMO crops, such as corn or soybeans. Historically, those are more accepted because they're going into feed for animals instead of human consumption.

Erker cites "decades of genetic improvement" through public and private breeding programs and the Clearfield and CoAXium trait systems.

It's important to evaluate new technologies carefully and determine where they fit in the industry, he said.

HB4 wheat is in commercial production in Argentina and Brazil, and currently in the deregulation process in Australia, he noted.

"We are no longer in a world where GMO wheat doesn't exist, nor will we go back to that point," Erker said. "The additional choice U.S. farmers may have to make is whether they will adopt technologies that their competitors now have access to."

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House passes farm bill 224-200, now on to Senate

By **Matthew Weaver**
Capital Press

The U.S. House of Representatives passed with a vote of 224-200 their version of the farm bill.

"This Farm Bill was not written in the halls of Congress, but in the fields and rural communities across our great nation," Rep. Glenn "G.T." Thompson, R-Pa., chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, said on X. "Every provision is a direct reflection of what we learned during each of the more than 150 listening sessions the Agriculture Committee held. The 2026 Farm Bill is a win for our farmers, ranchers, foresters, rural communities, and all Americans across our country."

It has been eight years since the last farm bill, with three years of extensions.

"We got basically everything, but" language reaffirming federal pesticide preemption on labeling and packaging, which was removed in an amendment, Anthony Peña, vice president of policy and communication for National Association of Wheat Growers, told Capital Press.

"But otherwise, it is a very strong bill and we do support it," he said.

The House version of the bill includes the transfer of the Food for Peace program from USAID and the State Department to USDA; doubling of market development program funds, and other NAWG priorities.

It's not certain when the Senate will take up the bill.

"There's a lot going on in Congress obviously in the next few months, and we're heading into an election season, that also will complicate timelines," Peña said.

For Senate Democrats, and Democrats in general, Peña expects many conversations around nutrition policy in the bill.

"It's not over, I think the Senate still has a lot to consider on that," he said.



The House of Representatives has passed a version of the farm bill, 224-200. (Courtesy Architect of the Capitol)

'Largest step in eight years'

"After three years of extensions and eight years since a farm bill was passed, we're grateful the House found a bipartisan path forward," stated Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, in a press release. "We urge the Senate to follow the House's lead and move this important bipartisan legislation forward. Food security is national security, and investing in America's farmers and ranchers is an investment in America's families. We all benefit from a reliable and affordable food supply."

The National Farmers Union called House passage of the bill "the largest step in eight years."

"However, the bill largely continues existing farm safety net programs that do not match the scale of the current economic crisis family farmers are facing," union president Rob Larew stated in a press release. "It also maintains cuts to the nutrition safety net at a time when too many

American families are struggling to make ends meet."

Other "missed opportunities" include authorizing

year-round E15, restoring mandatory country-of-origin labeling, addressing rising input costs, protecting farmers and ranchers from the threat of market concentration and expanding domestic market opportunities for U.S. producers, Larew stated in the press release.

"Farm bill policy must evolve to meet the realities of today's economy, and while this bill provides some needed certainty, it does not fully address what is at stake," Larew stated. "We look forward to working with the Senate to strengthen this bill and deliver more effective safety nets for farmers and families."

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Liening departs grain commission to become military jet pilot

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

Market development manager Jake Liening is leaving the Washington Grain Commission to become a pilot for the Oregon Air National Guard.

Liening joined the commission in September 2024. His last day was April 28.

He will undergo training during the next three years to fly the F-35A.

"I always had a desire to serve our country in a way that would make a tangible difference, and once I learned about the opportunity to become a military aviator, I began working toward that goal," Liening told Capital Press.

His father is a contract pilot and a grass seed farmer in the Walla Walla Valley.

"I grew up around both aviation and agriculture," he said. Over time, flying became a "serious pursuit."

Liening competed for and earned a pilot slot with the Oregon Air National Guard's 173rd Fighter Wing.

"This is important to me because I want to serve a purpose greater than myself," Liening said. "I want to serve our country in a role where the standard is extremely high and where what you do truly matters. I want to be held to that standard, and I want the responsibility that comes with it. I also want to be specially trained in air-to-air combat, air-to-ground combat, and electronic warfare, and to use those skills in service to the country."

Liening is the first in his fam-



Jake Liening briefs aquaculture trade team members from South America April 20 at the Washington Grain Commission office in downtown Spokane. Liening has departed the commission to pursue his dream of becoming a military jet pilot with the Oregon Air National Guard. (Matthew Weaver/Capital Press)

and Liening helped define the role and "set a great example for what it will be going forward," commission CEO Casey Chumrau said.

"He quickly earned the respect of industry veterans, endeared himself to customers, and proudly represented Washington's grain farmers," Chumrau said. "I'm very excited for his chance to chase this lifelong dream of becoming a military jet pilot. Just as he has found success in service to Washington farmers, I know that he will succeed in service to our country."

'Make us proud'

Liening encourages farmers to "keep showing up, keep volunteering and encourage the younger generation of farmers to do the same. This industry needs fresh ideas and more growers who are enthusiastic about representing agriculture, meeting the buyers of Washington wheat, and getting involved — not just overseas, but here at home too."

Liening recalled working while in high school, dumping grain trucks in Prescott, Wash.

"A driver asked me what I wanted to do with my life, and when I told him I wanted to fly for the military, he turned and said, 'Make us proud,'" Liening said. "I have never forgotten that. In a lot of ways, that still sums up how I feel going into this next phase."

ily to serve in the military.

"My faith is a big part of it as well," he said. "I really do feel like the Lord has had his hand in this process, so this feels like more than just the next step to me."

'It has only deepened my respect for them'

Liening called his time with the grain commission "incredibly meaningful."

bly meaningful."

"Outside of putting on the uniform, it has been one of the proudest chapters of my life," he said. "With farmers, it has only deepened my respect for them. Farmers really are salt-of-the-earth people. Working on behalf of Washington's wheat and barley growers has meant a lot to me, and I have taken a lot of pride in being able to represent them and this industry."

Liening is proud of the trust

given to him by farmers and the commission, including hosting international trade teams and traveling overseas to meet soft white wheat customers in their own countries.

"Those experiences gave me a much deeper appreciation for the work being done on behalf of Washington farmers and for the relationships that make that work possible," he said.

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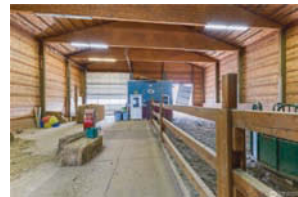
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Energy secretary vows Snake River dams will remain

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press



The Ice Harbor Dam on the lower Snake River. U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright says the Trump administration won't let dams on the river be breached. (Courtesy Bureau of Reclamation)

The Trump administration “cannot and will not allow” the lower Snake River dams to be breached, U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright recently said.

Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., during an April 15 hearing before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, asked Wright to reaffirm the Trump administration’s commitment to preserving the dams and ensure they are protected in future attempts to breach them. The conversation begins at the two-hour mark of the video.

“The story of the Snake River dams is fantastic, what they’ve done for environmental mitigation and dealing with the fish,” Wright responded. “They are critical energy resources for our country, and we cannot and will not allow to see those dams come down.”

Newhouse cited “relentless efforts continuing to weaken and remove the dams,” and cited the U.S. District Court

order to increase spill over the dams, which “will result in continuing to increase utility rates for customers and increase harm to fish through gas-bubble poisoning.”

California has expensive electricity and gas because “in the name of the environment, they’ve done regulations that don’t meaningfully change environmental outputs at all, they took something that was originally intended for that, and then just used it to kill industries that they don’t like,” Wright said, telling Newhouse that’s what’s happening with the Lower Snake River dams.

Wright pointed to “outstanding” fish mitigation efforts at the Snake River dams, with fish ladders and new turbines that allow fish passage.

“You solved a problem that was a real problem, but that wasn’t enough for the people that are fighting against these dams, and sort of exposes the lie,” Wright said. “It’s not really about the salmon for them. They don’t like these big pieces of industrial infrastructure.”

Dam critics believe they want to return to the pre-industrial age — “they would never

want to live in that pre-industrial age, but they believe they want to go back that way, and they want to tear down infrastructure,” Wright said.

“I believe they represent a very small minority of the people, but they too often get viewed as environmentalists — who doesn’t want a clean environment? we all want a clean environment — but that’s not real environmentalism, that’s just people attacking infrastructure,” Wright continued.

Wright called hydropower “the dream power — you can turn up when you need it and you can turn it down when you don’t need it.”

“You need dispatchable sources of power,” Wright said, citing natural gas and hydropower. “You can deliver power as you need it — that’s very valuable power.”

Wright thanked Newhouse for his education efforts regarding the dams.

Wright toured Ice Harbor Dam in December, “and I loved hydropower even before I visited.”

Newhouse cited a let-

ter recently sent to Wright by Pacific Northwest lawmakers regarding selection of the next administrator of the Bonneville Power Administration.

Current administrator John Hairston announced his retirement in February.

Wright said most people don’t appreciate the scale of the BPA, how much power it markets and the percentage of its

“This is a major utility, buried inside a government agency,” Wright said. “I’ve made personal calls around trying to get input and find people to find the right leader for that critical utility of scale that we have. We can transform either for the better, or we can continue a little bit of stagnation, the (availability) and cost of electricity, the speed at which new interconnections can be made.”

Wright said BPA is important to him personally, and to his department.

“We need to find that right person we can attract to come and take on that challenge,” he said. “Given the scale of that, we need a top-notch leader.”



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Ex-farm labor contractor employee pleads guilty to fraud, identity theft

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

The ex-account manager of a Kennewick, Wash., farm labor contractor pleaded guilty to taking part in a scheme that cheated more than 500 foreign farmworkers out of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Giovanna Sierra Carrillo pleaded guilty April 20 in a federal courtroom in Richland to two counts of foreign labor contracting fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft.

U.S. District Judge Mary K. Dimke set sentencing for Sept. 24. Carrillo faces two years in prison for identity theft and up to five years in prison for fraud. The U.S. Probation Office will prepare a sentencing report.

Carrillo was employed by labor contractor Harvest Plus during the 2022 and 2023 growing seasons. She admitted to filing false documents to obtain foreign farmwork-

ers through the Department of Labor's H-2A program.

She forged the signature of a farmer to obtain H-2A workers that could be assigned to other farms, according to a plea agreement signed by Carrillo.

The workers had to pay for their own transportation, housing and food in violation of Labor Department rules. Workers also were underpaid. Some 518 farmworkers lost somewhere between \$550,000 and \$1.5 million, according to the plea agreement.

Harvest Plus' former owner Francisco Rodriguez Martel, human resources director Erica Cisneros and Martel's wife, Esmeralda Rodriguez, also have been charged. An indictment lists 51 counts.

All three have pleaded innocent and are awaiting trial. Dimke moved the trial from May to December to give defense attorneys more time to prepare.



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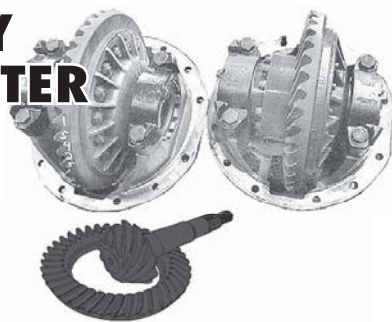
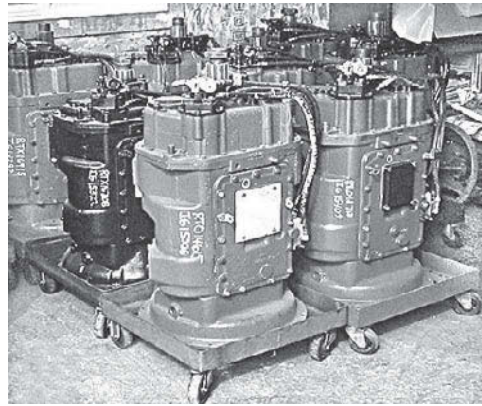
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Onion association, lawmakers seek action on Mexico imports

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The National Onion Association, nine House members and two senators have urged the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative to impose a bag fee on imports from Mexico and to enforce that country's water delivery obligations.

"U.S. onion growers face an increasingly uneven competitive environment," according to a letter from the lawmakers to USTR ambassador Jamieson Greer and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins. "Structural cost disparities, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, limited access to food safety inspections and rapid agricultural expansion in northern Mexico are distorting the market and placing sustained pressure on domestic producers."

The onion association, backed by members of Congress, seeks the bag fee and enforcement of the water delivery obligations tied to U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement to be renegotiated soon.

"U.S. onion growers are facing a deeply uneven playing field," Greg Yielding, association executive vice president and chief executive, said in a news release. "Our growers operate under some of the highest labor, food safety, and environmental standards in the world, and those costs continue to rise. A modernized import duty is essential to restoring fairness and ensuring American farms can remain viable."

U.S. onion producers operate under some of the strictest labor, safety and regulatory standards in the world, and produc-

tion costs per acre rose 343% from 1992 to 2025, according to the lawmakers' letter. Labor cost is much higher for U.S. producers, who also "undergo rigorous food safety inspections while Mexican producers selling into the same market face far less oversight." The combination of higher U.S. compliance costs and limited enforceable oversight "allows Mexican producers to undercut American growers and rapidly expand their market share."

The lawmakers requested USDA's support in strengthening FDA's enforcement of the foreign supplier verification program, particularly for Mexican onion imports, to ensure foreign suppliers meet the same food safety standards required of U.S. producers.

Rio Grande water

A 1944 treaty requires Mexico to deliver water from the Rio Grande river system to the U.S., which is owed a substantial volume. Over time, the shortfalls have enabled rapid agricultural expansion in northern Mexico, "directly benefiting producers who compete with U.S. growers operating under constrained water supplies," according to the letter. "We are grateful for the administration's efforts to secure these water deliveries back to American states as quickly as possible," and as USMCA negotiations develop, "we encourage consideration of enforceable compliance mechanisms to ensure Mexico fully adheres to its water sharing obligations."

Increasing volumes of Mex-

See Onions, Page B13



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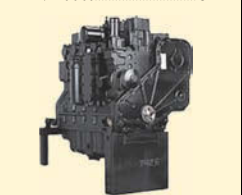
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Environmental group to sue over expanded grazing plan

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The Center for Biological Diversity on April 29 notified federal agency leaders that it plans to sue over a grazing plan's Endangered Species Act implications.

A March 31 memorandum of understanding between the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management and USDA's Forest Service aims to outline agency coordination in issuing a grazing action plan, which will "bring federal land grazing to the forefront and address the critical needs to grazing permittees," according to the text. The parties "recognize the innovation and cooperation needed to sustain and protect America's ranching heritage."

Grazing plan elements

The parties agree to take steps including maximizing the use of targeted grazing — such as on vacant grazing allotments — to help reduce wildfire fuels and invasive species; announcing and promoting the availability of vacant allotments ahead of the area's typical wildfire season; expanding shared stewardship and good neighbor authority agreements to address land management goals across multiple jurisdictions; and

carrying out and expanding outcome-based grazing.

BLM and the Forest Service through the memorandum agree to regularly audit vacant allotments to assess resource needs, identify active management strategies and solicit interest from the ranching community; apply new technologies and practices to reduce costs for lessees and permittees; and develop standardized tools and analyses to "accelerate the permitting process for authorizing grazing on federal lands while improving land health."

Center for Biological Diversity response

The plan would open up to 24 million acres of federal land to grazing, use emergency authorities to fast-track permits, and harm imperiled wildlife on public lands across the West, according to a news release from the center.

The administration of President Donald Trump is "bowing to the livestock industry's destructive demands to turn our shared wilderness into discount feedlots," said Andrea Zaccardi, carnivore conservation legal director at the center. "Grazing on America's public lands harms cherished animals like grizzlies, wolves and steelhead. This plan to let cattle trample over millions more acres of public land completely ignores these imperiled



Cattle on a BLM grazing allotment in Oregon. The Center for Biological Diversity is threatening to sue to block a Trump administration plan to expand grazing on public land. (Courtesy Bureau of Land Management)

species, and that's illegal."

A BLM map shows the grazing plan would open the westernmost portion of Grand Canyon National Park to grazing, according to the release. The plan also would impact sensitive landscapes in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, Canyons of the Ancients National Monument in Colorado, Sonoran Desert National Monument in Arizona, and other areas that provide critical habitat Fish and Wildlife designates as necessary to recover endangered species.

"The federal grazing program is already a disaster for endangered species and the places they live," Zaccardi said. "Expanding graz-

ing access across 24 million more acres will make that devastation even worse."

The Trump administration should have consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and

the National Marine Fisheries Service, according to the center.

In its letter notifying the agencies of its intent to sue, the center said it will challenge the failure to consult regarding impacts to species including grizzly bears, gray and Mexican wolves, razorback suckers, Mexican spotted owls, western yellow-billed cuckoos, northern Mexican garter snakes, Snake River Basin steelhead and bull trout. Failure to consult "means the agencies have failed to insure that these actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of, or destroy or adversely modify the critical habitat of, the aforementioned ESA-listed species as the ESA requires."

The letter was sent to Interior and USDA secretaries, the Forest Service chief, the Fish and Wildlife director, the Department of Commerce secretary and the Marine Fisheries assistant administrator.

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Farmer sentiment drops in April with Iran war

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

The Purdue University-CME Group Ag Economy Barometer Index rose in late 2024 and early 2025 with the fortunes of President Donald Trump, whom many farmers viewed favorably.

But for much of 2026, survey results have been more in line with pessimistic scores from the previous administration.

Producer sentiment dropped in April with concerns about input costs and availability, and respondents expected net farm income to drop due to the Iran war.

The ag barometer declined to 121 in April, down from 127 in March and from 148 a year prior.

Farmer sentiment was 116 in February but increased 11 points the next month despite the start of the Iran war, which drove up fertilizer, fuel and natural gas prices worldwide.

Bridge payments to grow-

ers likely influenced the March score.

In April, views regarding current conditions dropped more than future expectations — but farmers indicated less optimism about the next five years.

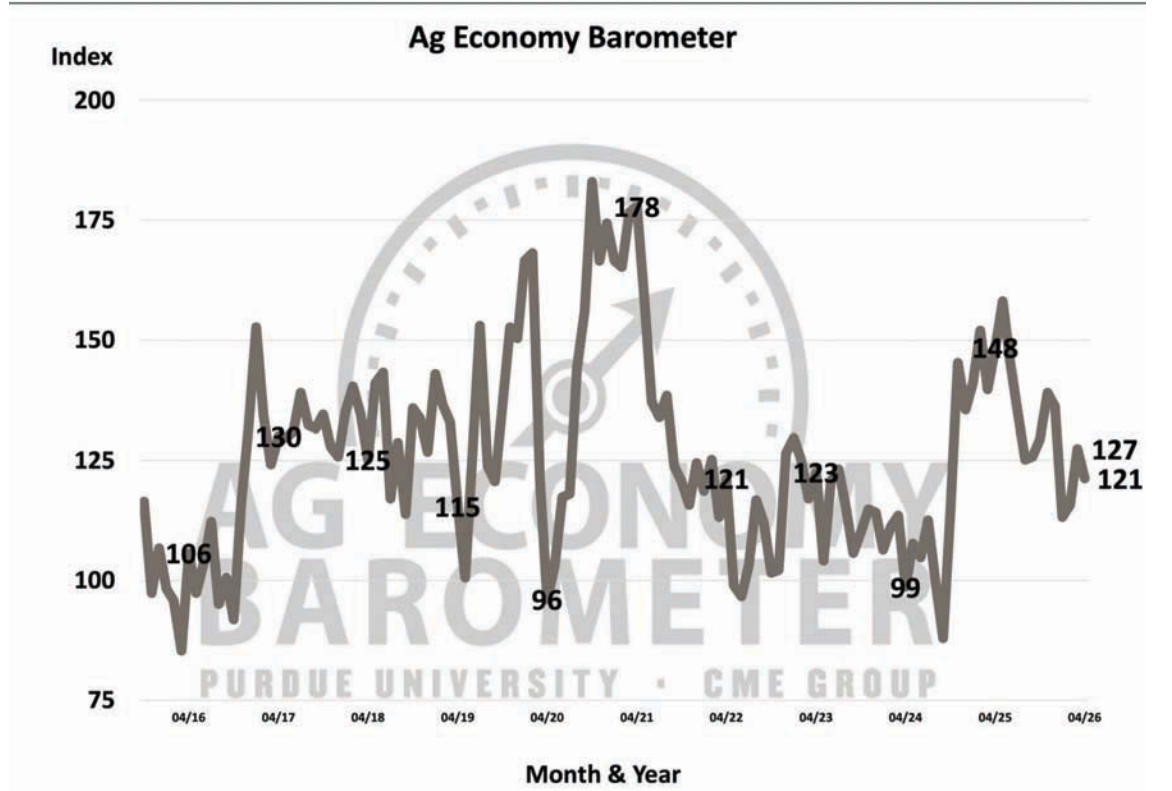
The percentage of respondents who listed high input costs as their biggest concern remained at 46%.

Those who said input availability was their greatest worry increased from 11% in March to 14%, likely due to uncertainty the war has caused in fertilizer markets.

Concerns about Iran war

The latest ag barometer survey included questions regarding the Iran war's impact on farm income and corn breakeven prices in 2026.

Approximately 2/3 of respondents expected their net farm income to decline in 2026 due to



Source: Purdue University Center for Commercial Agriculture, Producer Survey, October 2015 - April 2026

the Iran war.

Roughly 12% of farmers thought the war would have a very negative impact on their farm's net income, while 53.5% said it would have a negative impact.

Nearly 21% responded "no impact," 11.5% said "positive impact" and 2.3% indicated "very positive impact."

Among respondents who planted corn in 2025, about half expected breakeven prices to

increase by up to 6%, while 14% thought breakeven prices would increase 6 to 9%.

Another 37% anticipated corn breakeven prices to jump by 10% or more.

Poorer view of future

Producers were again asked whether the U.S. was headed in the "right direction" or the "wrong track."

Only 57% said the U.S. is headed in the right direction, down from 65% in March and from a recent high of 75% in December.

That combined with other indicators of doubt, including fewer farmers expecting land values to increase in the next five years.

The percentage of producers who expected good times in the next five years was 37% in April, unchanged from March.

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Onions in southwest Idaho, August 2025. (Courtesy Kris Crookham)

Onions:

continued from B10

ican onion imports are contributing to oversupply, price suppression and concerns about predatory pricing practices that undermine the stability of U.S. farms, lawmakers wrote.

Bag fee

Before the North American Free Trade Agreement, which took effect at the start of 1994, imported onions were subject to a duty of 87.5 cents per 50-pound bag.

When adjusted for inflation

and the significantly higher input and compliance costs borne by U.S. producers, “it is clear that a modernized duty in the range of \$3 to \$5 per bag is both reasonable and necessary.”

Lawmakers wrote that a \$5 duty “would most effectively offset existing cost disparities and ensure that imported onions compete under conditions required of U.S. producers.”

Domestic producers stand ready to meet U.S. demand, “and such a fee would stabilize the market while strengthening food safety, regulatory compliance and fair competition within the North American produce sector.”

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Growers hope for new varieties from WSU's new raspberry breeder

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

Giving growers options

Washington State University has hired a new raspberry breeder.

Germán Sandoya-Miranda, who grew up on a farm in Ecuador, will start his new job May 15 at the WSU Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon, Wash.

"I like knowing my research will directly impact farmers, improving their crops and lives," said Sandoya-Miranda.

"I was very interested in studying agriculture after watching my parents and grandparents grow crops and seeing the difficulties they had," he added, in a news release.

Washington produces roughly 90% of the U.S. frozen red raspberry crop, and much of that is grown near Lynden, Wash., near the Canadian border.

The Washington Red Raspberry Commission provided \$1.5 million in 2018 to create the endowment that funds Sandoya-Miranda's position, the WSU Endowed Chair in Raspberry Breeding.

Gavin Willis, the commission's executive director, said he hopes Sandoya-Miranda will develop new cultivars and varieties for berry growers in the Pacific Northwest.

"Our growers are dealing with effects of climate change, along with shifts in disease and pest pressure, and they want to produce more food with fewer inputs," Willis said.

"Giving growers as many options to choose from is a key part of this," he added.

Raspberry farmers have different soil types, microclimates and pest and disease pressures, and they're also seeking different price points.

Ideal raspberries must be able to handle machine harvesting and individual quick freezing without damage.

Growers also want new varieties to have some resistance to root rot or other diseases, which would reduce inputs.

Higher yield could correlate to larger fruit, though big berries aren't as important for consumers



Germán Sandoya-Miranda will start work as Washington State University's new raspberry breeder on May 15. The industry is seeking new varieties for the frozen segment that have some disease resistance and increased yield. (Courtesy Germán Sandoya-Miranda)

with frozen raspberries.

Willis said a branded raspberry — similar to the WSU-developed Cosmic Crisp apple — probably wouldn't benefit the frozen fruit segment at the moment.

"It would be nice to get the industry to that point," he added.

Branded caneberries, however, are starting to impact fresh fruit sales.

Proven track record

Raj Khosla, dean of WSU's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, said Sandoya-Miranda brings a

proven track record of partnering with growers.

Sandoya-Miranda currently works as a lettuce breeder at the University of Florida.

Raspberries will be the third crop plant Sandoya-Miranda has worked on in his career.

His interest in plant genetics started with an undergraduate research internship that involved working with maize.

"That experience opened my eyes. I saw how science can make things better for farmers," Sandoya-Miranda said.

Talking with growers first

WSU has crop breeders

for pome fruit, cherries, winter wheat, spring wheat, turfgrass, organic grains, barley and pulses.

The prior raspberry and strawberry breeder at WSU, Pat Moore, retired. Wendy Hoashi-Erhardt has been directing the program since then and will work collaboratively with Sandoya-Miranda.

Sandoya-Miranda's first priority will be meeting with raspberry growers to learn about their major concerns and then build a program to address their needs.

"He puts a really high priority on working directly with growers. That's really important for our industry," Willis said.

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Cosmic Crisp will remain only grown in Washington until 2032

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

WA 38, an apple developed at Washington State University and marketed under the brand name Cosmic Crisp, will remain a fruit exclusively grown in Washington for six more years.

In a letter to growers and nurseries, a WSU official said the exclusivity period for WA 38 will be extended through the patent expiration date of May 26, 2032.

The original exclusivity period, established to honor the critical role Washington growers played in the development of the variety through collaboration and direct funding, was sched-

uled to expire in 2027.

"WSU recognizes that the Washington apple industry's involvement in 'WA 38' continues well beyond its initial commercialization," wrote Jeremy Tamsen, senior director of innovation and entrepreneurship within WSU's Office of Research.

"Ongoing plantings, sustained quality standards, and the growing popularity and market strength of the Cosmic Crisp brand of apples reflect the dedication of Washington growers and reinforce the value of this partnership," Tamsen added.

In an email, Tamsen said the original exclusivity sun-



The Cosmic Crisp "Mother Tree," shown in this file photo, is still growing at Washington State University's Columbia View Orchard near Wenatchee, Wash. In a letter to growers and nurseries, a WSU official said the Washington exclusivity period for WA 38 will be extended through the patent expiration date of May 26, 2032. (Courtesy Washington State University)

holding a patent license will be given the opportunity to enter into trademark licenses, ensuring consistent quality standards for trademarked fruit and safeguarding the strength and integrity of the Cosmic Crisp brand that Washington growers helped build, that, WSU believes, will continue to command a premium in the marketplace," Tamsen wrote.

Royalties top \$8 million

Washington growers, the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission and the Washington State Department of Agriculture provided WSU with support that helped create Cosmic Crisp.

Cosmic Crisp was bred in 1997 by Bruce Barritt, then the apple breeder at the WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee.

In 2014, the variety was given a name that refers to its parentage — the fruit is a hybrid of Honeycrisp and Enterprise — as well as the mouthfeel and starry white spots on the apple's skin.


set was set at the signing date of the initial commercial licenses, before WSU could know the full extent of the impact Cosmic Crisp would make on the market.

After the patent expires

In the letter to growers, Tamsen wrote that after the patent's expiration, WSU will no longer be able to restrict where the variety will be grown on a generic basis with trademarks other than Cosmic Crisp.

However, the university will continue to protect and promote Cosmic Crisp as a premium brand, including through a licensing program that will allow WSU to continue to manage how and where the fruit is marketed and sold.

"At that time, growers




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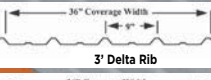
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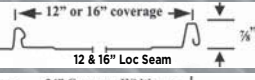
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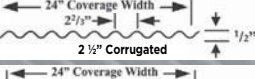
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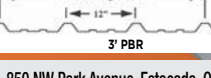
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Darigold to pay \$2 million to settle lawsuit

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Co-op doesn't admit allegations, denies causing environmental harm

Darigold will pay \$2 million to settle a lawsuit filed by Columbia Riverkeeper accusing it of discharging too much pollution from its milk processing plant in Sunnyside, Wash.

Darigold will make the payment to the Yakama Nation to fund water-quality projects, according to the settlement, which must be approved by U.S. District Judge Rebecca Pennell in Spokane.

The cooperative, headquartered in Seattle and owned by about 300 dairy farmers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, did not admit to any of the allegations and denied causing any environmental harm.

"In the interest of maintaining strong relations with our many partners and stakeholders in Sunnyside and surrounding areas, we are pleased

to have reached a resolution to this matter and to put it behind us," Darigold said in a statement.

"Darigold continually evaluates and upgrades its wastewater treatment facilities and has made improvements to our wastewater treatment system over the last year, with additional improvements planned," the cooperative stated.

Darigold declined to say whether the settlement will affect checks paid to producers.

Darigold's Sunnyside plant has a permit from the Washington Department of Ecology to release wastewater into a drain that leads to Sulphur Creek, a tributary of the Yakima River.

Riverkeeper alleged Darigold's discharge of pollutants exceeded limits set in the permit. The federal Clean Water Act allows private groups to sue to enforce the terms of permits.

"The Yakima River is a large, important tributary to the Columbia River, and protection of its water quality is

vital to the overall health of the Columbia," Riverkeeper attorney Teryn Yazdani said in a statement.

Darigold agreed to pay the Yakama Nation \$15,000 a day if it exceeds its daily limit on discharges, or \$25,000 if limits are exceeded over one month. The settlement caps the annual payout at \$150,000.

Darigold also agreed to pay Riverkeeper \$141,580 for litigation costs.

The Yakama Nation will use the money to reduce infestations of water stargrass, an aquatic plant that degrades fish habitat and water quality, according to Yakama Nation fisheries manager Tom Elliott.

The Sunnyside plant processes 7.7 million pounds of milk a day to produce cheese, whey powder and milk powder, according to court records.

The plant also releases wastewater to a lagoon to irrigate farmland and to the Port of Sunnyside's wastewater treatment plant.



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Washington Ecology describes what it considers ideal farming

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Ecology has finished a 12-chapter paper on agricultural “best management practices,” a years-long project that walks a fine line between advice and rules.

Ecology titles the paper, “Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture.” Farmers and ranches are not required to follow the practices, according to Ecology.

On the other hand, Ecology wrote the paper to supplement its plan to regulate “nonpoint” pollution sources, such as farms.

“Ecology’s authority includes the ability to require a nonpoint source polluter to implement specific best management practices,” according to the nonpoint plan.

“That’s where we’re nervous,” Washington State Water Resources Association executive director John Stuhlmiller said.

“Ecology has assured us they are not going to use the BMPs that way,” he said. “If they stick with that, we’re good.”

State law prohibits farms from polluting water. The law, however, also gives Ecology authority to identify potential pollution sources. If farmers follow the guidance, Ecology will presume they aren’t polluting, according to the department.

The value of the BMPs will be tested if a private organization sues a farmer following Ecology’s guidance, Washington State Dairy Federation policy director Jay Gordon said. “Will Ecology defend the farmer?” he asked. “Who’s going to

stand up for me in front of a judge?”

The Environmental Protection Agency and a court order pushed Ecology to develop the agricultural BMPs. Ecology rolled out the chapters as they were finished over several years.

The chapters cover subjects such as managing erosion, pesticides, manure and livestock. The guidance and non-point plan will shape Ecology’s approach to keeping water clean and cool, according to an Ecology blog.

“The guidance is designed to reflect the diversity of Washington’s agricultural industry and offer best management practice options that can be tailored to site-specific needs,” the blog states.

The BMPs are “almost aspirational,” surpassing Natural Resource Conservation Service expectations, Gordon said.

“It’s way, way beyond NRCS standards. That’s what makes us nervous,” he said. “As a farmer, who the heck do I listen to?”

In a chapter on “Riparian Management Zones,” the strip of trees and plants between fields and waterways, Ecology calls 215 feet the “default” buffer width in Western Washington.

Ecology prefers fences keep livestock out of the entire riparian management zone, according to the chapter on grazing.

Statewide implementation of riparian buffers is critical for meeting water-quality standards, according to the non-point plan.

“If they try to make (the buffers) mandatory, the fight is on,” Gordon said.



The Washington Department of Ecology says it will presume that farmers following its ‘best management practices’ won’t pollute water.

Farmers see Horse Heaven wind and solar project as ag's salvation

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Horse Heaven Hills farmers dispute claims that Scout Clean Energy's massive wind and solar project in southeast Washington will wreck agriculture, pointing to lease payments as agriculture's salvation.

Some 19 farmers and landowners submitted a friend-of-the-court brief to the Washington Supreme Court defending Scout's plans to put windmills, solar panels and batteries on farmland near the Tri-Cities.

Benton County argues ex-Gov. Jay Inslee and the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council dismissed the county's concerns about losing 6,869 acres of farmland.

Dryland wheat farmers who signed the brief said lease payments will help them buy equipment, hire more people and invest in new technology.

"As a result, the project will support retention of these lands for agricultural purposes and avoid the need to sell off land to other parties and uses," the brief reads.

The farmers and landowners filed the brief in advance of the Supreme Court's hearing June 11. The



Windmills turn in Central Washington. Lease payments from the Horse Heaven wind and solar project in southeast Washington will help dryland wheat farmers survive lean years, according to farmers and landowners. (Don Jenkins/Capital Press)

county, the Yakama Nation and Tri-Cities CARES, a citizens group, allege Inslee and EFSEC violated state laws in approving the project.

Scout, based in Colorado and owned by Brookfield Renewable Partners, a Canadian company, has leased property from 42 landowners and plans to install up to 222 windmills and cover about 5,500 acres with solar panels.

Residential development poses more of a threat to agriculture on Horse Heaven Hills than do windmills, solar panels and batteries, according to the farmers' brief.

The hills receive little rain, so farmers are limited in what they can grow, according to the brief. With

input costs rising and wheat prices not keeping up, lease

payments will help farmers survive lean years, the brief states.

"These are not hobby farms — those farming the Horse Heaven Hills live or die on the margins of a crop yield," the brief reads.

"It (Scout's project) will neither disrupt agricultural practices nor result in the long-term conversion of agricultural land; in fact, it will do just the opposite."

The county argues the conversion of farmland would violate county land-use laws and the state's

Growth Management Act. The Yakama Nation and Tri-City CARES raised objections unrelated to losing farmland.

The tribe argues the project will damage traditional gathering places and cultural resources. The Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians submitted a brief supporting the Yakama Nation's position.

The affiliation represents 57 tribal governments in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, California and Montana.

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Washington AG sues Albertsons; grocer denies allegations

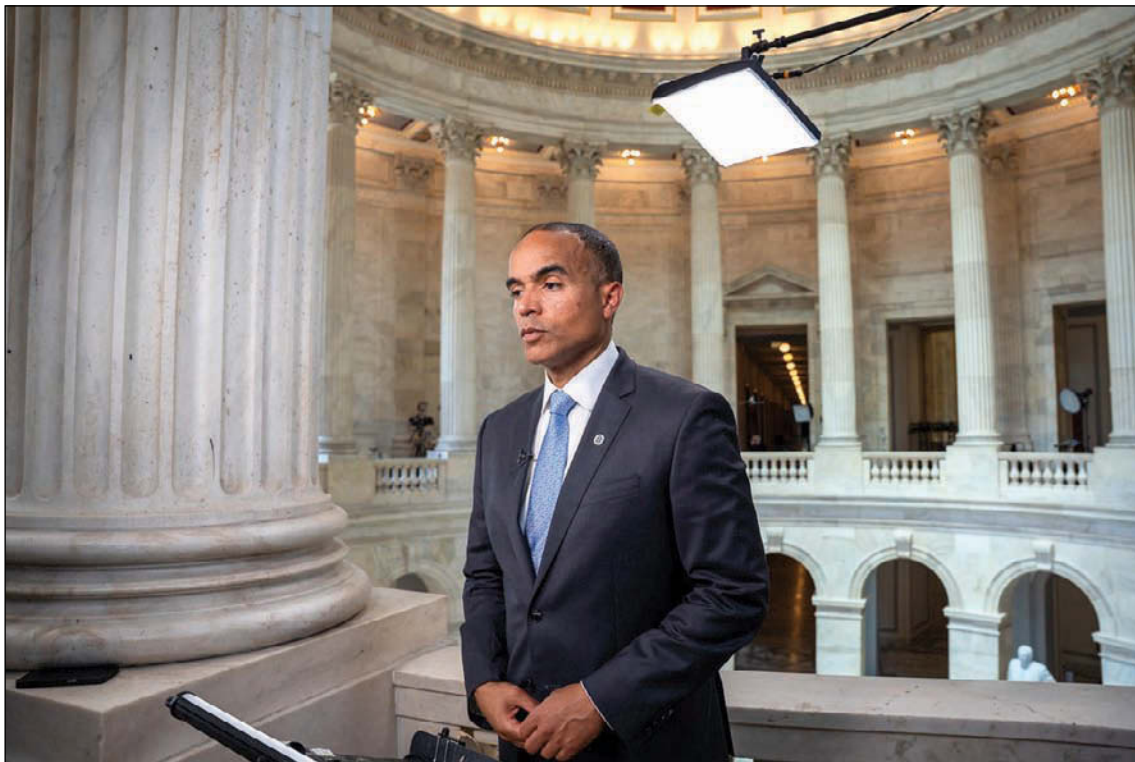
By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Washington Attorney General Nick Brown has sued Albertsons Companies, claiming the grocery retailer jacks up prices to deceive shoppers into thinking buy-one-get-one-free sales are bargains.

The Boise-based company, which owns 225 stores in Washington, including all Safeway and Haggen stores, denied the allegation.

“We engaged in good-faith discussions with the attorney general’s office and strongly disagree with its claims, which are based on flawed analysis and data errors that we identified and raised,” Albertsons said in a statement.

Brown announced the lawsuit April 27 at a press



Washington Attorney General Nick Brown has filed a lawsuit against Albertsons Companies. Brown alleges the Boise-based retailer deceived shoppers with buy-one-get-one-free promotions. Courtesy Office of Attorney General

conference in Seattle. The lawsuit claims the company’s alleged deception violates the state’s Consumer

Protection Act. “Consumers walk in the stores, thinking that they’re getting a bargain,” Brown

said. “But in reality, they are just paying an inflated price for that first item.”

Shoppers were snookered out of more than \$19.1 million in more than 3.1 million transactions from 2019 to 2024, the lawsuit alleges.

“We worked with analysts to sort of come up with a rough estimate,” Brown said. “It’s a pretty data intensive case.”

The lawsuit cites five examples of prices that were raised shortly before a buy-one-get-one-free special began.

- Orowheat Premium Italian Bread at a Tacoma Albertsons was raised from \$3.69 to \$4.29.

- Signature Select Sourdough Hoagie Rolls at a Battle Ground Albertsons

were raised from \$3.39 to \$4.29.

- Mini watermelons at a Colville Safeway were raised from \$3.99 to \$5.99.

- A 16-ounce bottle of O Organics Extra Virgin Olive Oil at a Gig Harbor Albertsons was raised from \$6.99 to \$10.99.

- A 7-ounce jar of Signature Select Olives Stuffed with Pimiento at a Renton Albertsons was raised from \$2.99 to \$5.49. The lawsuit called the price increase “shocking.”

The lawsuit did not cite any example of prices doubling to completely nullify savings. The promotions lured shoppers into stores and induced them to make additional purchases, the lawsuit claims.

Consumers deserve restitution, said Brown, a Democrat. “Washington consumers are already burdened by affordability issues, and we’re not going to stand by and let them get fleeced by deceptive marketing,” he said.

Gov. Bob Ferguson, Brown’s predecessor as attorney general, sued poultry companies, alleging price fixing. The companies settled, and Ferguson, a candidate for governor at the time, mailed checks to Washington households.

A Silverdale, Wash., woman sued Albertsons in 2023 over buy-one-get-one-free deals. She settled out of court.



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Oregon wolf population, livestock attacks grow

By **Kyle Odegard**
Capital Press

Oregon's wolf population continued to grow and disperse westward in 2025, with three new packs in the Cascades and increased sightings in recreational areas and rural neighborhoods in Central Oregon.

Livestock attacks and authorized kills of the apex predators also increased, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's annual wolf report, released April 17.

Agencies have recognized the need for more aggressive wolf management, said John Williams, Oregon Cattlemen's Association wolf committee co-chairman.

"They are using all the tools they have and they are doing them in a timely manner. It's still not enough," he said.

"There are more wolves eating more cattle in more places in Oregon than ever before," Williams added.

Oregon's minimum wolf count at the end of the year was 230, up from 204 in 2024 and the highest population since wolves began recolonizing the state in 2008.

The actual number of wolves is likely higher.

Thirty packs were documented, with 23 breeding pairs, up from 17.

Conservation group Ore-

gon Wild celebrated wolves' spread.

"Wolves are dispersing from eastern Oregon and growing in population throughout the Cascades, a testament not only of the resilience and perseverance of wolves as a species, but the dogged science-based advocacy that has given them the space to do so," said Danielle Moser, the organization's wildlife program manager.

Cattle kills highest since recolonization

The state recorded 106 confirmed livestock depredation events in 2025, up from 69 in 2024. Most occurred in the East Wolf Management Zone.

Wolves west of Highways 395/78/95 are protected under the federal endangered species act and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for management decisions, but they are delisted east of that line.

Cattle deaths were by far the highest since wolves returned.

In 2025, confirmed livestock kills included 10 cows, 77 calves, eight sheep, one goat and one livestock working dog.

Eleven cows, 27 calves, one goat and two livestock working dogs were injured by wolves.

The Oregon Department

of Agriculture's compensation program awarded \$729,000 in grants to 14 counties in 2025, down from \$790,000 the previous year.

About 84% of funding was used for non-lethal preventative measures and all requests for compensation of confirmed and probable livestock depredations were granted in full.

Far more wolves killed by authorities

Forty-two wolf deaths were documented, including 39 caused by humans.

The state had 30 authorized wolf kills, well above the 14 from 2024.

ODFW and USFWS killed 27 wolves in response to chronic depre-

dation or safety concerns, while livestock producers killed three wolves caught in the act of attacking their animals.

Only one wolf was removed from the West WMZ and it was considered a threat to humans and responsible for eight confirmed and four probable livestock depredations

Two wolves were accidentally killed by USDA Wildlife Services while the agency was removing coyotes.

Four illegal wolf deaths are being investigated by authorities, down from seven poachings in 2024 and 12 in 2023.

Three wolves were killed by motor vehicles the past year.

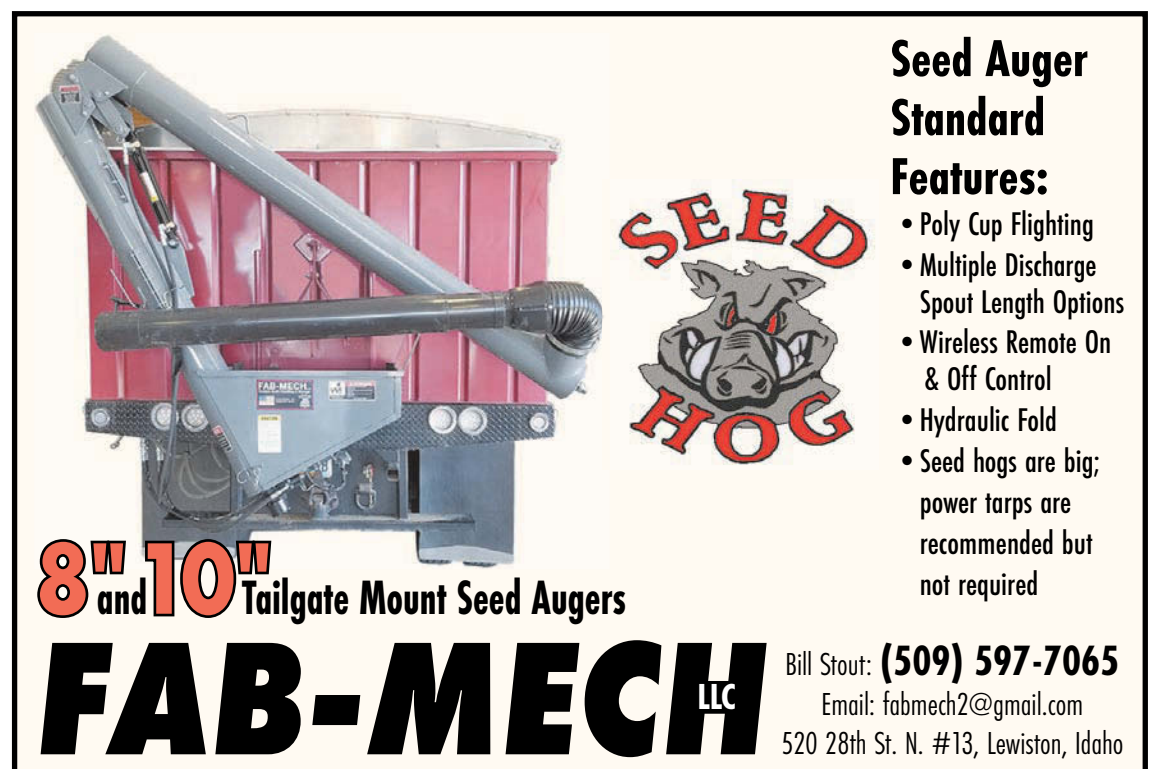
West zone wolf population grows

While 142 wolves were in the East WMZ, a slight decline from 2024, the West WMZ population increased to 88 in 2025, up from 49 the previous year.

The West WMZ had eight breeding pairs, up one from 2024.

If there are at least seven breeding pairs at the end of 2026, the West WMZ may jump from Phase 1 of the state's wolf plan to Phase 3 in 2027.

The switch would offer more flexibility to producers responding to livestock depredations once wolves are federally delisted.



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U.S. attorney general probing beef packers seeks tips from ranchers

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche solicited tips from ranchers and others to help the Justice Department probe alleged price-fixing by the big four meat packers.

Whistle-blowers whose information leads to criminal penalties topping \$1 million are eligible to keep up to 30%, Blanche said at a press conference May 4.

“Whether you’re a

farmer, a purchaser, a processor, you can help protect food security in America by reporting these types of violations and potentially criminal conduct,” he said. “The Department of Justice wants to hear from you.”

President Trump ordered the Justice Department in November to investigate high beef prices. The price of ground beef has gone up 15.7% and sirloin steak has gone up 18.5% in the past year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Tyson Foods, JBS USA, Cargill and National Beef control 85% of the beef market. Blanche and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins singled out the four companies at the press conference. The market concentration suggests anti-competitive activities, Blanche said.

Industry response

The Meat Institute, a trade association that represents packers, said packers are paying cattle producers record prices because there are too few cattle to meet consumer demand.

As a result, packers lost money nearly every month



Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche solicits tips at a press conference May 4 to help the Justice Department investigate the four large meat packers. Photo courtesy of Justice Department

for the last 18 months, according to the institute.

“We agree with the Trump administration that a competitive meat and poultry industry that sustains rural communities is essential,” institute President and CEO Julie Anna Potts said in an email.

The four companies did not respond to a request to comment.

Rollins linked the DOJ investigation to Trump’s efforts to revive U.S. agriculture. Ranchers are too dependent on the four packers, including two, JBS and

National Beef, owned by Brazilians, she said.

“This has led to a frightening landscape for cattle ranchers,” she said. “Industry consolidation reduces options for our ranchers looking to sell their cattle.”

Meat processors have been the target of numerous investigations and lawsuits and have paid hundreds of millions of dollars to settle price-fixing allegations.

In an unresolved case, the Biden Department of Justice alleged Agri Stats, a trade publication, was the clearinghouse for confiden-

tial business information that allowed packers to fix prices.

A trial is set to begin this month in the U.S. District Court for Minnesota. White House economic adviser Peter Navarro said at the press conference the case may be settled before then.

He predicted the settlement will “unleash a set of forces that are going to ripple through this industry rapidly and in a way which is going to allow us to get to the bottom of things.”

Agri Stats, based in Fort Wayne, Ind., is the last defendant remaining in a class-action lawsuit filed by pork buyers in 2018 against pork producers. Tyson paid \$50 million and JBS paid \$24.5 million in out-of-court settlements. Smithfield Foods, a Chinese-owned company, settled for \$83 million.

Agri Stats and the plaintiffs have proposed a settlement that bars Agri Stats from reporting production and sales figures. Agri Stats denies any wrongdoing. U.S. District Judge John Tunheim must approve the settlement.

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Farmers share more risk under Anderson Hay's reorganization plan

By Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Press

Farmers will be expected to share more of the risks involved in growing forage crops for Anderson Hay under the company's bankruptcy reorganization plan.

Growers will also cease receiving large upfront payments for crops under the plan, and instead will be paid incrementally to reduce cash flow problems for the company.

Last year, Anderson Hay of Ellensburg, Wash., filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy to shield its assets from foreclosure while restructuring its business and debts.

The major Northwest forage exporter has now submitted its reorganization plan to the bankruptcy court, under which the company will be "implementing significant changes" to how it operates.

"In summary, the Debtors will exit non-profitable lines of business, liquidate assets related to non-core operations, implement large reductions in fixed costs in their Washington processing plant and Agri harvest operations, and lower general and administrative costs," according to the bankruptcy plan.

Farmer impact

Some of those changes will directly affect farmers, as the company said it has traditionally assumed "all risks related to weather and grade," which has recently caused millions of dollars in losses.



Under its reorganization plan, Anderson Hay will cease large upfront payments for crops and will require farmers to assume more of the risk for growing forage. (Capital Press file photo)

From now on, Anderson Hay will "predominantly" enter into forage production contracts under which "risks associated with weather, grade and yield will be shared with the grower," the plan said, without offering more specifics.

In addition, the company will be dedicating more contracted acreage to producing Timothy hay, as this is "inherently a less volatile crop," and will reduce its export volumes to focus on "customers that are more consistent and less price sensitive in their purchasing."

Anderson Hay's plan said the company will "shift away from most harvesting activities," which will instead be contracted to third parties, allowing it to "liquidate excess owned harvesting equipment, including rakes, balers, stackers, pickups and other related equipment."

Payment terms with growers will also change under the plan, depending on the type of

contract.

Instead of a "fixed schedule" of pre- and post-harvest payments in the spring and fall, Anderson Hay will be paying certain growers in installments only after harvest, according to the plan.

These growers will either receive 10% of the contract value in monthly installments after harvest, or be paid as they deliver hay to the company's facility in Ellensburg or as they load trucks for delivery directly to its customers, the plan said.

These new contract terms will align more with payments coming in from Anderson Hay's clients and will eliminate the "large contract payments in advance of when the product might be sold."

Other farmers were traditionally paid 30% at the time of the contract, another 30% in the fall and the remainder in the new year after harvest, which created a "cash-flow challenge" for Anderson Hay

due to "fixed cash outflows and variable cash inflows," the plan said.

These growers will instead be paid monthly based on their activity in the previous month, ending "large advance payments on product that might not be sold for several months," the plan said.

Apart from the changes affecting farmers, the company will be dissolving six of the seven entities that operated various aspects of its business, with most of those assets consolidated under the Anderson Hay and Grain division.

The plan calls for the company to terminate its direct-to-consumer pet products divi-

sion and exit that market. Its Oregon facility for compressing straw will also be sold for \$10.75 million, as previously announced, reducing 29 employees as part of its exit from the straw business.

Anderson Hay also recently sold a property near Lake Chelan in Washington for about \$10 million and plans to sell two other properties in undisclosed locations, which is expected to yield another \$8 million in proceeds.

The company plans to continue operating its Ellensburg facility but will eliminate 13 jobs and "downsize operations" there, along with equipment reductions.

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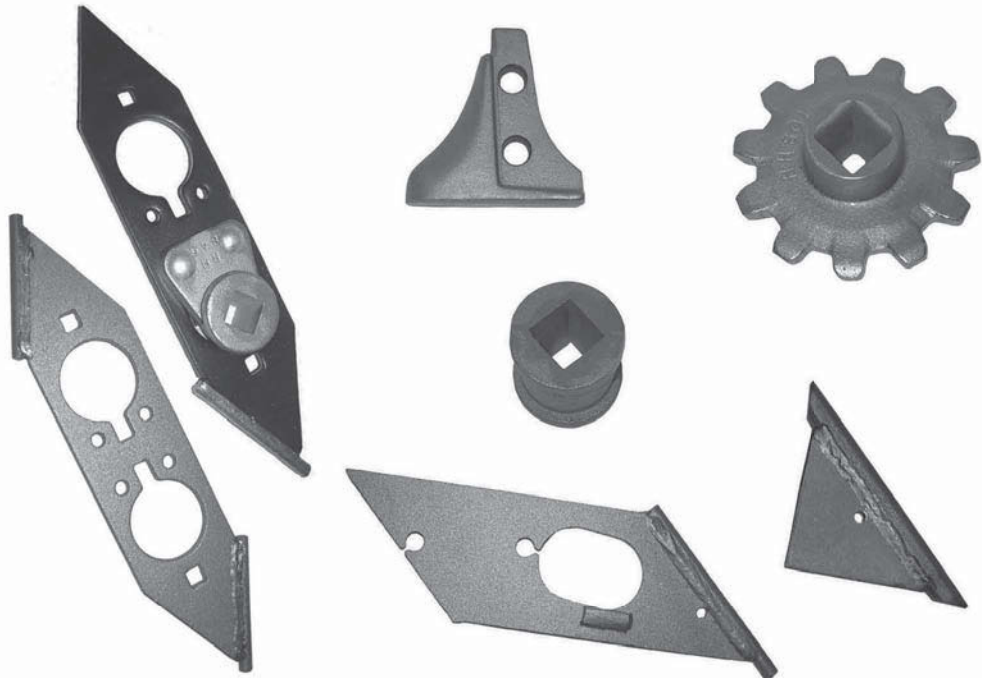
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Yakima basin irrigation outlook steady as water rationing nears

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

The Bureau of Reclamation projects Yakima River basin irrigators with junior water-rights will receive 52% of their normal water allotments, an outlook unchanged from one month ago.

The May 7 forecast passed for good news. April was relatively dry, but the snowpack, though small, held up, instead of prematurely melting.

"Just the fact we're holding stable is helpful," Kittitas Reclamation District manager Urban Eberhart said. "It could so easily have gone the other direction."

The reclamation bureau projects about 1.5 million acre-feet of water will be available to irrigate about 464,000 acres in Central Washington through Sept. 30. Fully meeting all water-rights, however, takes about 2 million acre-feet.

Senior water-right holders will get full allotments totaling more than 900,000 acre-feet. Junior water-right holders, however, will be cut back. The bureau expects rationing to begin within 10 days as its five reservoirs peak and start to come down.

This will be the fourth-straight summer of rationing in the Yakima basin. Ironically, it's rare for reservoirs to hold so much water in early May. This is only the fourth year since 1971 that reservoirs held more than 1 million acre feet on May 1.

The snowpack, however, is only 35% of average, the result of a warm winter.

The outlook has actually improved in the past two months. The reclamation bureau forecast in March that junior water-right holders would get only 44% of full allotments, with the possibility that allotments could drop below last year's 40%.

"Fifty-two percent is good news, and we hope it sticks," Roza Irrigation District policy director Sage Park said.

To stretch its water supply, Roza plans to shut down its canal for up to 15 days as soon as rationing begins, she said.

By shutting down early, the district hopes to deliver water until the end of September or early October, Park said.

The Kittitas district does not plan to shut down its canal, but will reduce deliveries and anticipates ending the irrigation season early in the last half of August, Eberhart said.

He said that a few weeks ago he anticipated rationing to start at the beginning of May. "In years like this, we'll take any good news we can get," he said.

The reclamation bureau projects reservoirs will be down to minimal levels by Sept. 30, leaving little water to carry over into the new water year.

Four irrigation districts told the Department of Ecology last week they are concerned there will not be enough water to satisfy senior water-rights in October.

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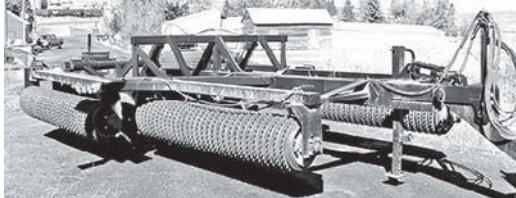


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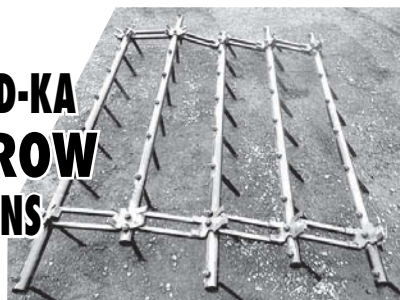
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Idaho livestock depredation payments increase, broaden

By Brad Carlson
Capital Press

Idaho ranchers in 2025 received increased compensation for livestock depredations, particularly for losses deemed possibly caused by a wolf or grizzly bear.

The legislature in recent years made depredations that a field investigation confirmed to be caused by wolves or grizzlies, or determined to be probably or possibly caused by wolves or grizzlies, eligible for state money. The goal was to help more producers receive compensation for depredations.

For wolf-involved depredations, payments in 2025 totaled \$109,051, according to the Idaho Office of Species Conservation. Federal compensation for confirmed depredations was \$48,383. Payments from state sources were \$2,154 in the probable category and \$58,514 in the possible category. Covered losses involved 72 livestock among 17 producers in 11 counties.

In 2024, compensation for livestock losses involving wolves totaled \$54,683. Federal compensation for confirmed depredations was \$9,842. Payments from state sources were \$8,762 for probable depredations and \$36,078 for possible depredations. Covered losses involved 89 livestock among 20 producers in nine counties. A law broadening eligibility took effect July 1, 2024.

Compensation in 2025 for livestock losses related to grizzly bears totaled \$59,174, according to OSC. Payments totaled \$34,498 for confirmed depredations, \$5,060 for probables and \$19,616 for "possibles."

The claims involved losses of 50 livestock owned by 12 producers in two counties.

Payments in 2024 for grizzly-related depredations totaled \$56,992. By category, compensation was \$38,808 for confirmed depredations, \$2,015 for probable depredations and \$16,168 for possible depredations. Losses totaled 29 livestock owned by 16 producers in two counties.

For depredations con-

firmed to be caused by wolves, federal or state money can be used, but federal money has covered these claims so far, OCS terrestrial species program manager Joshua Uriarte said. Payments in probable and possible categories are from state funds.

Grizzly-related claims are paid with state funds whether the livestock depredation is in the confirmed, probable or possible cate-

gory, he said.

Cattle price impact

For livestock depredations this year, "we did pay out more because cattle prices are higher and we pay market rate," Uriarte said.

The yearly rate is an average established by consulting with livestock groups and USDA. The rate does not reflect depredation impacts such as weight loss and calving inefficiency, he

said.

"In the past, we haven't been able to fund probable and possible" depredations, Uriarte said. "Now that it is available, people are using it."

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Department of Fish and Game and OCS, carries out the program and has spending authority. OSC receives the claims, due Dec. 31.



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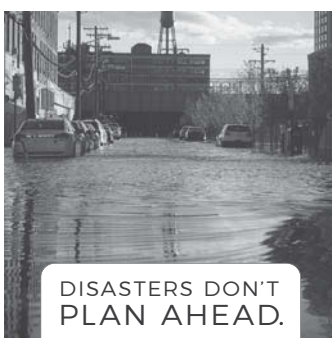
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Washington farm couple to fight Ecology's \$876,000 bloody water fine



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By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

A Chehalis, Wash., couple say they will defend themselves against allegations by the Department of Ecology that they violated the state's water-pollution control law by irrigating hay with blood-laced water.

Jerry and Nicole Foster have been fined \$876,000 for spreading wastewater from a Woodland slaughterhouse on a 112-acre field in southwest Washington.

The water was contaminated with animal's blood and "other animal bits" and was a threat to the Chehalis River and groundwater, according to Ecology.

Mrs. Foster said in an interview April 30 that they will appeal the fine to the Pollution Control Hearings Board. She disputed the allegations Ecology made in a press release.

"It totally slammed us, and it's very disheartening," she said. "This has caused us so much anguish."

Ecology alleges that between April 29, 2024, and Oct. 5, 2025, the Fosters collected wastewater at least 438 times from the Rainer Pure Beef Company, previously known as Walt's Meats.

The department claims the Fosters illegally dis-

posed of the waste on their farm. Ecology told Rainer in late 2025 to stop contracting with the Fosters.

"What the Fosters did was absolutely illegal," Ecology water quality program manager Jon Kenning said in a statement.

"This business shortcut is inexcusable. There is a right way to dispose of this type of waste, yet the company chose differently," he said.

Mrs. Foster said hauled water used to wash down the slaughterhouse. "It was basically 90% water," she said. "There was not a lot of blood in those tankers."

The Fosters mixed the blood-laced water with manure-laced water. "It made the hay look beautiful," Mrs. Foster said.

The field is at least 500 feet from the river, and soil samples showed pollutants were not getting into groundwater, she said. The Fosters began collecting the slaughterhouse's wastewater in 2019 and spread it under state supervision, she said. "We met every expectation."

Mrs. Foster attributed their troubles with regulators to complaints about odors from a neighbor. "We had a guy come out and he literally sniffed the area," she said.

The GROWERS' GUIDE

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Washington wolf attacks down, but maybe only on paper

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Washington wolves officially attacked relatively few head of cattle last year, though it may be a sign that ranchers see more drawbacks than benefits to reporting depredations to the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Wolves definitely or probably killed or injured 19 head of cattle in 2025, compared to 56 the year before, according to Fish and Wildlife. Documented attacks dropped even though the wolf population grew by 40 wolves to 270.

By comparison, Oregon last year counted 230 wolves and documented 145 animals attacked by wolves.

Some northeast Washington ranchers have lost confidence that reporting attacks will lead to action by Fish and Wildlife, Stevens County Sheriff Brad Manke said. "They've given up hope that the department will do anything for them," he said.

Fish and Wildlife wolf policy lead Subhadeep Bhattacharjee agreed the department may be missing depredations. "There could be more," he said. "If they are not being reported, it is very difficult for us to have an indication of how many more."

Ranchers who report depredations are eligible for compensation, and Fish and Wildlife may cull a pack to keep depredations from spiraling out of control. In the long run, not reporting is bad for ranchers, wolves and the department, Bhattacharjee said.

Ranchers, however, aren't seeing the advantages, said Jeff Flood, wildlife sheriff's deputy for Stevens and Ferry counties.

"I have ranchers who report depredations to us, but they don't want Fish and Wildlife to get their information," Flood said. "They

do not get satisfaction out of it, and then their information gets spread all over.

"They don't want to deal with that stress anymore," he said.

Washington Wildlife First last year went to court and succeeded in stopping Fish and Wildlife from culling a pack attacking cattle in the Colville National Forest.

The organization issued a press release accusing the department of catering to "irresponsible beef producers who refuse to take the most basic steps to protect their cattle."

Wildlife First will continue scrutinizing the department and ranchers, the organization's policy director, Francisco Santiago-Avila, said.

"The intent is certainly not to place producers in these positions, and we certainly don't make casual accusations," he said.

Santiago-Avila agreed the 2025 depredation count was suspiciously low and that ranchers may not be reporting attacks on livestock. Without accurate counts, it's hard to evaluate Fish and Wildlife's lethal-removal policy, he said.

"It's a big concern for us," he said. "We don't think the response is for the department to be more inclined to kill endangered wildlife."

Manke estimated ranchers reported about 20 depredations to his office last year, but didn't want Fish and Wildlife to be involved.

"As the sheriff, I have to respect the wishes of the producer," he said. "Fish and Wildlife's numbers are low because they don't have all the facts.

"We'd like to see everything reported and everything accounted for," Manke said. "It's hard for me to fight for my producers if they've given up hope in the fight."

Fish and Wildlife last year killed four wolves to curb attacks on cattle. Ranchers shot two more

wolves caught attacking cattle. Tribal hunters harvested 12 wolves.

In Oregon, state and federal wildlife managers removed 27 wolves. In both states, wolf populations grew — by 13% in Oregon and 17% in Washington.



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Washington State University extreme microbe can fight Listeria, fire blight

By Kyle Odegard
 Capital Press

A compound derived from a microorganism that can survive in extreme conditions will be tested this growing season in orchards against fire blight — and evaluated in the lab versus Listeria, a major problem for packing houses.

“This work has the potential to make a real difference for Washington’s tree fruit industry,” said Washington State University researcher Cynthia Haseltine.

Haseltine has spent nearly a decade developing and testing the compound, which has shown promising effectiveness against a variety of harmful pathogens.

Work is progressing to WSU research orchards and laboratories with support from a new \$141,000 Washington Tree Fruit Research Commis-



An Imperial Gala apple hangs from a branch at Washington State University's Tukey Horticultural Orchard in Pullman, Wash. A new compound developed by a WSU researcher could help agriculture battle fire blight, Listeria and other problems. (Courtesy Shelly Hanks, WSU Photo Service)

sion grant.

Potential applications

Haseltine, an associate professor in the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine's school of molecular biosciences, has dedicated her career to studying archaea, microorganisms known for thriving in extreme environments such as boiling acid, deep sea hydrothermal vents and salt crystals.

One of those microorganisms is key to her compound, which could have a wide range of potential applications.

Preliminary data shows it fights pathogens that harm potatoes, carrots, onions and other produce, as well salmonella, Haseltine said.

“The main focus right now is the funded research,” she said.

The compound could have human and animal health uses. It has shown effectiveness against MRSA, an antibiotic-resistant staph infection.

“We’ve been spending a lot of time testing every species we can get our hands on,” Haseltine said.

Approving medical treatments can take decades, but ag products have a faster timeline and can still benefit health as well as the economy, she said.

“I really want to help the growers,” Haseltine added.

‘Listeria loves packing lines’

WSU announced the compound in October and touted its ability against fire blight, which can wipe out orchards.

U.S. annual losses from the disease exceed \$100

million.

While fire blight is an issue in apple and pear orchards, Listeria can contaminate numerous fruit and vegetables during harvesting, processing and packing.

“Every grower is worried about contamination of their produce after it leaves their farms. ... It’s a big deal,” Haseltine said.

“Listeria loves packing lines. It’s very fond of lurking in there,” she added.

Although only 10 to 25 cases are reported annually in Washington, incidents can result in millions of dollars in losses and serious illness or even death.

“Recalls can cost between \$5 million and \$15 million, and beyond that, growers absorb the loss of fruit that can’t be sold and the reputational damage that comes with it,” she added.

Haseltine said she’ll use Listeria samples from packing lines to investigate the compound, including how much exposure is needed to be effective.

Thanks to the extreme microbe, the compound is “incredibly” stable across a broad range of temperatures and conditions, from sunny days to refrigeration.

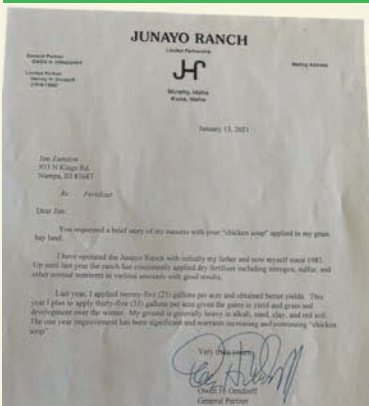
It also has shown effectiveness against pathogens within biofilms — protective layers bacteria form on surfaces to shield themselves from disinfectants and antibiotics.

While many pathogens are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics, including fire blight, that’s unlikely with the extreme microbe compound.

“Jim, You have turned my dryland ranch into an oasis... Everything you told me was true, thanks!” – Owen O. Junayo Ranch

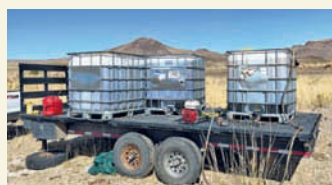


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Huckleberry research aims to commercialize wild berries in PNW

By **Matthew Weaver**
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — Several huckleberry research projects are advancing throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The “ultimate goal” is more huckleberry plants, said Steve Cook, entomology professor at the University of Idaho.

“We’re having anecdotal stories coming in that huckleberry stands are decreasing,” Cook told Capital Press. “We would like to find out what may or may not be important in re-establishing, or establishing new plots.”

Demand for huckleberries themselves and for huckleberry plants remains high, said Andrew Nelson, director of UI’s Pitkin Forest Nursery. Potential uses include landscaping and restoration.

The researchers need to figure out why a huckleberry plant doesn’t transplant well. They live for three to five years in a greenhouse, but die within a year of being transferred to a natural setting.

Huckleberries produce good berries in bright light, but like partially-shaded conditions during establishment, Nelson said.

Some are sold and grow in yards, but don’t produce fruit, Cook said.

“We’re trying to answer the question of why,” he said. “It may be a nutrient that’s missing, it may be a fungal associate that’s missing.”

Insects and huckleberries

Cook compares insect communities occurring in huckleberry stands with communities nearby. He believes closed-canopy huckleberry sites change soil moisture and influence the insect community.

If losing or decreasing huckleberries becomes more of an issue, “it would be nice to know if we’re affecting something besides just the plants,” he said.

Cook’s research team studies sites in north Idaho, the Olympic Peninsula and coastal Oregon.

Huckleberry pollination is dominated by queen bumblebees, because huckleberries are typically the first floral resource available in forests.

“Bumblebees overwinter as queens,” Cook said.

“And so she has to do all of her foraging on her own until the brood starts to develop, and then the workers — her daughters — will go out and do the bulk of that work. But early in the year, it has to be the queen, because she’s the only one there.”

Cook in 2023 expressed surprise that the insects that pollinate huckleberries were unknown.

“Do we know more? Yes. Do we know more meaningfully — I’m not sure,” he said.

His team captures and releases queens during collections, and swabs worker bees and other insects to collect pollen to assign every captured pollinator with specific



University of Idaho entomology professor Steve Cook displays huckleberry plants grown in a greenhouse April 9 in Moscow, Idaho. UI researchers want to improve the plants’ survival when transplanted into outdoor surroundings.

“I feel passionate for forest resources in general,” Cook said. (Matthew Weaver/Capital Press)

Pollination may be a minor component of a huckleberry stand expanding, Cook said. They appear to expand more below ground.

“The first plant has to be from a germinated, healthy, viable seed, but after that one goes, it may all just be expansion of a single plant,” he said. “So we’re trying to look into that more closely. I think that’s going to take tens of years to answer.”

Commercial production

All huckleberries are harvested in the wild, even those picked by commercial harvesters. The eventual results of UI’s research could lead to commercial production, Cook and Nelson said.

“Some people would like to be able to crack that nut,” Nelson said.



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