Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Average US price of gas steady at $2.91 per gallon

LOS ANGELES (AP) — U.S. gas prices remained steady over the past two weeks and an analyst says the pump price may start to drop later this month.

Trilby Lundberg says the average price of regular-grade gas as of Friday was $2.91 per gallon.

In California, however, the average was $3.63 per gallon, up 3 cents from two weeks ago.

The price in the San Francisco Bay Area was even higher while the city with the lowest average was Jackson, Mississippi at $2.51 per gallon.

Consumers may see prices fall 2 to 4 cents per gallon by the end of the month, Lundberg says, because gasoline supplies are plentiful, growth in demand is weak and refiners are ending their production of summer blend gas that's designed to reduce pollution but is costlier to produce.

Registration open for free Business Foundations workshops

LA GRANDE, ENTERPRISE — Northeast Oregon Economic Development District is offering a free, six-week workshop series to help entrepreneurs and small-business owners build the basis for a successful enterprise.

This six-week hands-on class covers the basics of running a successful business. Business Foundations takes place from 6 to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays from Sept. 25 to Nov. 6 (no class Oct. 16) at IGNITE, 104 Depot St., La Grande, and on Thursdays from Sept. 27 to Nov. 1 at Wallowa Resources, 401 NE First St., Enterprise. Thanks to a Community Development Block Grant through City of La Grande, the classes are offered free of charge.

To register, call NEOEDD by Friday, Sept. 21 at 541-426-3598 or 800-645-9454, or email kristyathens@neoedd.org. Preference is made to people with low-to-moderate incomes; income verification is required.

Producers must have valid CCC-941 AGI form to receive payments

According to the Farm Services Agency, many producers have experienced delays in receiving Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) payments, Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs) and Market Gains on Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) because they have not filed form CCC-941, Adjusted Gross Income Certification. No program payment can be issued to an eligible producer, including landowners who share in the crop, without a valid CCC-941 on file in the county office.

Producers without a valid CCC-941 on file for the applicable crop year will not receive payments. All farm operator/tenants/owners who have not filed a CCC-941 and have pending payments should IMMEDIATELY file the form with their recording county FSA office. Farm operators and tenants are encouraged to ensure their landowners have filed the form.

FSA can accept the CCC-941 for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. Unlike the past, producers must have the CCC-941 certifying their AGI compliance before any payments can be issued.

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office:

Union County FSA Office: 1901 Adams Ave., Suite 5, La Grande; 541-963-4178

Wallowa County FSA Office: 401 NE First St., Suite E, Enterprise; 541-426-4521

Baker County FSA Office: 3990 Midway Drive, Baker City; 541-523-7121, ext. 106

#womeninag infographics showcase women's impact on agriculture

A new USDA #womeninag infographics showcase the impact women have on agriculture in each state and across the country, the USDA announced in a press release. From the classroom to the farm to the boardroom, women in agriculture are helping to pave the way for a better future. To celebrate and honor the contributions of women in agriculture, the USDA is releasing a series of state-by-state infographics detailing the impact women have on agriculture in each state and across the country. The USDA also is featuring stories of women in agriculture on its blog, accessible by following the #womeninag tag. Women in agriculture are encouraged to join the women in ag mentoring network by emailing AgWomenLead@usda.gov.

BREAKING GROUND

Commercial Tire begins construction ON NEW, BIGGER FACILITY

By Max Denning, The Observer

In a ceremony on Aug. 31, members of the Union County Chamber of Commerce and employees of Commercial Tire broke ground on a new facility for the tire company.

La Grande's Commercial Tire will be building a new facility on the corner of 26th Street and Mulholland Drive that will be double the size of their current shop on Jefferson Avenue.

John Cederholm, general manager of Commercial Tire in La Grande, said the idea to expand their business began three years ago, and the property was purchased two years ago.

"We were sitting on it, until just the last couple months," Cederholm said.

Bob Kavanaugh, executive director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, called Cedarholm the visionary of this project, noting he approached his boss at Commercial Tire and asked about expanding the business.

During the ceremony, Ben Davidson, assistant manager of Commercial Tire in La Grande, said the more expansive shop will allow them to better serve customers.

"It's a chance to grow, to help people out a little bit faster," Davidson said. "We were running out of space, and you can only do so much with where we're at."

Cedarholm said he was "very pleasantly surprised" when he saw the drawings of the new facility, which includes a bay that can house two semi-trucks at a time and additional space for employees to work on trucks outside the bay. The construction of the new facility is expected to cost approximately $2 million.

Mollie Hulse, vice president of the Union County Chamber of Commerce and business loan officer at Community Bank, said she was excited to see what the new building will bring to the area, which has a number of vacant lots.

Construction is set to be completed in February 2019, and Cedarholm said he's excited to move in to the new facility.

"The timing will be perfect," he said. "We'll get through the snow rush season, and then we'll hit the slow-down period and that'll enable us to move everything over."

The expansion is evidence of the business' local success, mirroring the long-term prosperity of the chain of tire shops. Commercial Tire Company celebrated its 50th anniversary this year.

With the expanded size of the facility, Cederholm said there will be increased expectations.

"You don't just build a new facility and stay the same," he said. "We're going to be expected to grow."

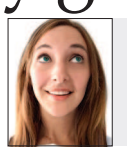
One thing that might assist with drawing more business? The new location.

"Being right off the freeway, that's going to help tremendously," Cedarholm said.

Max Denning photos/The Observer

Top: Mike Becker, owner of Mike Becker General Contractor, and John Cederholm, general manager of Commercial Tire in La Grande, stand with shovels ready to break ground on the location of a new Commercial Tire facility. Bottom: From left, Bob Kavanaugh, executive director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, Ben Davidson, assistant manager of Commercial Tire, Mike Becker, contractor for the construction and John Cederholm, general manager of Commercial Tire in La Grande, take questions from members of the community about the construction project.

Spend money guilt-free - even with student loans



ASK BRIANNA
ADVICE FOR POSTGRADS

Earlier this year, total outstanding student loan debt surpassed $1.5 trillion.

For those with loans they can't afford, the news was a large-scale confirmation of a small-scale truth: Student loans have gotten out of control, and they leave a smoking crater in the place where a thoughtful budget should be. Seemingly endless and urgent new priorities compete for your attention and limited income after graduation: housing, an emergency fund, paying off those loans.

Here's one more you shouldn't ignore: yourself.

"If you've got a financial plan that includes no money for fun, it's unrealistic. It's not going to happen," said Matthew Angel, advice director of personal finance at USAA, a financial institution for members of the military and their families.

Managing your money well is about creating balance, which you'll have to do over and over as the shape of life changes: You may change jobs, get married, have kids or go back to school. Learn how to keep your big expenses low, get serious about setting aside "fun" money and pick activities that will bring you lasting joy, and you'll be able to repeat the process when new priorities edge their way in.

When you lead a life that's more than the sum of your financial stresses, you might even feel motivated to pay off your student loans faster .

Compartmentalize your cash

Budgeting meticulously isn't for everyone. But no matter your personality, you should have a general idea of where your money goes.

Start with this method:

— Add up monthly fixed expenses, like your rent, transportation, utility bills, student loan payment and an average grocery bill.

— Decide how much to save per month to build a solid emergency fund, which will eventually include at least three months of expenses (it's OK if it takes time to get there).

— Use a retirement calculator to see how much you should save per month now to get a head start on retirement, even if it's just a little.

— Take a look at your high-interest debt, like credit card balances, and come up with a plan to pay it down. Put even $10 more than the minimum toward your debt each month.

The money left over is where fun money will come from.

All these expenses might seem overwhelming, and I wouldn't recommend putting off saving for retirement or letting credit card balances linger. But you can chip away at them slowly rather than throwing all your cash at one goal, giving you the freedom to set aside cash for nonessentials.

You can also save money by making smart decisions about the big stuff. Buy a used car, or sign up for a federal income-driven student loan repayment plan, which keeps your payments from exceeding 10 percent of income.

Pick the right 'fun'

It's worth making the effort to earn a little extra if that's a quicker path to building discretionary cash than cutting expenses, Angel said. You can easily sell unwanted items online, he said; you can also tutor, freelance or open a shop on Etsy.

Once you set aside the cash, spend it well. You'll likely feel more fulfilled gaining experiences, pouring money into hobbies and socializing with friends than buying new clothes or technology.

Money should make you feel more free and more like yourself. If you're spending in a way that feels empty or hasty, pause and consider whether you're getting the most out of the money you've worked so hard for.

Go in with a goal

To stick to spending only the fun money you've decided you can spare, make a plan beforehand, Angel said. Say, "I'm going to spend $100 at most with my friends tonight," not, "I have $500 in my bank account, and we'll see how much is left tomorrow." If you have access to credit cards, setting that limit internally is even more important.

Especially when you're with friends, it's easy to apply a "you only live once" mentality. But think of controlling your spending as an investment in going out with them again and again. You won't accrue so much debt that eventually you'll have to go on an even harsher spending fast to fix it.