Business & AgLife B
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Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Oregon Wheat Industry supports U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement

PORTLAND — The Oregon Wheat Commission and the Oregon Wheat Growers League in a Jan. 17 press release applauded the U.S. Senate for passing the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. According to the release, the strong bipartisan 89-10 Senate vote to approve USMCA is a testament to the good work done by President Donald Trump, the U.S. Trade Representative, members of Congress, Canada and Mexico to negotiate the agreement.

Oregon Wheat CEO Blake Rowe noted "trade deals like this should help the price of wheat for growers in Oregon and across the country. We think this agreement sets a pattern for future trade agreements and sends a signal that the U.S. can get trade agreements completed and approved in a timely manner."

USMCA retains tariff-free access to imported U.S. wheat for those long-time flour milling customers in Mexico, a crucial step toward rebuilding trust in the U.S. as a reliable supplier in this important, neighboring market, the release stated, adding that other measures that benefit the wheat industry include the agreement's language around agricultural biotechnology, which supports 21st century innovations in agriculture.

BLM takes steps to improve administration of grazing regulations

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Bureau of Land Management published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to consider proposed revisions to the agency's grazing regulations. The BLM manages livestock grazing on 155 million of the 245 million acres of public land and administers nearly 18,000 grazing permits and leases.

"Administration of sustainable livestock grazing on public lands is a key part of the Bureau of Land Management's multiple-use mission. We continue to seek ways to improve and streamline the grazing permit process to achieve greater efficiencies and service to permittees," said Acting Assistant Secretary of Land and Minerals Management Casey B. Hammond in a press release. "This rulemaking effort is designed to strengthen and improve our administration of grazing permits across the West, and we welcome public and stakeholder ideas and perspectives."

The proposed revisions will update, modernize and streamline the grazing regulations and provide greater flexibility for land and resource management. By publishing this Notice of Intent, the BLM is informing the public about the proposed revisions and how interested parties can provide input. Comments on the proposed regulation revisions may be submitted in writing until Feb. 28. Meeting information, announcements, instructions on how to provide comments, and pertinent documents can be found at https://go.usa.gov/xyMqb. For more information, contact Seth Flanigan, BLM Project Manager, at 208-384-3450 or sflanigan@blm.gov.

Union County FSA reminds producers to enroll in USDA safety net programs

LA GRANDE — The Union County Farm Service Agency office encourages agricultural producers in Northeast Oregon to enroll in the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs — two U.S. Department of Agriculture safety net programs — for the 2019 and 2020 crop year.

ARC provides income support payments on historical base acres when actual crop revenue declines below a specified guaranteed level. PLC provides income support payments on historical base acres when the effective price for a covered commodity falls below its reference price. The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and updated both programs.

Signup for the 2019 crop year closes March 15, 2020, while signup for the 2020 crop year closes June 30, 2020. Producers who have not yet enrolled for 2019 can enroll for both 2019 and 2020.

Covered commodities consist of barley, canola, chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium and short grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

For more information, contact the Union County FSA office at 541-963-4178.

Photo courtesy of Audrey Comerford

As the agritourism coordinator for Oregon State University Extension Service in Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, Audrey Comerford works with farms, county planners and local tourism organizations to make connections and help producers add a new revenue stream for their operations.

Agritourism innovator

By George Plaven
Capital Press

SALEM — Audrey Comerford was coordinating school tours for the annual harvest festival at Bauman's Farm and Garden in Gervais. when she realized the full impact of agritourism.

Comerford remembers a young boy, about a second-grader, who came to visit the 400-acre family farm north of Salem. Inside the animal barn, he saw a Jersey calf that was brought over from a nearby dairy, and had no idea what it was.

"He looked at it, and he goes, 'What is it?'" Comerford said. "He had no name for it. He couldn't even guess."

Comerford didn't think much about it at first, but then a dozen or so kids asked the exact same question over the next several weeks — one of them even thought it was a deer, she said. It served as a reminder of just how far removed generations have come from farming and ranching. As of 2008, less than 2% of the U.S. population is directly employed in agriculture.

"That's where it clicked for me," Comerford said. "The educational component (of agritourism) is so important for the general public."

Comerford now works as the agritourism coordinator for Oregon State University Extension Service, serving Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties in the Mid-Willamette Valley. She was hired in September 2019, replacing Mary Stewart, who retired earlier in the year.

Agritourism is a bit of a nebulous term. There is no universally accepted definition or list of approved activities, which can make it difficult for farmers to know what they can and cannot do on their property.

Comerford's job is to work with farms, county planners and local tourism organizations to help make connections and answer questions.

In general, agritourism falls into one of five categories: direct sales, entertainment, hospitality, education and outdoor recreation. Events might include weddings, concerts and festivals, or it can be as simple as having a farmstand or U-pick orchard to sell fresh fruit and produce directly to consumers.

"A lot of farms are having to go that way, selling directly to consumers because the prices of crops are remaining the same or dropping," Comerford said. "This is a great way to get more revenue out of it, and then also provide great food connections for the public."

Comerford grew up surrounded by thousands of acres of grass seed farms in Rickreall. Both of her parents also worked for OSU Extension Service. Her father, Richard Regan, was a horticulture professor and extension agent for the university, and her mother, Eileen Regan, did community

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Suez Canal species altering Mediterranean

By Aron Heller and Isabel Debre
The Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — As Egypt marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Suez Canal, marine biologists are bemoaning one of the famed waterway's lesser known legacies — the invasion of hundreds of non-native species, including toxic jellyfish and aggressive lionfish.

The canal, which connects the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, revolutionized maritime travel by creating a direct shipping route between the East and the West. But over the years, the invasive species have driven native marine life toward extinction and altered the delicate Mediterranean ecosystem with potentially devastating consequences, scientists say.

The influx has increased significantly since Egypt doubled its capacity in 2015 with the opening of the "The New Suez Canal," raising alarm in Europe and sparking criticism from various countries along the Mediterranean basin. The sharpest criticism comes from neighboring Israel, which once battled Egypt in war alongside the 193-kilometer (120-mile)-long canal.

Bella Galil, an Israeli marine biologist who has studied the Mediterranean for over three decades, said much of the ecological damage is irreversible.

But with the invasive fish and crustaceans buoyed by warming water temperatures and rapidly spreading toward European shores, she argued that urgent action is needed to minimize its long-term impact. Galil, of Tel Aviv University's Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, said the continued widening and deepening of the canal had created a "moving aquarium" of species that, if unchecked, could make coastal waters inhospitable for humans.

Galil said the number of invasive species, currently about 400, has more than doubled over the past 30 years, a phenomenon she called a "historic example of the dangers of unintended consequences."

Already, Israel is coping with an unprecedented wave of toxic jellyfish that has damaged coastal power plants and scared off beach-goers and tourists. Several other venomous species, including the aggressive lionfish, have established permanent colonies, creating a potential health hazard when they end up on plates of beach-side restaurants. Most worrisome has been the arrival of the Lagocephalus Sceleratus, an extremely poisonous bony fish commonly known as the silver-cheeked toadfish.

Galil said half of all the Israeli fish intake — and all the crustaceans — are now of the invasive variety.

With the "rolling invasion" now reaching as far as Spain, European countries are increasingly taking note. The issue is set to feature prominently at a United Nations ocean sustainability workshop this month in Venice.

"These non-indigenous organisms present serious threats to the local biodiversity, at the very least comparable to those exerted by climate change, pollution and over-fishing," Galil said.

She said the new species have caused "a dramatic restructuring" of the ecosystem, endangering various local species and wiping out native mussels, prawns and red mullet.

Israel's Environmental Protection Ministry said it was monitoring the process with

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Beef industry sees big wins in China deal

By Carol Ryan Dumas
Capital Press

Although the phase one trade deal with China doesn't address tariffs on U.S. beef, significant ground was gained on non-tariff barriers to Chinese markets.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association is going over the details of the agreement signed on Wednesday, but the provisions it has seen are "very positive" and address a lot of the things NCBA asked for, Kent Bacus, NCBA senior director of international trade and market access, said.

"This is a truly momentous day for the U.S. beef industry and National Cattlemen's Beef Association," he said in a telephone conference with the media.

U.S. beef had been locked out of China since 2003, following the detection of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in a Washington state dairy cow, until the industry gained hard-fought but limited access in 2017.

That access was a result of President Donald Trump making it a top agenda item at the Mar-a-Lago Summit, but China kept many other restrictions on U.S. beef. Those included bans on production technology, such as hormones and beta agonists, the BSE-related 30-month age limit on cattle slaughtered for beef and bookend traceability, he said.

"We still face really significant non-science-based, non-tariff trade barriers," Jennifer Houston, NCBA president, said.

But the phase one agreement will get rid of a lot of those restrictions and allow the

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