



The Growers' Guide

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Number 3

Ranchers open new USDA-certified slaughter facility

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

ELTOPIA, Wash. — It took Cody and Jen Hoseth nearly a decade to open their new USDA-certified slaughter facility.

The Lone Crow Meat Processing facility was slated to slaughter its first cow July 21. It sits on a nearly 200-acre site in Eltopia, Wash., about 31 miles north of the Tri-Cities.

Getting USDA approval took a long time.

“This was attempt number nine to get this kill floor; I really just failed my way into finally getting a kill floor for almost 10 years,” Cody Hoseth said. “There were quite a few times and spots where I probably should have quit, and I didn’t ... I always tell my wife, ‘A smarter person wouldn’t have done it.’”

“It’s relieving,” Jen Hoseth said.

When they first started selling meat, they sold at farmers markets and parking lots. When they got their own shop, they were still outsourcing for slaughter.

“Now that we have this, we’ve



Cody and Jen Hoseth stand on the “kill floor” of their new slaughter facility June 24 in Eltopia, Wash. Neither has a farming background. “If someone who didn’t have any experience came to us wanting to get into it, I feel like we have more expertise than anyone starting with nothing, and going to where we’ve been,” Jen Hoseth said of the 10-year effort to build the new site. (Matthew Weaver/Capital Press)

finally built the stairs,” she said.

“There’s no gaps, we have it from start to finish.”

So-called “kill floors” are highly specialized, and difficult to get local permitting. It took nine months to get a permit just to build the facility.

“There aren’t that many people that genuinely know that much about them,” Cody Hoseth said. “Finding enough people that know anything about any part of it is significantly challenging.”

Finding bank support can also be tough.

“Any time you do a project, you

need permits and money,” Cody Hoseth said. “Well, if those two things are massively challenging, it makes the project itself hard.”

He did a lot of ag-related or ag-adjacent work in the meantime, he said.

“This thing has worked less days than it hasn’t worked, and I was fine with that the whole time,” he said. “The whole time it wasn’t working, I was just like, ‘One day it will work.’ I kept at it, kept at it and kept at it, and then finally one day, it

See Facility, Page A2

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A white Kenworth T300 dump truck is shown from a front-three-quarter view. The truck features a large chrome grille with the Kenworth logo in the center, and large headlights. It is parked in an outdoor lot with other vehicles and buildings in the background.

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Facility:

continued from A1
actually did.”

Meet Lone Crow Ranch

At 17, Cody Hoseth knocked on the door of a neighboring rancher and asked to work for him to learn the cattle business.

He remembers having a “burning inkling” while delivering cattle to a “wild card packer” feedlot.

"I just wanted to build something big like that," he said. "I never really thought I would get this far."

Today, Cody, 31, and Jen, 29 own 400 acres, lease 2,000 acres and run 1,000 head of cattle. They have two sons, Wyatt, 4, and Weston, who turns 2 in August.

They keep meat markets in Loon Lake, Wash., and

See Facility, Page A4

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'14 GREAT PLAINS 3S-5000HD DRILL, 50', 6" Spacing, 15K Acres, Track Scratcher, 1 Owner...
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\$2,500

COLT HOPPER PUP TRAILER, 21', Late Brakes, Airgate, 21" Tongue...
\$9,950

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JD QUICK HITCH...
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FRONTIER PALLET FORKS...
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DRAGON BOX BLADE, 6'...
\$500

'69 CAT D8H, 12964 Hrs, 13' Semi U Blade, Ripper...
\$25,000

'06 CAT D5N XL, 8281 Hrs, 10' PAT Blade, Ripper...
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'86 AVELING-BARFORD GRADER, 6X6, Silver 92, Front Blade...
\$12,950

CAT V80E FORKLIFT, Propane...
\$8,000

'17 JD 310L EP BACKHOE LOADER, 1702 Hrs, 4WD, Cab, Air/Heat...
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\$6,500

'87 KW T800 GLIDER, Reyco 4 Spring, P/S...
\$2,000

'94 MACK CH600, E7 400 HP, 18 Spd...
\$1,950

CHEVROLET C65 TANDEM, 427, 5X3 Trans, Air Brakes...
\$1,000

MACK RL700L, 400 Cummins, 13 Spd, A/C, Air Ride Cab...
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\$115,000



'21 JD S780, 652 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Pro Drive Trans, IF1250/50R32 Drive Tires...
\$325,000



'16 CIH 8240, 4473 Sep Hrs, Hillco 27%, 4WD, '17 MacDon FD75-45'...
\$119,900

'15 CIH 8240, 4405 Sep Hrs, Hillco 27%, 4WD, '17 MacDon FD75-45'...
\$112,900

'10 CIH 8120, 3403 Sep Hrs, Hillco 27%, 4WD, Chopper, Pro 600...
\$85,000

(2) '12 CIH 3020 TERRAFLEX HEADS, 35' Cart, Harvest Ready...
\$9,000 EA.

'99 CIH 2388, 4664 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Hillco, Late Cone/Cage, Hydros, New Rad, '97 CIH 1020-25'...
\$35,000

'99 CIH 2388, 4114 Eng Hrs, Hillco, Duals, '04 CIH 1010-30'...
CALL

'89 CIH 1015, Rakeup Pickup...
\$3,500

'17 CIH FD75, 45', Top Auger, Transport Kit...
\$29,950

'04 JD 9760STS, 3625 Sep Hrs, Full Leveler, 4WD, Chopper, '07 JD 630R, Cart, '06 JD 630F, Cart...
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'99 JD 9610, 5272 Sep Hrs, Full Leveler, 200 Hrs On New Hydro, Chaff Spreader, '99 JD 930R, Cart...
\$19,950

'92 JD 914 PICKUP HEAD, 7 Belt, Hillco Conversion...
\$4,950

(2) CIH 2020 FLEX HEADS, 35', Cart...
\$3,500 EA.

'11 CASE IH 8120 LEVEL LAND 4016 Sep Hrs., Luxury Cab...
PARTING OUT, 1/2 OF NEW

(100) LOVE LIFTERS...
\$25 EA.

'80 IH 1470, '94 CIH 1010-25' Head...
\$4,000

REDKOP MAV CHOPPER & SEED CONTROL UNIT, Came Off JD S780 Combine...
\$29,950

'04 CIH 2388, 4938E/3940S Hrs, Hillco Leveler, '04 CIH 1020-30 Flex Head...
\$42,500

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The Hoseths custom-built the hooks in the meat cooler. It can hold 100,000 pounds of beef. What's the maximum capacity of the new facility? "We'd love to find out," Jen Hoseth said. (Matthew Weaver/Capital Press)

Facility:

continued from A2

Pasco, Wash., and a USDA butcher shop in Connell, Wash.

They have two 24-hour beef vending machines, at the storefront in Loon Lake and a restaurant in Deer Park, Wash.

Their total operation employs about 25 workers.

Cody took over the Eltopia site in 2021, purchasing a portion. Last year, he bought the remaining portion. They partner with rancher/consultant Samuel Cossio.

The Hoseths estimate the new facility cost \$700,000, with Cody doing all of the construction work. For its size, the cost should be three to four times more, Cody Hoseth said.

He expects another five to six large area family ranches will bring their cattle to the Eltopia site for finishing, slaughter and/or

processing.

"I would really like other ranchers and farmers to know that we are open to do business with them," Cody Hoseth said. "This plant has a lot of capacity to support other producers."

The couple expects to slaughter 10 to 15 head per day.

How big is their storage capacity? "We'd love to find out," Jen Hoseth said.

First-generation ranchers

Neither grew up in agriculture. "Back then, Cody didn't even know what to ask," Jen Hoseth said. "Just like with everything else that we have, we had to build it from the ground up, because we didn't have the money to buy anything."

"We had to build one because there wasn't one to buy," Cody Hoseth added.

They note that many "new" slaughter plants

See Facility, Page A5



The Growers' Guide

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TRACTORS



VERSATILE 1150, power shift, 5,900 hrs., diff. locks front & rear, KTA-1150, 525-hp., triples, 4 remotes\$67,500
PTO, 3-point hitch, 4-remotes, new crank, rods & main bearings, Papé Machinery rework on engine, 8-heavy cast wheels, rack & pinion axles\$18,500
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CASE 4890, 4-remotes, 4594-original hrs, 30.5LRx32 radials inside, 24.5x32 outside\$17,500
diesel, 85-hp, PTO, 3-point, cab and loader **MAKE OFFER**

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TILLAGE

HESSTON 54FT WIDE CULTIVATOR, 5-section, walking beam axles, sweeps, hard faced\$8,800
JD KILLIFER 15' OFFSET DISK.....\$2,800
MORRIS, 19' chisel plow, 2-section **PARTS**

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LEWCO HAY GRAPPLES with swivel or equivalent

ALFALFA SEED, BAGGED, CLEANED, \$240⁰⁰/BAG

HAY & FEED

REARS FLAIL MOWER, 22 ft width, transport hitch, 1000 PTO.\$18,800
JD 1710 mulch subsoiler 16 ft width.....\$3,300
JD DEEP TILL 7 SHANK SUBSOILER COMBO 3 POINT AND TAG AXLE STYLE.....\$5,500
JD DRILL/SEEDER, 3 point hitch, with packer wheels, 8 foot width.....\$1,250
NH 1048, self-propelled bale wagon, auto trans, dieselCALL
NH 1046, self-propelled bale wagon, 6-cyl. gas.....\$3,500
NH 595, 3x4 baler, Excellent!\$17,700
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JD, 12-wheel V-rake\$4,750
HESSTON, StackMover trailer\$1,100
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CASE IH, hay dry preserver applicator, ea\$250
NH 515 BALER, w/ Deutz diesel engine, 3-twine. \$12,500
VERMEER 605K, Roundbaler.....\$6,500.00

ENGINES

CAT 3126, 190-hp**PARTS**
AC 3500, diesel\$3,850
JD 404, turboed diesel\$3,500
JD 303, gas engine head, complete\$600
JD 466 TURBO DIESEL\$3,950

PARTS & EQUIP.

NEW WATER WELL DRILL BITS, carbon buttons . 1/2 OF NEW
HYDRAULIC CYLINDERS, PUMPS & MOTORS, CALL
• **JD 8630**, tractor • **JD 8640**, tractor..... **PARTING OUT**
• **JD 880 & 2270 WINDROWERS**.....**PARTING ATTACHMENTS**
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Facility:

continued from A4

are usually existing facilities purchased by multi-generational ranches with financing “behind the scenes.”

The couple offers guidance to brand-new meat sellers.

“I feel like, given the right circumstances, more people would build these,” Cody Hoseth said of the new slaughter facility. “But if you underestimate how hard these are to build – I’ve actually seen some very wealthy people try to build these and fail.”

‘Real economics’

“It’s pretty impressive to see somebody like Cody come in, produce live-stock, slaughter and sell the end-product,” said Colorado Springs, Colo., rancher, butcher and “rural advocate” Mike Callicrate. “In fact, today it’s the only thing that works. If you’re missing any piece of the process, you can’t make it.”

Under a model like the Hoseths’, about 80% of the consumer dollar goes back to the farm and ranch gate, compared to 27% to 50% under the national beef market model, he said.

“The real importance of Cody’s model is to show what the real economics should look like for the producer, people in the middle and the end-consumer,” Callicrate said.

New USDA-certified facilities require too much effort, work and skill to be commonplace, he said.

“A person needs to be young, aggressive and full of energy — otherwise, there’s just too many moving parts to look after,” Callicrate said.

Inspiring new ranchers

A new USDA-inspected beef processing option is rare, agrees Bridget Coon, Benge, Wash., rancher, restaurant owner and Washington Farm Bureau first vice president.

“I know they’ve gone through a lot of local, up to federal, hurdles to make that happen,” Coon said. “I’m not surprised it took a long time; also not surprised that they are actually bringing it to fruition.”

Having another option that’s “geographically convenient” is something area ranchers don’t take for granted, Coon added.

The farm bureau took a group of younger regional farmers and ranchers to tour the Hoseths’ processing facility in 2025.

“They provide inspiration, particularly to people who maybe didn’t grow up in ranching, but have a passion for it and want to be part of the future of the cattle industry,” Coon said. “There’s a lot that people who come from other backgrounds and bring it into ranching can offer to everyone. (The Hoseths are) seeing the needs and filling them, which is always the right answer in business.”

40-year perspective

“There’s probably plenty of people willing to do the ranching thing, to some extent,” Cody Hoseth said. “But it’s a matter of finding someone that’s willing to do it that has enough capital to be able to do it. That’s where it starts getting hard. It takes millions of dollars worth of assets just to run a ranch that’s big enough to make a

living.”

What would he say to a 17-year-old kid who knocks on his door today, looking to get into ranching?

“If you’re not motivated enough to think about this in a 40-year perspective, I just would recommend doing something else, because you might just have to wait,” he said. “This could take you the rest of your life to pay

for itself. There has to be another fire or drive inside of you other than money. Otherwise it just won’t work.”

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DD13, 410 hp, Auto trans, AC, good miles.....\$24,900



2011 Freightliner Cascadia

Detroit 450 hp, 10 spd, 3.70 ratio, Low miles.....\$27,900

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

Pacific Northwest wheat industry leaders are asking the USDA to develop a policy to compensate growers for low protein, in the wake of price dockage for growers at grain export elevators.

Farmers are seeing a reduction of 30 cents per bushel to 50 cents per bushel for soft white wheat below 9% protein levels.

USDA Risk Management Agency regional office director Ben Thiel said he is still getting informed on the issue.

Crop insurance or disaster aid pays wheat farmers for a loss of quality discount in their crop, but protein is not uniformly included as an eligible loss, said Oregon Wheat CEO Amanda Hoey.

With 33% of Washington's wheat crop harvested, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers is actively monitoring protein levels and coordinating with regional and national partners on solutions to off-

In the wake of growers being docked at the elevator, wheat groups in the Pacific Northwest are asking the USDA to consider aid or insurance programs that would help compensate growers with low-protein wheat. Washington State Department of Agriculture/Contributed

set potential protein discounts, said Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director.

"In low-protein years, farmers can follow every best practice and still face devastating financial hits when elevator discounts reduce grain value," Hennings said. "Therefore, national ad hoc disaster programs and USDA programs must recognize that quality losses from adverse growing conditions are just as damaging as bushel losses."

Early in the harvest season

Pacific Northwest wheat industry members discussed the need to include low protein within quality loss considerations following low-protein discounts due to extreme drought in 2021.

"This gives us an opportunity to talk about that further," Hoey said.

It's still early in the season for this year's harvest, so not all data for protein levels is available yet, she said.

"Overall, (we) anticipate lower than average proteins but a range throughout harvest," Hoey said.

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Idaho potato industry conference targets fresh-pack market

By Brad Carlson
Capital Press

University of Idaho Extension's first Fresh Pack Potato Symposium is planned Nov. 17-18 at Canyon Crest Event Center, 330 Canyon Crest Drive, Twin Falls.

The symposium, expected to bring together industry professionals from across the country, will address challenges facing the fresh potato market, according to a news release. The segment often is overlooked in industry meetings in favor of the larger category centered on potatoes processed into fried products.

Fresh, table-stock potatoes accounted for about 23% of sales in the 2023 crop year, according to USDA data the university cited.

Symposium organizers aim to draw up to 150 industry professionals and expert presenters from the nation's major fresh potato production regions, according to UI. Participants will attend presentations on the event's first day and will have an opportunity to tour area fresh-pack facilities on the second morning.

UI Extension received a USDA grant to launch the symposium. The grant will fund the symposium for one year, but organizers hope to make it a recurring event, according to the university.

UI associate professor and potato post-harvest physiologist Gustavo Teixeira is the grant's

principal investigator. The symposium committee also includes UI prof. Nora Olsen, who specializes in potatoes and horticulture, and USDA Agricultural Research Service plant pathologist Jonathan Whitworth. Teixeira and Olsen are based in Kimberly, Whitworth in Aberdeen.

"The main focus of most potato conferences is on processing, and fresh packing is a little different," Teixeira said.

Fresh potato operators can store potatoes at a lower temperature, and they have different packaging needs, he said.

"Transportation is another challenge," Teixeira said. "They export potatoes in containers, and a lot can happen when you put potatoes in a container for 35 days and send them overseas."

New environmental regulations impacting the chemicals that may be used in refrigeration equipment for cooling potato storages will be among topics discussed at the symposium. Other significant topics will include maximum pesticide residue limits on fresh potatoes accepted by export markets, and pressing pest and disease concerns, according to the release.

Teixeira said UI researchers also plan to discuss their contributions to a multi-state potato breeding program to develop potatoes resistant to diseases such as Potato Virus Y. And they will discuss their work on

a federally funded program to eradicate Pale Cyst Nematode, a quarantined pest.

Cost: \$25 to \$75 depending on category.

Information: Teixeira, 208-423-6678 or gteixeira@uidaho.edu.

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Conveyors sort fresh potatoes at Wada Farms in Pingree. University of Idaho Extension's first Fresh Pack Potato Symposium is planned Nov. 17-18. (University of Idaho/Contributed)

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\$138,000



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



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



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



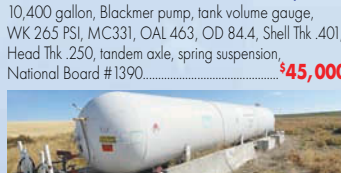
2018 John Deere F4365, with AB485 Twin Bin Air system, 70ft booms, 4740 Gen 4 Integrated Display, Auto steer. Tarp, Lincoln Lube System, Premium Cab, Premium radio, LED Field Lights, Beacon Light. New Fan and Housing. 2724 Hours
\$162,000



2019 TERRAGATOR TG8400C, Cummins diesel, 3446 Hours. Diesel Engine. CVT transmission. 70' stainless steel booms. Micro bin with yellow and white rollers. Electric roll tarp
\$152,000



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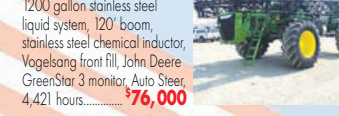
2019 RBR VENTURI 380, Cummins diesel , Allison automatic, 4 wheel drive, air ride, RA-885 Salford 3 bin bed, 72' spread width, electric tarp, Alliance flotation tires, lightbar, Viper 4, 2,724 Hours
\$153,000



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 autoSteer. 2177 hours
\$146,500



'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



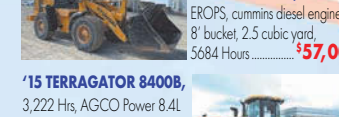
2012 John Deere 4940 Sprayer, John Deere diesel engine, hydrostatic transmission, 12000 gallon stainless steel liquid system, 120' boom, stainless steel chemical inductor, Vogelsang front fill, John Deere GreenStar 3 monitor, Auto Steer, 4,421 hours.....
\$76,000



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



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



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



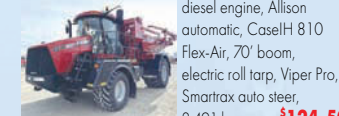
'15 TERRAGATOR 8400B, 3,222 Hrs, AGCO Power 8.4L 6-Cyl, Diesel, CVT Transmission, Viper Pro, New Leader L4000G4 MultiApplier Dry Box
\$125,000



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



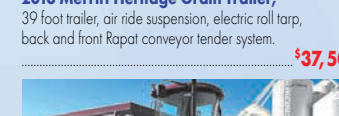
2016 Case IH Titan 4540, Case IH Diesel Engine, Allison 6 speed automatic transmission. Fenders, Case IH FLX810, Air Boom Spreader, 70 Ft. Viper 4, Raven Smarttrax Light Bar. Electric roll tarp. 3246 Hours
\$96,500



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



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



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



2019 TERRAGATOR TG8400C, 2648 Hrs, 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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It's the Pitts: Becoming obsolete

By Lee Pitts

Call me an old fuddy-duddy for saying this but I think the Internet is one of the worst things to ever happen to this country.

Just look at our kids today.... wait, you can't because they're locked in their rooms communicating with God knows who. The only friends they have are called Siri and Alexa, or they could be an Islamic terrorist trying to convert them or a dirty old man pretending to be a soul mate or a play mate. They sit on their butts for hours playing video war games online instead of playing ball outside. Shooting games are the most popular and then we are surprised when they buy real AR 15's and kill their classmates.

I don't care if you love or hate our president but you should be concerned that there have been three attempts on his life and all the would-be killers were influenced by social media. Do you think Charlie Kirk would be dead today, his wife a widow and his kids fatherless, if it wasn't for the Internet? Both China and Russia have tried to influence our elections, spied on us and propagandized our children all using the Internet. A pro-Palestinian riot on a campus can be organized in mere hours in an online chat room.

Go to a restaurant and observe the patrons who aren't talking to their table-mates but have their eyes glued to their smart phone. And I'm not referring just to kids, it's the entire family. Even Grandma is staring at her I-phone surfing the Internet, texting or reading her e mails which are 99% junk. We have killed off verbal communication and our spelling is atrocious because a computer program fixes our mistakes. A lady lawyer I know got scammed on an Internet deal that ended up costing her nearly half a million dollars.

Downtown used to be a bustling and joyful place where we all window shopped, bought our books, our clothes, kitchen goods and hardware. In a nearby town JC Penney, Sears, Bed Bath and Beyond and many others all closed their doors because we're all shopping online, buying



Lee Pitts

shoes and clothes that don't fit because we couldn't try them on. We purchase housewares and tools that don't look a thing like the photos on Amazon.

A good friend of mine was placed in a rest home for the last year of his life where he got bored and shopped for crap online totaling \$70,000 before his family could legally get him stopped. Some days he'd get as many as ten packages from Fed Ex, UPS and the Post Office and because they were delivered to his home address he never even saw them, let alone used a single item he bought. When sold at a garage sale the stuff didn't fetch \$1,000!

Because of the Internet we don't even know fact from fiction. Information on the Internet is so unreliable as to be useless. "Influence peddlers" put up shocking totally false headlines called "clickbait" hoping to reel you in to their website so they can get paid, or convert you to their cause.

And, my friends, the worst is yet to come. Artificial Intelligence may be all the rage but it promises to make your brain a useless appendage, like your appendix, because you won't have to use it any more. Our cars will drive themselves, Chat GPT will write your kid's essays and accelerated hacking will make your private personal information a commodity to be bartered and sold online. Terrorists will use AI to make the world a far more dangerous place.

To build the infrastructure for the AI revolution will demand huge amounts of electricity and turn nuclear energy into "Green Energy." I remember when greenies marched in the streets in an effort to stop its proliferation.

How can people become so excited about something that will take their job? Recently a banker who laid off thousands of his employees made

possible by AI called his former employees "lower value human capital." At graduation ceremonies around the country this year titans of tech gave speeches about all the glorious things AI will do. Invariably they were practically booed off the stage any time they mentioned AI because Gen Z knows that in an already challenging job market the career they have studied for will disappear. AI will make them obsolete.

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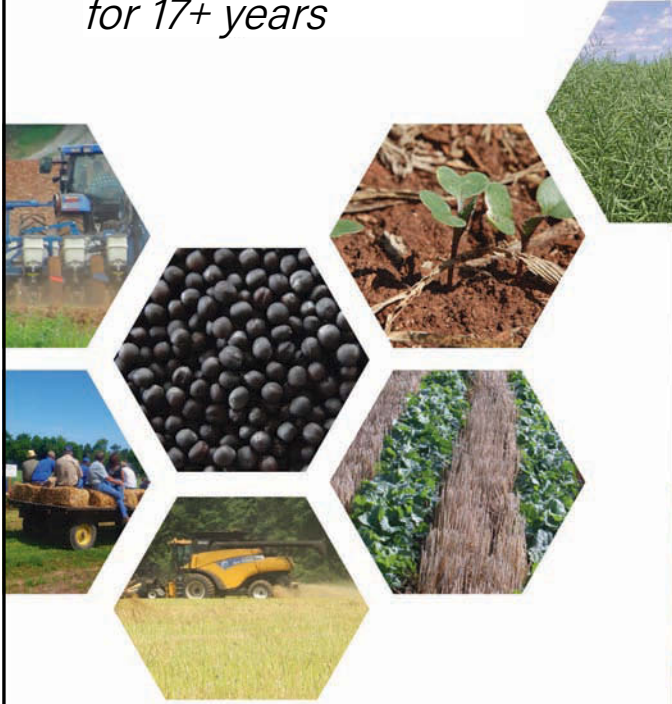
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Lyla Salois, daughter of The McGregor Company director of research and technology Cat McGregor, riding on horseback at the sheep camp pasture, looking over the fire damage. (Cat McGregor/Contributed)

144-year-old McGregor family ranch feels fire's impact



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By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

Fire caused by lightning threatened the 144-year-old McGregor family ranch.

The Lyons Ferry Fire began July 16 and is now 100% contained.

It burned roughly 33,750 acres in Washington's Franklin County, including about 20,000 acres owned and operated by McGregor Land and Livestock in Whitman County, said Ian McGregor, president of The McGregor Company.

"We believe the losses will be minimal, thankfully," Ian McGregor said.

"The fire was scary," said

Alex McGregor, chairman of The McGregor Company and managing partner for McGregor Land and Live-stock, father to Ian McGregor. "The scale of it and the speed of it — we've had range fires over the years, but never one like this, in the 144 years we've been there."

Losses

An unused barn and a former cook shack burned, Ian McGregor said.

A four-man team back-burned around the historic "Archie's Sheep Barn," one of the original buildings,

See McGregor, Page A13



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Kitchen Corner: It's blueberry time

By Dana
It's blueberry season. Here are some recipes from the Oregon Blueberry Commission.

Oregon blueberry pie with cream cheese frosting

- Ingredients**
For the Crust
12 each graham crackers
2 tbsp. sugar
6 tbsp. butter, melted
Pinch of salt
For the Blueberry Puree
2 cups blueberries
1/3 cup sugar
4 tsp. cornstarch
1/4 tsp. salt
1 tbsp. lemon juice
For the Filling
2 3/4 cups fresh blueberries
For the Cream cheese Frosting
8 oz cream cheese
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1/4 cup sugar
1 cup heavy cream

Directions
In processor grind graham crackers into fine crumbs, add sugar and salt then melted butter until mixed. Press into 9" pie pan. Bake 325 for 16-18 min.
Add uncooked blueberries to blueberry puree, add to baked crust, and chill until set or overnight top with whipped cream cheese frosting if desired.
Process blueberries until smooth add sugar, cornstarch and salt, simmer in sauce pan until thickened remove from heat then add



Picking blueberries from a blueberry bush.

- lemon juice, stain out seeds and skins if desired with wire strainer.
In electric mixer whip soften cream cheese until light and fluffy add sugar and vanilla and beat in, add heavy cream and mix until soft have peaks formed.
Top Blueberry pie with frosting using a pastry bag with star tip or pallet knife as desired.
- Classic blueberry pound cake**
- Ingredients**
3/4 cup butter, softened
3/4 cup sugar
1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt

- 3 large eggs
1/3 cup plus 1 teaspoon milk, divided
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1-1/2 cups frozen blueberries
1/4 cup confectioners' sugar
- Directions**
Heat oven to 325°F. Grease a 9-x-5-inch loaf pan; set aside.
In a large mixing bowl with an electric mixer beat butter until creamy; gradually add sugar and beat until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating just until blended after each addition.
In a separate bowl, stir the flour, baking powder and salt. Add alternately:

- 1/2 of the flour mixture, the milk, then the remaining flour, beating at low speed just until blended after each addition.
Spread half of the batter into the prepared pan. Top with half of the blueberries. Gently spread remaining batter over blueberries, then sprinkle remaining blueberries over the top. Tap the pan briskly on the counter top to settle the batter. (The blueberries will distribute themselves throughout the cake during baking.)
Bake 50 to 60 minutes, until golden and a toothpick comes out clean. Let cool in pan 10 minutes. Turn out and cool completely on a wire rack, about 1 hour.

In a small bowl combine confectioners' sugar with the remaining teaspoon milk. Brush or drizzle over cake.

- Gluten-free blueberry crumble**
- Ingredients**
2 cups gluten-free granola
5 cups frozen blueberries
6 tablespoons dark brown sugar
2 tablespoons butter, softened

Preparation
Heat oven to 350°.
In a food processor, pulse one cup of the granola until it is reduced to coarse crumbs.

In a 9-inch square baking dish, sprinkle half the granola crumbs over the bottom. Add blueberries and 4 tablespoons of the sugar. Stir to combine.
In a medium bowl, combine remaining sugar, butter, and remaining granola (ground and unground). Mix together until coarse crumbs are formed; sprinkle over blueberry mixture.
Bake 40 – 50 minutes until blueberries are bubbling and top is golden brown.

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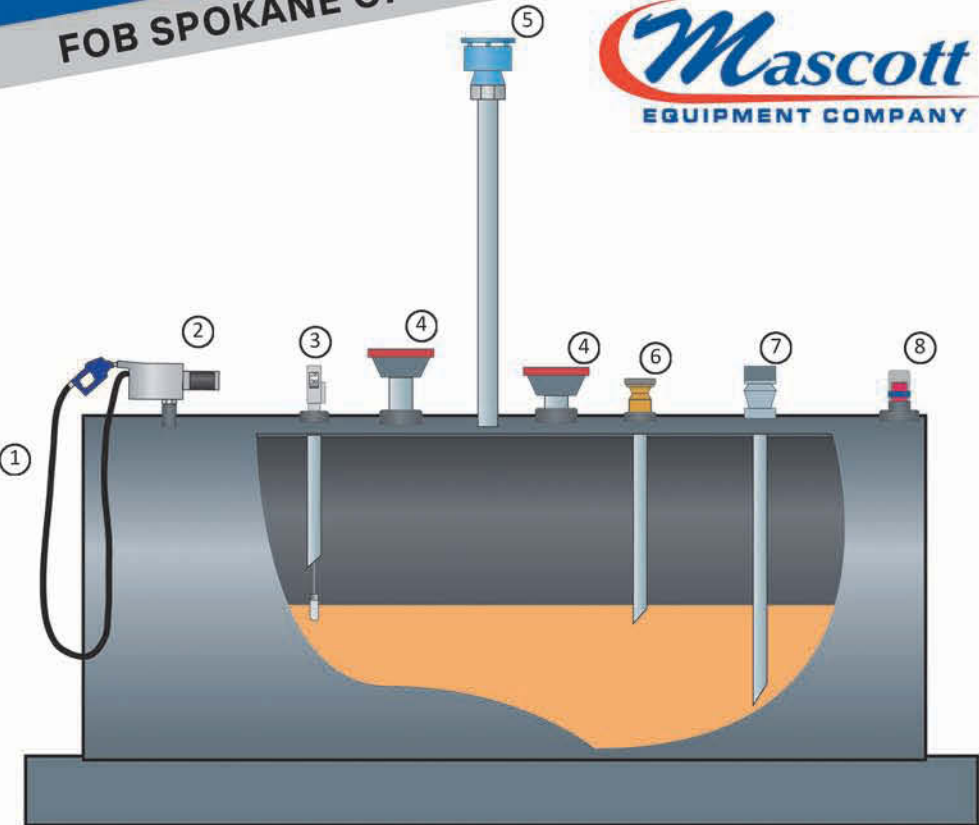
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McGregor:

continued from A10
built in 1915.

"That was saved, but fire (was) all around it for literally miles," Ian McGregor said.

The cattle herd was spread out across multiple pastures. No cattle appear to have been killed in the fire.

"We believe we've recovered most of the herd at this point, but the team is still working on that," Ian McGregor said.

The fire got to the edge of the farm's wheat fields, said Alex McGregor. The farm includes about 6,900 acres of wheat and 400 acres of hay.

He estimates 50 acres were lost, half of that to discing the ground to keep the fire from spreading.

"We'll have more than 100 miles of fence to replace," Alex McGregor said. "That's a daunting task, but we'll be up for it."

Community

The McGregors thanked the community and volunteer firefighters for their "extraordinary efforts" and "tremendous achievement."

About 72 people responded, including aircraft support and crews alternating between saving Ian McGregor's house and saving the farm's wheat.

"It was incredible peace of mind just hav-

ing and seeing the community come together, bringing tractors and water and really address what could have been far worse," Ian McGregor said.

Family history

The ranch is the original sheep farm for the McGregor family.

Brothers Peter and Archie McGregor moved to Washington Territory in 1882, owning 22,000 sheep by 1890. They and brothers John and Alexander Campbell "A.C." McGregor expanded to raise wheat in 1901.

A.C.'s son Sherman McGregor established The McGregor Company, the agronomic retailer, as

its own separate entity in 1955.

Alex McGregor is the son of Sherman McGregor.

The ranch is headquartered in the small town of Hooper, Wash. The 41,000-acre property includes 26,000 acres of rangeland.

"Even the town of Hooper could well have burned without all of that help," Alex McGregor said. "It was that close."

They raise about 750 cows for beef production.

The ranch employs about seven full-time workers and other harvest crew members.

Next steps

The ability to graze the affected ground has likely

been lost for more than a year, Ian McGregor said.

Some bunchgrass land may be viable, which will be determined this fall. The company will reseed more than 20,000 acres of rangeland.

Some range areas were spared, so the family will use that for grazing.

The company may downsize the herd some, and buy feed in the meantime, Ian McGregor said.

"Quite an experience, and while it's one I'm happy to see only once every 144 years, we're left with tremendous appreciation for agricultural, rural areas and people pulling together when it counts," Alex McGregor said.



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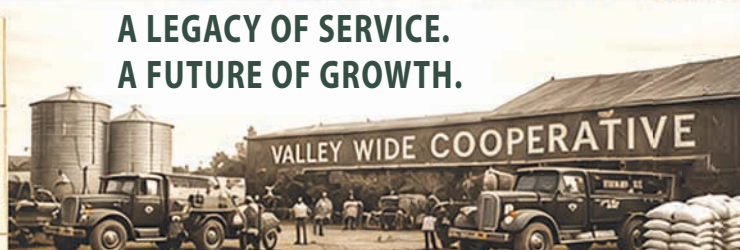


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Idaho CREP acres surge on water concerns

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Southern Idaho farm acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program will be substantially higher in the 2027 crop year, largely due to water supply concerns.

CREP, which started in 2006, is a partnership between the state and USDA's Farm Service Agency. Enrollees contract for 10 years to plant unirrigated vegetative cover. In exchange, they receive federal rental and sign-up incentive payments as well as a state match payment of up to 13% of the federal rental payment.

The Idaho Water Resource Board recently increased cost-share assistance to help reduce groundwater withdrawals from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer.

Water a factor

Tight water supply is a factor in the jump in enrolled acres between 2026 and 2027 crop years, FSA Idaho state executive director Kevin Andrus said.

"Producers were able to see the shortcomings in the water year with the low snowpack early on, and some chose to take advantage of this tool to be able to conserve water," he said. "We are thankful for this tool to help protect and conserve our water resources in Idaho."

Newly enrolled Idaho CREP acres for the 2027 growing season total 6,394.48 compared to 227.2 in the year-earlier period, said state CREP manager Rob Sharpnack of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The federal fiscal year starts Oct. 1.



USDA Farm Service Agency Idaho state executive director Kevin Andrus. (Brad Carlson/Capital Press)

"We had a very successful enrollment this spring," he said. "We are very happy about that and are hoping to continue that."

Future enrollment periods hinge on extending or renewing the federal Farm Bill.

Idaho CREP acres already enrolled total around 9,620 as of the 2026 crop year, Sharpnack said. The total could increase to 16,015 based on spring 2026 enrollments.

At the Farm Service Agency, Andrus has a lower Idaho total for newly enrolled acres for the 2027 crop year — 2,107, the number accepted, approved and guaranteed.

Additional CREP acres have been accepted but not yet approved, he said. FSA county offices have until

Sept. 30 to approve these acres.

Assuming all newly enrolled acres are accepted and the Idaho total moves to 16,015, "with a little luck and a good open enrollment period next year, those numbers will get better," Sharpnack said.

Idaho Department of Water Resources leaders would like to see CREP enrollment hit the maximum of 50,000 per the agreement between the state and USDA, he said. The legislature this year approved an administrative merger of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission into IDWR.

Stepped-up promotion was a factor in this year's enrollment increase, as were water supply conditions and a late 2024 settlement

agreement between groundwater pumpers and a coalition of surface water users with senior rights, Sharpnack said.

The settlement spreads groundwater pumpers' required mitigation volume over the agreement's four-term. Some groundwater users, as they began operating under the pact, determined CREP "was a very good tool," he said.

Other factors likely boosting CREP enrollment are currently low prices for many commodities and recently higher per-acre reimbursement rates, Sharpnack said.

Newly enrolled acres totaled 336.35 in 2025 and 824.73 in 2024, Andrus said.

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Shepherd's Grain farmer-founders reflect on company's legacy

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

Washington wheat farmer Karl Kupers was flying home from Washington D.C. when he looked down at the Mid-west farmland.

"I thought, 'How in the world can 1% of us still get what we're getting from the government when 99% of the people don't know a dang thing about farming?'" Kupers remembered.

Kupers wanted to create a farm that could live without subsidization.

He took the idea to farmer Fred Fleming in December 1999.

"I was looking for something that I could bring value back to my farm," Fleming remembered.

Together, they proposed keeping wheat they raised through no-till farming separate from the rest of the industry, to create traceability. They wanted to set their own price, with a "true and transparent



Shepherd's Grain farmer-founders Fred Fleming and Karl Kupers stand on Fleming's farm in Reardan, Wash., June 30. Kupers credits the company's success to the trust he and Fleming built with customers. (Matthew Weaver/Capital Press)

cost of production."

The first sale of Shepherd's Grain flour was in June 2003.

Kupers outlines forming the company in his self-published book, "Too Dumb to Fail — Too Smart to Quit."

"Everybody always talked

to us about building a business plan," Fleming said. "Well, it's hard to build a business plan that has never been done ... We were ignorant of all the barriers that were out there. We would just hit a barrier, turn, go to another area, go under it, go

around it or go through it."

"People would tell us, 'You can't do that,'" Kupers said. "We'd say, 'Well, we're already doing it, I guess we'll just keep doing it.' There are so many times Shepherd's Grain should have never gotten this far."

'Fred-isms'

Particularly during the first eight years of the business, "we did everything together, we went everywhere together," Kupers said.

They'd schedule meetings in Portland, driving four hours each way, sometimes on very little notice.

"That was probably the most valuable time we spent, talking together at the beginning, sharing ideas," Fleming said.

They quickly learned their respective strengths when speaking to potential partners and customers. Kupers is very analytical; Fleming is more of a storyteller.

"I could make the ask; it's so simple and easy for me," Kupers said. "So we'd be meeting. And Fred would make his wonderful anecdote —"

"Fred-isms," Fleming said.

"And I'd sit there and go, 'Oh, geez,'" Kupers continued. "And then the next day, guess what they remembered? The Fred-ism."

The people they talked to would also get excited.

During one event, Kupers and Fleming spoke before a group of four people.

A woman in the audience came up and said, "I want to buy your flour." Kupers directed her to the company booth, where bags of flour were available.

"She goes, 'No, I want to buy truckloads,'" Kupers remembered. She was a California bakery owner who had been following the company's growth. "I go, 'Fred! Get over here!'"

Shepherd's Grain today

Today, the company has 30 grower-owners, 10 of which produce the majority of wheat for Shepherd's Grain flour in southeast Idaho and Montana, CEO Jeremy Bunch said.

The farms represent "well over" 100,000 acres. Not all of that is in wheat each year, as

See Founders, Page B5

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Founders:

continued from B4

“It is impossible for us to give a number on how many there are in total,” Bunch said. “Our largest customers are food distributors who buy truckloads of our flour and then resell it to individual bakeries.

See Founders, Page B6

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Founders:

continued from B5

“That kind of economic sustainability is necessary to pair with sustainable farming.”

Moving flour production

In August 2022, a fire destroyed the Pendleton, Ore., mill, where most of the company’s flour was produced. They pivoted to a mill in Blackfoot, Idaho.

The number of farms that Shepherd’s Grain sources wheat from has decreased since moving flour production, Bunch said.

“Farm sizes are generally speaking larger there than many of the farms we sourced wheat from on the Palouse,” Bunch said. “However, we are still very much a PNW community of farms, and we source wheat from Oregon, Washington and Idaho.”

Some Eastern Washington farmer-owners still supplement the Idaho production, Kupers said.

KARL KUPERS

Title: Farmer-founder, Shepherd’s Grain

Age: 79

Hometown: Harrington, Wash.

Current location: Central West Coast Costa Rica

Education: Attended Central Washington University for two years; majored in pharmacy at Washington State University.

Family: Lexie, wife of 52 years; one son, two grandsons.

Hobbies: Golf.

Undefeated state basketball championship: 1965.

Favorite thing about Fred: “The Fredisms. He enlightened the whole group, he always did. And just the dedication.”

FRED FLEMING

Title: Farmer-founder, Shepherd’s Grain

Age: 77

Hometown: Reardan, Wash.

Current location: Reardan, Wash., fourth generation on the “old home- stead.”

Education: Studied agronomy in Wash- ington State University.

Family: Vicki, wife of 55 years; two kids, four grandchildren, one great-grand- child and one on the way

Hobbies: Working on projects “at a real, real slow pace. I’ve taken on the art of going in and visiting with the village elders at 6 a.m. We tell the same stories over and over again, and some new ones.”

Undefeated state basketball champi- onship: 1966 and 1967.

Favorite thing about Karl: “Let’s put Karl and (wife) Lexie together. The integrity of those two was stellar ... (Wife) Vicki and I realized that we could trust them through thick and thin.”

Website: https://www.shepherdsgrain. com/

remain on the board. Lexie Kupers currently sits on the board.

Kupers has gotten a lit- tle more involved in recent months. He lives in Costa Rica for seven to eight months, visiting family in Portland the rest of the year.

Fleming is still involved, but has been tending to medi- cal matters in recent years.

Fleming believes the secret to the company’s success is its emphasis on caring farm families.

Other companies try to replicate Shepherd’s Grain’s formula, “but they don’t bring the caring family to the mar- ketplace,” he said.

“Nobody has made this work, because nobody’s been farmers first,” Kupers agreed. “You have to have equal love for the farmer and for the buyer. And only farmers can do this. It’s just a mentality we take by being price takers.”

“A lot of guys don’t raise red wheat right now,” he said. “It’s a tough crop. It’s a costly, riskier crop.”

The founders hope to see

some production return to the region to support growers there, Kupers said.

‘Farmers first’

Kupers and Fleming both

retired from farming.

They resolved early on that one of the founders – Kupers and wife Lexie, Fleming and wife Vicki – would always

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Water Truck 2014 Caterpillar CT660 Water Truck Spray bars - front, rear and side, CAT power, CAT Automatic Transmission, 4000 gallon tank, \$84,500. Baker City, OR. Dave 503-519-3218

316 Trailers Misc.

1966 Utility Flatbed Trailer: 48ft long, 8ft wide, 3 axles, \$9500. 1995 34ft long, 8ft wide pull trailer, 4 axles, \$9999. Athol, ID. No Text. Calls only. 208-651-8698

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316 Trailers Misc.



1999 Trail-Eze Equipment Trailer 48' hydraulic equipment trailer, \$24,500. Scio, OR. 503-932-1854 jasonjrnfarms@gmail.com

319 Trailers, Horse & Stock

Merritt Cattle Trailer: double deck, 40ft long, older trailer, farm trailer, \$6500. Athol, ID 208-651-8698 No Text

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503 Real Estate Wanted

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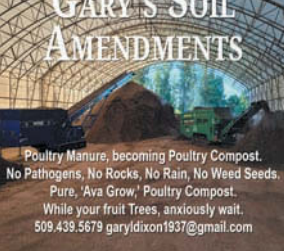
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Judge OKs stalking horse bid for Gebbers

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

A federal bankruptcy judge approved Legendary Fruit Company's \$231.3 million stalking horse bid for Brewster Heights Packing and Orchards, setting a target for other suitors to beat.

Legendary can still withdraw its bid to acquire some 10,000 acres of apples and cherries in north-central Washington. And if outbid, Legendary will get about \$4.6 million for serving as the stalking horse bidder.

Some creditors objected that the bid was too tentative and Legendary's consolation compensation too generous. Judge Frederick Corbit, however, said he wanted to keep the sale moving to save the company.

Brewster, the flagship company of Gebbers Farms, employs more than 3,700 workers and is running on borrowed money. "I do believe that things have to move quickly, or they might not move at



Brewsters Heights Packing and Orchards in north-central Washington . A bankruptcy judge has approved a stalking horse bid that will set the floor value for the company's assets. Brewsters Heights Packing and Orchards/Contributed

all," Corbit said.

Brewster declared bankruptcy in early June. Legendary, a Chelan fruit company, announced it intended to bid for Brewster. Since then, Copper Leaf, a commercial real estate company, has emerged as another possible suitor, but has not made a public bid.

Legendary's bid consists of \$75 million in cash and

the assumption of \$156.3 million of Brewster's debts. Creditors charged that favorable terms given Legendary will discourage other bidders.

Creditors desperately want competitive bidding, said attorney Brad Cosman, who represents unsecured creditors. He called Legendary's bid "not real."

"We can all really, really,

really want this to be a stalking horse that sets a floor, but it's not," he said.

Brewster attorneys defended Legendary's bid as the best Brewster could line up. A marketing company contacted more than 80 potential buyers, according to court records.

Brewster hopes other bidders will emerge, but if Legendary's bid is rejected out-of-hand, there's no guarantee anyone will bid,

Brewster attorney John Mitchell said.

"And we'll go into the abyss of the great unknown, and it could be disastrous," he said.

Gebbers, a sixth-generation family farm, produces apples and cherries. In filing for bankruptcy, Brewster cited Washington's poor farm economy as a factor.

Some Gebbers' companies, including Apple House, a fruit processor in Brewster, and Cascade Holdings, which owns orchards and farmworker housing, are not part of the bankruptcy case.

Brewster's creditors include Prudential Insurance Company and BMO Bank. Brewster owes the two lenders more than \$225 million, according to court records.

Prudential endorsed Legendary's stalking horse bid. Based on the information it has, Legendary's offer is the best Brewster has received, Prudential said in a court filing.





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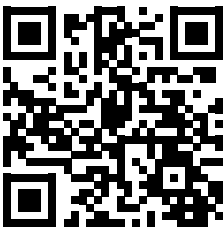


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Bayer drops push for glyphosate tariffs

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Bayer AG withdrew its petition to slap antidumping tariffs on Chinese glyphosate, receiving thanks from commodity groups for listening to their customers.

Bayer notified the International Trade Commission July 17 that it was no longer seeking an investigation into whether China was dumping glyphosate products into the U.S.

Farm groups roundly criticized the petition, saying antidumping duties would raise costs for growers who use the herbicide. Bayer came under intense pressure from commodity groups, according to the National Corn Growers Association.

The association's president, Ohio farmer Jed Bower, said in a statement that farmers appreciate chemical suppliers. "But as we have made clear, farmers cannot and will not bear this

relationship at any cost," he said.

Bayer filed the petition under the name Monsanto, which Bayer acquired in 2018, and Ruveon, a unit Bayer recently formed to handle its U.S. glyphosate business.

"Since filing our petitions, we have engaged directly with farmers and agricultural trade associations to hear their perspectives. Today's decision reflects our commitment to putting farms first and meeting their evolving needs, especially during this challenging farm economy," Ruveon said in a statement.

All glyphosate sold in the U.S. originally comes from Bayer or Chinese companies. Bayer said in a June 30 petition to the ITC that it was losing sales to Chinese competitors.

Bayer alleged the Chinese government was subsidizing and directing a plan to increase market share.



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Low-protein wheat causes problems for overseas customers

By **Matthew Weaver**
Capital Press

Soft white wheat with “exceeding low” protein can

cause problems for millers and flour functionality, Washington State University winter wheat breeder Arron Carter said.

At such low protein, the excess amount of starch can mill too fine and start clogging up screens.

“Soft wheat already doesn’t flow through mills as easily as hard wheat, so it presents a lot of flow issues at very low protein,” Carter told Capital Press.

Wheat farmers in Yakima and Klickitat counties are protesting price dockage of up to 50 cents per bushel for soft white wheat testing below 9% protein.

Companies are more familiar with changing formulations for high protein because that’s much more common, Carter said. Low protein formulations are challenging “with such a deviation in the opposite direction.”

“Hence, the tendency of countries to put specifications on the minimum and maximum percent protein they want to buy,” Carter said.

Causes of low protein

Protein content in wheat is typically controlled by environmental conditions, Carter said.

“The more stress the higher the protein,” he said. “The better growing conditions the lower the protein (a general trend).”

Protein is mainly nitrogen, WSU Extension agronomist Aaron Esser said in a post on the university’s Small Grains website.

High grain yield and low grain protein often indicate fertility – primarily nitrogen and/or sulfur was limit-

ing grain protein. Low fertility could be due to inadequate fertilization and/or loss of nitrogen, Esser states.

However, there is also a dilution effect of spreading a fixed amount of nitrogen and sulfur over unexpectedly more bushels of wheat. Yields of the current winter wheat crop have been coming in much higher than expected, Esser said.

“So, when farmers fertilize for a yield of X and harvest a yield of 2X or even 3X, grain protein is going to be much lower,” Esser states in the post. “This shows that in a year like this one, even the best planning can get derailed when conditions change dramatically.”

Trend not yet clear

It’s not yet clear whether protein is trending low across the region or just in specific locations, Carter said.

Export markets usually ask for specifications on protein, with some wanting a minimum of 9.5% and some between 9% minimum and 10.5% maximum, with various other specifications depending on the country.

Most markets likely have a minimum around 9%.

“So in some years with low protein it might be harder to get above the minimum and in stressful years it might be difficult to get below the maximum if it is a high protein year,” Carter said.



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Animal activists take aim at ‘no-drone zones’

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

Animal-rights activists are asking the Federal Aviation Administration to let them continue flying camera-equipped drones over farms, claiming that banning overhead surveillance would shield animal agriculture from public oversight.

The FAA has proposed allowing producers to seek the agency’s permission to ban drones over farms as part of a broader effort to protect sites critical to national security.

Farmers and farm groups say activists’ drones harass producers, annoy workers and startle livestock. Cattle were hurt in a drone-triggered stampede, according to a Central California cattle company.

“The problem is widespread, it is growing and individual producers are all arriving at the same conclusion: There are no rules that



A drone photographs a farmer planting corn. Activists are lobbying the Federal Aviation Administration to let them continue flying camera-equipped drones over agricultural operations. (Jacob Tosch/Porter County, Indiana, SWCD/USDA)

protect us,” Grimmus Cattle Company chief operating officer Austin Flores said in comments to the FAA.

The FAA’s proposed rule stems from an executive order President Trump issued directing the agency to protect critical infrastructure from drone surveillance or attacks.

A no-drone zone may not stop terrorists, but it would help law enforcement respond to complaints about drones, the FAA said.

Critical sector

The FAA identified agri-

culture as one of 16 sectors with critical infrastructure. The FAA, however, hasn’t developed criteria for determining whether a particular farm qualifies as critical infrastructure.

Animal-rights activists argue the FAA should take agriculture off the list entirely. Their drone pilots are photojournalists exposing alleged animal and environmental abuses, activists say.

“Drones are one of the only ways the public can see what’s actually happening

behind the walls of industrial animal agricultural facilities,” Animal Outlook executive director Ben Williams said in a statement.

Animal Outlook submitted comments to the FAA with FarmSTAND and We Animals. FarmSTAND says it’s a legal advocacy group “dedicated to dis-

See Drones, Page B13

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U.S. farm exports grow in first half of 2026

By Don Jenkins
Capital Press

U.S. farm exports were up 7% through the first half of this year compared to last year, rising to \$91.8 billion, the highest level since 2022.

Trade data released Aug. 4 by the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service generally showed strong foreign sales for U.S. agricultural products between January and June.

Export totals were lifted by record-setting sales to Mexico, the European Union, Vietnam and the Philippines, and the resumption of farm exports to China.

Meanwhile, farm imports fell 8% through the first six months of the year. The six-month farm trade deficit shrunk by 54% to \$12.8 billion from last year's \$28.2 billion.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, speaking to farmers in Minnesota, credited robust exports to trade deals negotiated by President Trump.

"We're seeing key commodity export records, like ethanol, like dairy, like corn," she said.

Ethanol exports rose 21% to a record \$2.7 billion for the six-month period, while dairy sales rose 12% to a record \$5.2 billion. Corn exports rose 3% to \$9.9 billion, though sales were lower than in 2021 and 2022.

Soybean exports returned to historic levels after slumping last year because of trade disputes with



A ship docks at the Port of Baltimore in Maryland. The USDA reports farm exports were up 7% during the first half of this year.

China. Soybean sales to China rose 94% to \$4.7 billion. Most U.S. soybean exports occur in the last half of the year.

Overall, farm exports to China rose 48% to \$8.1 billion.

Global wheat and beef exports were down 6% and 4%, respectively. Fresh fruit and processed fruit exports rose 11% and 5%, respectively. Tree nut exports increased by 28% to \$6.5 billion.

Farm exports to the 27-country EU rose 12% to \$7.7 billion, a record-setting pace. Ethanol sales accounted for a large share of the increase, rising by 99% to \$664 million.

Farm exports to Mexico were up 4% to \$15.2 billion, putting sales on a record pace. Despite trade tensions, exports to Canada rose 1% to \$14.3 billion.

Sales to Vietnam and the Philippines were up 13% and 11%, respectively. The U.S. signed new trade deals with both countries last year.



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Drones

continued from B11

mantling the corporate-controlled industrial animal agriculture system.”

Congress already has authorized no-drone zones over some sites, such as prisons, railroads, oil refineries, chemical factories and amusement parks.

While expanding the list, the FAA says it doesn’t want to unduly restrict airspace. A site would have to document why it needed a no-drone zone. FAA would seek public comments before approving a no-drone zone.

Activists have a record of disrupting hog farms and drones are the next logical step, according to the National Pork Producers

Council.

Swine are sensitive to unusual sights and sounds and low-flying drones could crash into farm equipment, the council said.

Farm groups also say low-flying drones could disrupt ventilation systems and biosecurity. Chicken farms in particular have been targeted by activists, according to the North Carolina Poultry Federation.

Kentucky Department of Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell said no-drone zones should be extended to grain elevators, feedlots, meat-packing plants and export terminals.

“When critical agricultural facilities are disrupted, rural economies suffer, exports decline, and America’s strategic resilience is diminished,” he wrote.

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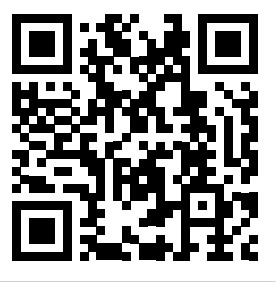
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Farm leaders blast administration ag policies

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

John Foltz, former dean of the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, wasn't happy about how federal policies are impacting farmers, and he wasn't alone.

Foltz and about 45 other former and current farm leaders penned a July 23 letter to congressional ag officials warning that the farm crisis is deepening and urging politicians to listen to producers.

The letter stated that "actions of the current administration and inaction by Congress have created and worsened unparalleled pressures on

producers and rural communities across America."

Foltz, an ag economist who also was chairman of The Ohio State University's animal sciences department, said the bipartisan group of signees believes in free trade.

"The administration is just putting these tariffs on countries willy-nilly and countries are retaliating, and it's going to hurt farmers across the nation and in the Pacific Northwest," Foltz said.

Foltz, who lives in the Tri-Cities metropolitan region of Washington, said he's historically been a staunch supporter of Republican politics.

"These are not Repub-



About 45 former and current farm leaders penned a July 23 letter to congressional ag officials warning that the farm crisis is deepening and urging politicians to listen to producers. Among the signees were several past presidents of the National Corn Growers Association. (USDA/CONTRIBUTED)

lican politics. They are kind of crazy politics. ... It's the politics of chaos," he added.

Letter signees include multiple past presidents of the National Corn Growers Association, as well as former industry leaders for soybean, pork and grains, state ag department directors, USDA officials, university administrators and prominent farmers.

A strong Midwest contingent was likely a function of organizers' contact lists, Foltz said.

"It's not representative of who it affects," he said, adding that Northwest apple and wheat growers also were impacted.

Iran war 'ill-conceived,' tariffs a 'disaster'

The July 23 letter is a follow-up to Feb 3 correspondence asking congressional ag committee leadership to hold farm crisis hearings.

The letter criticizes

the "ill-conceived" Iran war, which resulted in increases in fuel and fertilizer prices., further diminishing farmers' prospects.

Farm bankruptcies intensified in early 2026 and ag exports continue to languish and include the loss of \$15 billion in shipments to China, according to the letter.

"The widespread use of tariffs as a trade policy by the administration has been and continues to be a disaster for American

See Policies, Page B15

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continued from B14

agriculture, resulting in export value losses, significant loss of market share, increased input costs and creation of new competing global trading alliances by

other countries,” the letter states. Major competitors including China and Brazil now outspend the U.S. in public ag research, and cancelled USDA projects and capricious layoffs have decimated America’s scientific capabilities, which farmers rely on for

viability, the letter adds. The letter also blasts federal relief payments to farmers. “Short-term, inadequate (less than the Administration paid to support Argentina’s beef industry) and poorly distributed handouts won’t fix the problems that

we now face. The bailouts are simply an acknowledgement of the damaging impacts from lack of effective policies,” the letter states. It adds that American farmers want and need long-term, stable markets.

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USDA probes scrapie case at Oregon plant

By Matthew Weaver
Capital Press

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has confirmed classical scrapie in a sheep slaughtered in a facility in Oregon. The National Veterinary Services Laboratory will conduct tissue-matching and parentage testing on the affected sheep and two additional animals accompanying the affected sheep, according to an American Sheep Industry Association press release. APHIS and state animal health officials initiated an investigation to determine the flock of origin.

APHIS expects min-

imal impact on international trade, according to the release. Most countries restrict live animal exports only from affected flocks or premises, and products such as wool remain unaffected. The press release did not identify the facility or its location in Oregon. APHIS and state animal health officials initiated an investigation to determine the flock of origin. Ear tags important Scrapie is a neurodegenerative and chronic disease that affects small ruminants with a fatal outcome. The affected animal did not have an ear tag, which may limit traceability. Scrapie is



The USDA has confirmed the discovery of classical scrapie in a sheep slaughtered in a facility in Oregon. Officials are trying to trace the origins of the infected animals. (Oregon Department of Agriculture/Contributed)

typically contracted during pregnancy and newborn lamb periods, which is why locating the flock of origin is so essential to the investigation, the release states. This case highlights the critical importance of strong animal identification practices nationwide. "The importance of official scrapie tags cannot be understated," stated Cindy

Wolf, veterinarian and Animal Health Council co-chair for the sheep association. "These tags have made trace back to the flock of origin possible in order to stop further spread," stated Roselle Busch, veterinarian and Animal Health Council co-chair. The investigation stems from a component of the National Scrapie Eradica-

tion Program called Regulatory Slaughter Surveillance, where brains from adult sheep and goats are examined by USDA. The positive animal was QQ (at codon 171) for scrapie resistance (susceptible genotype). Breeding for natural resistance is an additional important effort for long-term success of the "scrapie-free" status.



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Oregon farmers spared fight on animal cruelty measure

ByMateusz Perkowski
Capital Press

A proposed ban on killing animals won't be on Oregon's ballot this year, sparing farm groups from a campaign fight — but also denying them the chance to beat the measure.

Supporters of Initiative Petition 28, which would've effectively outlawed slaughtering or hunting animals, haven't submitted enough valid signatures to qualify for the November elections ballot.

Their failure is generally seen as good news for animal agriculture, though farm organizations say that letting voters decide the matter might've led to a more conclusive victory.

"It would have been great to have given it a decisive defeat and put it to rest," said Katie Murray, executive director of the Oregonians for Food and Shelter agribusiness group.

Initiative 28, also known as the People for the Elim-



Oregon farm groups are relieved a ballot initiative that would have banned animal slaughter, hunting, fishing and many common husbandry practices has failed to qualify for the ballot. (Oregon Department of Agriculture/Contributed)

ination of Animal Cruelty Exemptions Act, or PEACE Act, sought to end exceptions in state animal protection laws that allow slaughter, hunting, fishing and common husbandry practices, such as artificial insemination.

Roughly 104,000 signatures collected for IP 28 were determined to be valid — about 73% of the 142,000 signatures submitted — falling short of the 117,000 signature needed to make it onto the ballot.

According to the Secretary of State's elections division, this marked the first time in a

decade that an initiative was determined to have insufficient signatures after being submitted for verification.

Proponents of IP 28 said their campaign has gained momentum since they began the ballot process in 2020, and they remain "confident we can get this initiative on the ballot in the future."

A statement released by supporters quoted the Buddhist philosopher, Thich Nhat Hanh, who noted that every failure contributes to wisdom and "every event is both fortunate and unfortunate."

Groups prepared to fight That duality was also acknowledged by the Oregon Farm Bureau and Oregonians for Food and Shelter, who had been gearing up to fight the measure if it'd succeeded in getting on the ballot.

"I think we get a reprieve this year but expect it to come back," said Lauren Kuenzi, Farm Bureau's director of government and political affairs.

Farm groups had raised about \$100,000 for their campaign against the proposal, which will stay in the Feed Oregon Political Action Committee's war chest in case the initiative is resurrected for a fourth time, she said.

Though the IP 28's failure to get on the ballot is a welcome development, an electoral loss might have sent the message to stop treating Oregon as a testing ground for such radical concepts, Kuenzi said.

"We felt confident that Oregonians wouldn't support this idea of criminalizing animal agriculture and everything related," she said.

Because the measure was

expected to drive turnout among voters who understand natural resources, it could have also helped candidates who are friendly to the industry, said Katie Murray of Oregonians for Food and Shelter.

However, IP 28 received a lot more media attention this year than during two previous attempts to get on the ballot, likely educating voters about how extreme the proposal was, she said.

Due to misrepresentations during the signature gathering process, many people probably didn't fully understand how far-reaching the measure was or comprehend what they were signing, Murray said.

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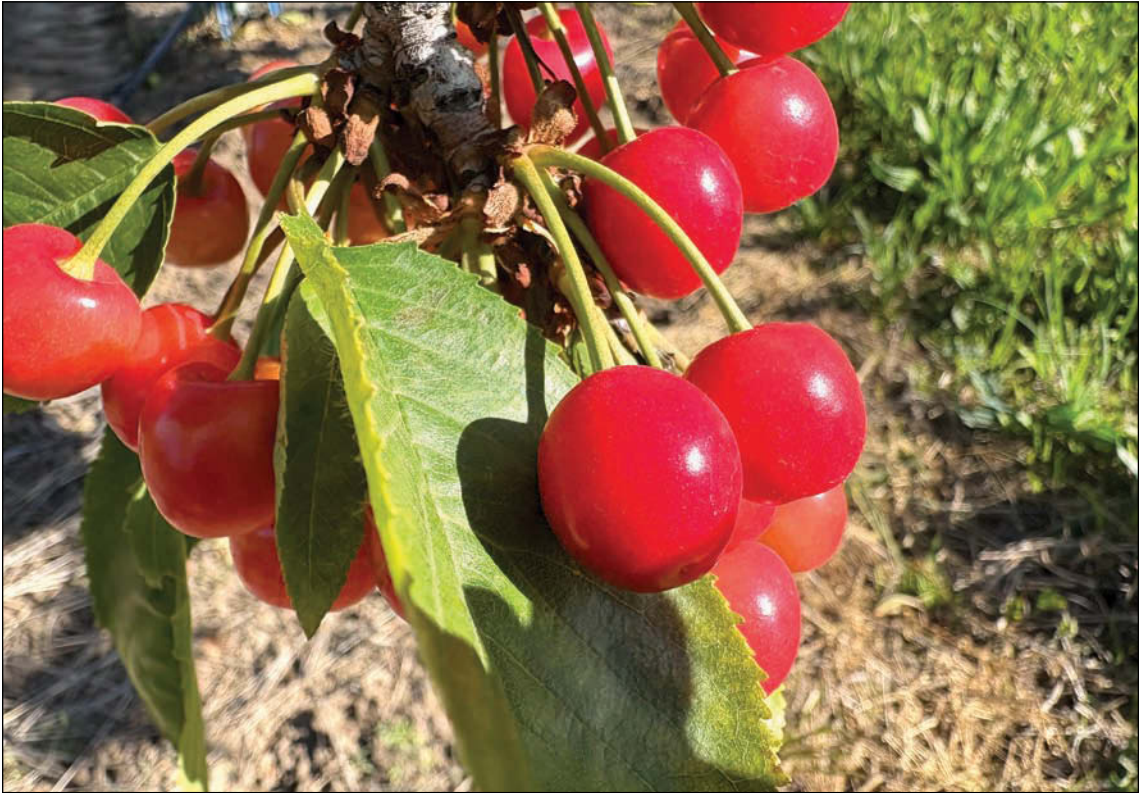
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Cherries soak up the morning sun near The Dalles, Ore., in this late May file photo. The season came earlier than normal in both California and the Pacific Northwest this year. While California production is forecast to rise, the harvest in Washington and Oregon is expected to decline. (Kyle Odegard/Capital Press)

USDA projects 23% drop for Washington cherry crop

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

U.S. sweet cherry production in the top four producing states is expected to hit 310,500 tons this season, down 17% from 2025.

The USDA's "Fruit and Tree Nuts Outlook: July 2026" report shows production declines for Washington, Oregon and Michigan, but an increase for California.

Washington, the top producer, is expected to account for two-thirds of the nation's crop at

200,000 tons.

However, that's a drop of 61,000 tons or 23% from last season's bumper crop, which was Washington's largest cherry harvest in eight years.

California sweet cherry production is projected at 63,000 tons, up 24% over last year's short crop, but still relatively small.

In Oregon and Michigan, ranked third and fourth for production, the harvest is forecast to decline 24% from the previous year.

Fresh market cherries represented about 77% of

volume and 91% of value for the U.S. crop.

See Cherries, Page C6

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Cherries:
continued from C5

Most sweet cherries in Washington, California and Oregon historically go to the higher-value fresh market but most Michigan cherries are processed.

California's cherry harvest this year started and ended about two weeks earlier than normal due to a warmer-than-average spring.

There was little overlap between California and Washington shipments this season.

As weekly shipment volumes tapered off toward the end of June, prices began to increase leading into the Fourth of July.

Shipment volume from Washington peaked in mid-June, about one week earlier than the previous season.

Washington sweet cherry exports through July 5 to leading markets — Canada, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan — were lower this year but higher than two seasons ago.

U.S. cherry imports reached a record 86 million pounds in 2025, but about 80% of that volume is from counterseasonal producers in the Southern Hemisphere.

Overall, the U.S. remained a net exporter the past year, with volumes totaling 179.3 million pounds.

Washington blueberries have early, good start

U.S. and Washington blueberry shipments were higher through mid-July compared to the previous year.

Pacific Northwest blueberry shipments began in mid-June.

Weekly crop reports indicate that Washington's season is off to an early but good start.

Pest pressure hasn't been as significant as in previous years.

Though some reports indicated small sizing, fruit quality, including firmness, has been reported as good to excellent.

In Oregon, shipments through mid-July were lower than at that point in the season in 2025.

Unseasonably warm conditions in the Willamette Valley expedited fruit ripening and led to pest pressure from spotted wing drosophila, an invasive fruit fly.

The raspberry season began in early July in the Pacific Northwest, where most of that fruit is grown for processing.

Crop reports indicate Washington and Oregon raspberries experienced some sunburn or sunscald early this season due to heat, according to the "Fruit and Tree Nuts Outlook" report, which was released July 23.



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High grocery prices will hurt produce growers

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

Recent surveys show Americans' frustration with high grocery prices and indicate consumers are buying less produce or swapping out fresh for cheaper processed fruit and vegetables. "When budgets are tight,

food is one area where households have some flexibility, so consumers adjust at the margins. They switch to store brands, trade down from fresh to canned or frozen and prioritize who gets what," said David Ortega, a Michigan State University economist and food price expert.

The change will slow movement, weaken prices and mean less money for many growers suffering from high production costs and poor financial returns, experts said. "A consumer shift away from fresh compounds the

price pressure growers are already under," Ortega said. The long-term result could be more farm consolidation, greater reliance on imports and a less resilient domestic fruit supply, he wrote, in an email. "That's already the direc-

tion we're headed," said Lesley Tamura, a pear grower and Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers chairwoman. The shift toward processed food is challenging but farms and other businesses can adapt and take

See Groceries, Page C9



Moon Rader, produce manager at Fry Family Farm in Medford, Ore., hydrates the produce case at the business' farm store. Fry Family Farm has turned to direct sales to avoid competing with industrial food suppliers in the commodity market. (Kyle Odegard/Capital Press)



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Irrigation specialist helps growers in tough year

By Brad Carlson
Capital Press

Emily Bedwell helps farm irrigators optimize their efficiency.

But much of the time, she just listens to them.

“This is a tough water year,” said Bedwell, University of Idaho Extension irrigation technology specialist based at Kimberly Research and Extension Center. “We

have had tough water years before. It doesn’t make it any better.”

“These tools can help,” she said. And future benefits usually result from “attacking that learning curve early.”

Growers in the upper and middle Snake River region have been contacting Bedwell.

Much of the feedback relates to shortfalls “regard-

less of where they are with their water rights,” she said.

“Most people have the same question: How can I make the best decisions with the water I am allocated, with the potential that there could be reductions throughout the season?”

Being proactive to the extent possible is one common goal among growers as they have reached out to Bedwell.

Many growers “are being a little more intentional about when to put water down and how much to put down” based on crop and soil needs rather than a pre-set schedule, she said.

Work to optimize irrigation occurs every year regardless of snowpack, streamflow and weather.



Emily Bedwell, University of Idaho assistant professor and extension irrigation technology specialist. (Bill Schaefer/Contributed)

Sugar beets and potatoes can get too wet, for example.

In a dry year, some steps can help growers save water fairly quickly, Bedwell said.

Preseason opportunities include changing to more efficient equipment.

Through the season, the grower can make sure that equipment is maintained and operating efficiently, that soil moisture sensors are installed properly and in the right places, and that data are usable. Testing for water application uniformity may help in a “problem area” of a field, Bedwell said.

“Years like this, while they are pretty unpleasant and there is more uncertainty in what to expect with the crop and how it’s going to do, the silver lining to it is that it does kind of encourage people to say how can I do better?” she said.

And when a good water year comes, “we still have that skillset in the toolbox,”

Bedwell said.

Educational resources

She wrote the extension resource Five Ways to Improve Irrigation Efficiency Without Buying New Equipment. Recommendations include knowing what is happening below ground, staying ahead of water demand rather than waiting until a crop looks stressed, checking system uniformity, fine-tuning irrigation timing, and determining how much crop is produced per unit of water applied.

Bedwell also produced Making Every Drop Count: Irrigation Management Strategies for Sugarbeets in a Tight Water Year. She recommends starting with the soil profile, matching irrigation to crop demand, using soil moisture monitoring as a decision tool, planning for system capacity limits, and avoiding overcorrection after crop stress.



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Groceries:

continued from C7

advantage of the change in consumer habits, said Ricky Volpe, a California Polytechnic State University agribusiness professor and food price expert.

"Substitutions happen and this presents opportunities," Volpe said.

From price takers to price makers

Farmers generally receive only 9% of the food dollar.

When production costs rise faster than farmgate prices — and labor has often been the main culprit — growers often can't pass those costs forward.

Facing persistent losses, farmers have been trying to become price makers, rather than price takers.

For large farms, that means scaling up for more bargaining power.

Smaller growers often leave commodity markets to seek better prices through direct sales at farmers markets and farm stands, value-added products and agritourism, experts said.

The price problem may feel especially urgent in the Pacific Northwest.

Growers are receiving low prices for apples, blueberries, cherries, pears and potatoes — all primarily grown in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

"All of these crops have been unprofitable recently," said Tim Delbridge, an Ore-

gon State University agricultural economist.

Demand also plays a role, he added.

Beef prices are at record highs but shoppers haven't stopped buying.

Meanwhile, total consumption for fruit and vegetables has dipped in recent decades, with processed produce performing worse overall, according to the USDA.



Delbridge

Grocery prices up 30% from 2020

Ortega said food prices very rarely come down and grocery inflation has outpaced wage increases.

The USDA expects food-at-home prices to increase 2.8% in 2026.

"When we look at food prices, since January 2020, they've increased more than 30%," Ortega said.

Several factors have contributed, including the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, drought, highly pathogenic avian influenza and trade uncertainty and tariffs.

The Iran war raised diesel and fertilizer costs, and the full impact of that shock should show up at the grocery store in the next month or so, experts said.

Fruit and vegetable grocery prices rose 5.3% over the past year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor

See Groceries, Page C13

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Family dispute imperils hop farm's future

By Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Press

Trying to avoid domestic strife four decades ago only ended up compounding it for Oregon hop farmer Richard Kirk and his family.

Conversations about inheritance, awkward and morbid as they may seem, are ultimately necessary to arrive at a legally enforceable succession plan. Without a written plan, however,

tensions and disagreements among family members are bound to arise.

In Kirk's case, such disputes are now jeopardizing his ownership of a farm near St. Paul, Ore., that his family has operated for more than 150 years.

"Things were never done right, clear back to my parents. There's enough blame to go around," he said. "My blame is that I was too quiet, too hopeful that it would all

just work out. I should've dug my feet in years ago, but I didn't want to rock the boat. I wanted this to be easy."

The troubles encountered by Willamette Valley Hop Farms, which Kirk runs with this wife, Julie, are long and convoluted, but can largely be traced back to the lack of a formal document specifying his parents' original intentions.

Kirk and his wife say they agreed in 1990 to lease and

pay property taxes on the entirety of the roughly 365-acre operation, with those payments eventually counting toward their ownership of the property upon his parents' deaths.

But they acknowledge that the 1990 agreement was never memorialized in writing, casting doubt on their claim in legal proceedings.

"It was nothing contractual. It was an agreement between mother, father, and

son and daughter-in-law when we took over," said Julie Kirk.

Divorce complicated deal

The matter of the farm's ownership began growing more complicated just a few years later, when Kirk's mother petitioned for a divorce from his father in 1997.

According to the dissolution judgment, entered in Marion County Circuit Court roughly a year later, ownership of the farm was split between his parents.

His father, who was also named Richard Kirk, kept approximately 200 acres, which the family calls the "home farm," while his mother, Joanne Van De Wiele, was awarded about 165 acres known as the "river farm," among other assets.

While the farm's ownership was formally divided, Kirk and his wife say they continued to operate it as one unit, with the expectation both parcels would pass to them when his parents' died.

But both parents lived into their 90s, so Kirk and his wife estimate those lease payments added up to about \$6 million, far exceeding the property's appraised value at the time of the 1990 agreement.

"Because they lived so long, which was wonderful — it was great to have all the years with them — but it ended up costing a lot more money than it should have," said Emily Brundridge, Richard and Julie's daughter. The couple also have a son, Lester Kirk, who was involved in the family business but has since gone to work for a neighboring farm due to his parents' financial difficulties.

Even before the deaths of Kirk's parents, which occurred within four months of each other in 2024, conflict erupted over the financial terms of the arrangement.

In 2019, Kirk and his wife filed a lawsuit against his mother's living trust, which they contend other non-farming heirs effectively "took over," challenging the lease



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Family:

continued from C10

terms and a purchase option for the “river farm.”

His father had transferred ownership of most of the “home farm” to Kirk, but the couple said his mother decided against a similar transfer on the advice of these relatives, who aren’t involved in the farming operation. These relatives either refused to comment on the situation, were unavailable for comment, or were no longer living.

Instead, the couple said they agreed to an option to purchase the property upon her death, with the mother’s estate financing the transaction similarly to a mortgage: Title to the land would pass to the Kirks while they kept making payments.

Their complaint alleged that his mother’s living trust tried to alter those terms in a way that “substantially increased the value of the property” under the purchase option, requiring the “plaintiffs to relinquish significant rights under financial duress.”

According to the lawsuit, Kirk’s mother’s trust wanted to increase the annual lease payment by 50% and to eliminate their financing deal to buy the farm, instead requiring a one-year pay-off of the farm’s higher purchase price.

The revised purchase option proposed by his mother’s living trust “modified the determination of



From left, Emily Brundridge, stands in a hop field with her parents, Julie and Richard Kirk, and brother, Lester Kirk. The family’s financial troubles have jeopardized the farm’s future. Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

the purchase price and eliminated any credit or discount to plaintiffs for improvements, maintenance, trellis, crops and permanent crops,” which had been a key component of the original deal, the complaint said.

The lawsuit sought a court order requiring the parties to mediate the dispute, which the trust had refused, and preserve the status quo, preventing the mother’s living trust from evicting the couple from the property as threatened.

“Plaintiffs seek only to maintain the status quo of their possession of the property and to mediate their disputes under the agreements,” the complaint said. “Defendants are not harmed by allowing the continued possession of the property and proceeding to mediation to resolve any disputes.”

In a response brief, the mother’s living trust claimed that Kirk and his wife had engaged in “protracted and unnecessarily contentious lease negotiations” and sought to “pay below-market rent.”

The legal action was meant to avoid eviction from an “agricultural property that the couple have no right to occupy, as their lease has long been terminated,” according to the response brief.

Settlement reached

Before the judge overseeing the case could reach a

decision, though, the parties involved agreed to dismiss the litigation.

Though they reached a settlement to the lawsuit, the Kirks say the deal entailed a purchase price and pay-off terms that were far more expensive than the \$850,000 they’d expected to pay under the original option, leading to their loss of that portion of the farm.

See Family, Page C12



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Family:

continued from C11

“We had to say, ‘No, there’s no way we can do this,’” said Julie Kirk, adding that the couple had tried to preserve the family’s unity.

The following year, the couple said their financial situation continued to deteriorate with the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, which effectively shut down many bars and taverns, reducing beer consumption and thus sending demand for hops “in the toilet.”

Due to hop brokers catching wind of the threatened evictions, Kirk and his wife said these buyers were reluctant to enter into new contracts with the couple, as they were uncertain the farm could fulfill its obligations on a smaller amount of property.

That was followed by a series of disputes with the farm’s creditors, prompting the couple to borrow money from a private lender. They allege that deal included “predatory” terms that led to the private lender seizing their “home farm” last year as collateral for the debt.

The family’s situation is not without some glimmers of hope, however.

Because that private lender is also engaged in lit-

igation with its own creditors, the Kirks have been able to remain on the property despite having signed over the deed to it.

In one of the lawsuits filed against the private lender, the company is accused of breaching the terms of a loan contract and failing to disclose ownership of the farm property as collateral for its own debt.

That case remains pending in Colorado, but as a result, title to the “home farm” is clouded, preventing its sale — allowing the Kirks to continue growing hops on the property. They hope to eventually negotiate an agreement to stay on the land with one of the creditors suing their former private lender.

The couple has also launched a fundraising campaign on the online platform GoFundMe, with the goal of raising \$500,000 to get the operation through this year’s harvest and pursue possible litigation against the private lender and potentially other parties.

While he remains hopeful that his family’s farm will find a way to survive, Richard Kirk said he uses his own history as a cautionary tale for younger farmers who will also face succession planning issues.

“I preach it to my younger buddies that are starting out: Don’t be smiling at me. You need to take this seriously,” he said.

Remaining on the farm has proven to be far more

difficult and required more sacrifices than the couple ever expected, as they’ve sold “everything we can other than kidneys and eyeballs,” said Julie Kirk.

In hindsight, the battle to hold onto the property could have been avoided if the couple had the benefit of the hard lessons they’ve learned in recent years, she said.

“We would have been done already,” Julie Kirk said. “We’ve fought for this property since day one, given everything that we could for all these years. This is where we belong and where we never want to leave and want it to perpetuate.”

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Cherry growers said high retail prices derailed demand with a big 2025 crop, reducing fruit movement. “We had a smaller crop this year and intuitively, you would have thought this would have been an easy one to sell, but that wasn’t the case. You can’t sell a crop at high prices if no one has any money,” said Ian Chandler, Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission chairman. (Kyle Odgaard/Capital Press)

Groceries:

continued from C9

Statistics.

“For millions of Americans, grocery shopping is no longer routine — it’s financially stressful,” said Sally Greenberg, National Consumers League executive director, in a news release.

According to a survey from Advance America, a loan company, one in three families are buying less produce.

More than half report eating less healthy than two to three years ago because of higher grocery prices.

About 20% of shoppers have switched to frozen produce while 9% turned to canned goods.

The Kitchen Table Project’s cost of living survey found groceries are by far the top source of financial pressure for Americans.

Survey results from the economic policy group showed respondents tended to blame tariffs and trade restrictions for higher

prices, as well as corporations for perceived price gouging.

No love lost for grocers

Among specialty crop growers, there’s no love lost for grocers.

During a November Pear Bureau Northwest meeting, industry members worried retail pricing remains high regardless of crop size, disincentivizing grocers from moving fruit during a large harvest.

Cherry growers said high retail prices derailed demand with a big 2025 crop, reducing fruit movement.

“We had a smaller crop this year and intuitively, you would have thought this would have been an easy one to sell, but that wasn’t the case. You can’t sell a crop at high prices if no one has any money,” said Ian Chandler, Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission chairman.

The supermarket segment is ruled by a few very large

players, so it’s tempting and convenient to blame market manipulation for price increases, said Delbridge, of OSU.

“It’s very difficult to

show any of this empirically,” he added.

Experts said supermarket chains, like farmers, are facing increased fuel, packaging and labor costs.

“Grocery stores, even the big guys, operate on razor thin margins. ... Whenever things get hard, they’re feel-

See Groceries, Page C14

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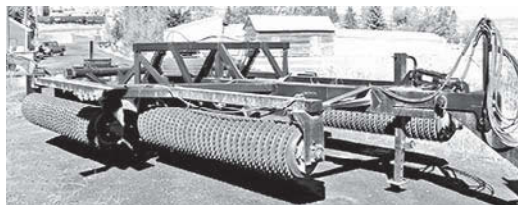


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Groceries:

continued from C13

ing the squeeze, too," said Volpe, of Cal Poly.

Market concentration brings more effective and efficient supply chains — which actually benefits consumers to a degree — but huge businesses also can negotiate better deals for themselves.

That creates a difficult dynamic for small- and medium-sized farms, experts said.

Getting big or getting small

Consolidation has been the dominant force in the food system in recent decades, both for farms and grocers, Volpe said.

Large businesses rely on scale to keep costs low and remain competitive.

However, despite consolidation, smaller outfits can make a profit with a focused niche, Volpe said.

Family farms can succeed by selling through farm stands, farmers markets or U-pick operations, joining cooperatives to scale up or cultivating relationships with independent retailers.

"Consumers willingness to pay for attributes like locally grown has increased in recent years," Volpe said.

That's helped nimble independent and regional grocers who buy directly from farmers.

Ortega, of MSU, said the shift to direct sales and value-added products makes sense, "but those channels can't handle the volume the commodity system moves, so it works for some operations, not the sector as a whole."

Experts said the Pacific Northwest supplies a huge share of the nation's tree fruit and that simply can't be sold at a local level.

Even a small region such as the Columbia River Gorge lacks the bandwidth for direct sales or other alternative channels, such as working with regional retailers, said Tamura, who leads a growers cooperative.

"You can sell a tiny fraction of that locally," she said.

Tamura added that pivoting to direct sales takes considerable effort and in some areas the agritourism market has already been cornered.

Many growers aren't selling wholesale

Fry Family Farm in Medford, Ore., grows organic produce. A decade ago, roughly 75% of its harvest was sold wholesale.

This year, 10% will be sold to large distributors, said Amber Fry, general manager.

She hopes not to sell any crops to commodity markets in 2027 to avoid competing with industrial food suppliers.

"A lot of growers aren't selling wholesale anymore," Fry said.

"The price point for wholesale is terrible. ... As a small farm, I cannot sell my product for what they are paying," she added.

Her family relies heavily on their farm store, and much of the produce and value-added products, including ready-to-cook meals, are from their own acreage.

Fry Family Farm also sells products from several other producers and food businesses that also are seeking better returns.

Growers put in the hard work, take the risk, and then receive poor prices that can be breakeven or worse for crops.

"They are sick of it," Fry said.

Younger generations have seen their parents struggle, know market conditions are unfavorable, and often seek other careers besides farming, she added.

Pivoting to processed cherries

Wade & Rufener Orchards near The Dalles, Ore., has pivoted to processed brine cherries, which it grows on contract to secure consistent prices.

The strategy might seem unusual as fresh cherries have had higher value in past decades.

But contracts guarantee sales and farmers know they can pay the bills, said Devon Wade, co-owner and manager of Wade & Rufener.



Volpe

WSU plans \$13.5M creamery upgrade

By Kyle Odegard
Capital Press

The Washington State University Creamery will get a \$13.5 million upgrade to modernize its equipment, produce more Cougar Gold cheese and provide student employees a cutting edge work experience.

The project is expected to be completed in March 2028.

The facility creates about 250,000 cans of its signature cheese every year despite an outdated production system.

After a three-month shut-down to switch to the new equipment, production will jump to 350,000 cans — the capacity of WSU's storage warehouse, where Cougar Gold is aged at least a year.

A future project could increase storage space.

Most of the funding for the WSU Creamery upgrade will come from the facility's reserves and a loan.

WSU is providing \$2 million, the state government is contributing \$1 million and the university hopes for industry support, as well.

"This is a major investment, but when we are producing more cheese, we should be able to pay off the loan quickly and start building up our reserves again," said John Haugen, WSU Creamery manager.

"Cougar Gold and the creamery play a big role in how the world sees WSU," he added, in a news release.

The WSU Creamery produces several varieties of Cougar Cheese as well as ice cream, which are sold on campus at Ferdinand's Ice Cream Shoppe.

The production system was designed with a 20-year life expectancy but has been in use since 1992.

"Our equipment has had a long and productive work life, but we need a refresh," Haugen said.



Amber Fry, general manager of Fry Family Farm in Medford, Ore., said many growers aren't selling wholesale anymore. "The price point for wholesale is terrible. ... As a small farm, I cannot sell my product for what they are paying," she added. (Kyle Odegard/Capital Press)

Groceries:

continued from C14

"I used to look down at brine cherry growers, or judge them as lower quality growers. Now that's me," he added.

Chandler, the Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission chairman, said other growers also have leaned into processed cherries to avoid "riding the roller coaster" of commodity prices.

Cherry growers have discussed forming an overarching cooperative to set a minimum price for fruit, similar to the hazelnut

industry, but Chandler said that's challenging in normal times and there's no resources right now.

Shoppers may feel frustrated with high grocery store prices, but so are Northwest farmers, as those haven't translated to better returns.

Growers see few realistic solutions as production costs rise and an influx of foreign produce undercuts domestic options.

"We can grow beautiful, great fruit, but if we can't sell it for anything, what's the point?" Chandler asked.

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'12 KINZE 1100 GRAIN CART, 20" Auger, Roll Tarp.....\$51,950



BRENT 672 GRAIN CART, Hyd Drive.....\$8,950



'06 CAT D5N XL DOZER, 8281 Hrs, 10' PAT Blade, Ripper.....\$37,950



'91 CASE 650 DOZER, 5322 Hrs, 8' PAT Blade, Winch.....\$15,000



'69 CAT D8H, 12964 Hrs, 13' Semi U Blade, Ripper...\$25,000



'86 AVERLING-BARFORD GRADER, 6X6, Silver 92, Front Blade.....\$12,950



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CAT V80E FORKLIFT, Propane.....\$8,000



SUMMERS ULTIMATE NT SUSPENDED BOOM SPRAYER, 90', 1000 Gal Tank, 5 Section control, Foam Marker, Mix Tank, Triple Nozzles.....\$12,800



'17 JD 310L EP BACKHOE LOADER, 1702 Hrs, 4WD, Cab, Air/Heat.....\$45,500



(2) 12,000 GAL NH3 TANKS, Blackmer Pump.....\$14,500

DRILLS



'19 CIH PRECISION DISK 500DS, 60' 10" Spacing, '19 CIH 4585 Tow Between Cart....\$225,000



'15 CIH FLEX HOE 700, 60' 12" Spacing w/4" Dutch Precision Points, 3430 Cart, 2450 Liquid Cone Tank, Full Run Blockage Monitors.....\$165,000



'14 JD 1890, 40', 7.5" Spacing, 1 Owner, 32K Acres, Blockage Monitors, '13 JD 1910 Cart.....\$129,500



FLEXICOIL 8100, 30', 2340 Cart, Extra Parts...\$18,000



'14 GREAT PLAINS 355000HD, 50', 6" Spacing, 15K Acres, Track Scratcher, 1 Owner.....\$79,950

COMBINES



'12 CIH 8230, 3189 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Hillico 27%, '15 MacDon FD75-40', Overhauled.....\$225,000



'15 CIH 8240, 4405 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Hillico 27%, '17 MacDon FD75-45'.....\$112,900



'21 JD 5780, 652 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Pro Drive Trans, IF1250/50R32 Drive Tires.....\$325,00



'10 CIH 8120, 3403 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Hillico 27%, Chopper, Pro 600.....\$85,000



'99 CIH 2388, 4664 Sep Hrs, 4WD, Hillico, Late Cone/Cage/Hydros/Rad, '97 CIH 1020-25'.....\$35,000



'99 CIH 2388, 3100 Sep Hrs, 2WD, Hillico, Duals, '04 CIH 1010-30'.....\$29,950

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'11 BOURBON HOPPER SET, 25' Lead & 25' Pup, 102" Wide, AirRide, Roll Tarps, All Aluminum Wheels.....\$49,950



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'77 FRUEHAUF HOPPER PUP, 22', New Brakes, Roll Tarp.....\$9,500



'91 WILSON CATTLE POT, 53', Triple Axle.....\$15,950



'17 MACDON FD-75-45', Top Auger, Transport Kit..\$29,950



'23 JD HD45R, 45', 489 Hrs, Dose Tandem Axle Cart w/ Brakes.....\$115,000



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'18 GREAT PLAINS 3500 TURBO MAX, 3K Acres on New Blades & Spiders.....\$79,950



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TRACTORS



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'23 JD 2025R, 40 Hrs, MFWD, Cab, Hydro, 120R Loader, 60" Midmount Mower, Frontier 6" Rear Blade.....\$26,500



MITSUBISHI MT300D, MFWD, Loader, Yanmar Backhoe.....\$3,000



'05 JD 8120, 6950 Hrs, MFWD, (4) Hyd Remotes, AutoSteer.....\$85,000



'14 JD 9510R, 3278 Hrs, 1 Owner, AutoSteer, Goodyear 800 LSW Duals, Weight Package Deleted.....\$208,750



'95 JD 8870, 13029 Hrs, Powershift, PTO, Autosteer, Diff Locks.....\$55,000



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