

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

La Grande Main Street Development Committee requests survey response

LA GRANDE — The La Grande Main Street Business Development Committee is distributing a survey to gather input from local businesses and entrepreneurs regarding classes and training they would be interested in attending. The survey takes a few moments to complete. For access to the survey, contact the Small Business Development Center at 541-962-1532 or eousbdc@gmail.com or come by the office at 1607 Gekeler Lane, Room 148, La Grande, which is open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Deadline is approaching for tourism grant applications

LA GRANDE — March 1 is the application deadline for the Union County Chamber of Commerce's TRT Grant Program. The grants fund projects and events that help promote or develop events or attractions to increase tourism in Union County. All individuals, organizations or businesses can apply. For more information and access to the application, go to www.visitunioncounty.org/2020/01/22/let-trt-help-you-this-year, contact the Chamber at 541-963-8588 or visit 207 Depot St., La Grande.

Oregon's Barry Bushue honored with national Farm Bureau award

SALEM — The American Farm Bureau Federation presented one of its highest honors, the Farm Bureau Founders Award, to Oregon's Barry Bushue during its recent annual convention. The Farm Bureau Founders Award was established in January 2017 to recognize exemplary leadership, service or contributions to Farm Bureau by officers or employees of AFBF and state Farm Bureau organizations.

Bushue served as the vice-president of AFBF from 2008-2016 and is known as a tireless worker, mentor and fundraiser. He served as the Oregon Farm Bureau President from 1999-2018 and on the AFBF Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Trade Advisory Committee and the Vision for Action Task Force.

Bushue is a firm believer that farmers and ranchers should get involved in education and the policy making process. He and his wife, Helen, invite members of the public to their family farm outside Portland to pick various fruits, vegetables and, a fall favorite, pumpkins. He was nominated by the Oregon Farm Bureau. A national Farm Bureau committee selected each of the winners.

Oregon FSA 2020 Photo Contest calendars available

SALEM — The Oregon Farm Service Agency 2020 Photo Contest calendars are available at Oregon FSA county offices. The state winner photos were selected by the Oregon State Committee in categories that represent Oregon's agricultural landscape, people in agriculture, a rural workday in agriculture, and agricultural animals and crops.

The calendar provides general reminders each month, resources available at Farmers.gov and Oregon FSA office locations. Calendars are available at local FSA offices: Baker County — 3990 Midway Drive, Baker City, 541-523-7121 ext. 106; Union County — 1901 Adams Ave., Suite 5, La Grande, 541-963-4178; Wallowa County — 401 NE First St., Suite E, Enterprise, 541-426-4521.

Former car salesman now a broker at Sunfire Real Estate

BAKER CITY — Bob Reedy, a longtime car salesman in Baker City, has been working for several months as a broker at Sunfire Real Estate.



Reedy

Reedy said he can serve customers throughout Baker County. He generally travels to the Richland and Halfway area once a week.

Reedy was a salesman at Phillips-Long Ford in Baker City, and its successor, Gentry Ford, from 1995 to 2018.

Reedy can be reached by phone at 541-523-7727 or 541-403-1352, or by email at breeedy68@msn.com.



Photo by Arek Rataj/The Associated Press

A worker wearing a face mask sprays disinfectant along a path Tuesday in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province.

Virus causes uncertainty

By Paul Wiseman, Joe McDonald and Yuri Kageyama

The Associated Press

This should be peak season for a 12-room hotel near the train station in the Chinese industrial hub of Wuhan. The Chinese New Year usually brings in plenty of travelers and delivers profits of around \$3,000 a month.

But the place is empty. Wuhan, the center of a deadly viral outbreak, is on lockdown. "There is not a single customer," said the hotel's owner, who gave only his surname, Cui. He still has to pay rent and his utility bills. Instead of counting his earnings, he's expecting to lose \$1,500 a month.

The outbreak arrives at a bad time for Wuhan, China and the world economy.

China, with the world's No. 2 economy, was decelerating even before the coronavirus hit.

And the world economy is coping with an unexpectedly sharp slowdown in No. 7 India, which prompted the International Monetary Fund last week to downgrade its outlook for global growth this year.

The coronavirus is drawing comparisons to the SARS outbreak, which paralyzed

the economies of China and Hong Kong for weeks in 2003. But what happens in China carries a lot more weight these days: In 2003, China accounted for 4% of global output. Now its share is 16%, according to the World Bank.

"A growth slowdown in China could have sizable ripple effects across Asia and the rest of the world, given the size of China's economy and its role as the key driver of global growth in recent years," said Eswar Prasad, a Cornell University economist and former head of the International Monetary Fund's China division.

No one knows exactly how the outbreak will play out or what its economic impact will be.

Authorities are still trying to better understand the new virus. It is from the coronavirus family, which also can cause the common cold as well as more serious illnesses such as SARS.

So far, China has confirmed more than 4,500 coronavirus cases and more than 100 deaths.

The Chinese government has locked down Wuhan and 16 other cities in Hubei province, isolating more than 50 mil-

lion people. The United States and other countries prepared Tuesday to airlift their citizens out of Wuhan. The outbreak has brought every day business to a standstill and closed down such popular tourist attractions as Beijing's former imperial palace, Shanghai Disneyland, Hong Kong Disneyland and the city's Ocean Park.

The significant decline in travel has already caused United Airlines to suspend some flights to Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai, the airline said in a statement.

"It's still too soon to measure what the impact is going to be from an economic perspective," said Jim Baird, chief investment officer at Plante Moran Financial Advisors.

The SARS experience offers some reason for economic optimism. That outbreak, centered in southern China, initially clobbered the Chinese economy. In the April-June quarter of 2003, China's economic growth dropped to an annual rate of 9.1% from 11.1% the previous quarter, noted economists Tommy Wu and Priyanka Kishore of Oxford Economics. But as the health crisis subsided, growth picked back

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Bill would create task force to address groundwater nitrates in NE Oregon

By George Plaven

Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon lawmakers will consider a bill during the upcoming legislative session aimed at curbing elevated levels of groundwater nitrates in the Lower Umatilla Basin.

State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, recently introduced Senate Bill 1562, which calls for the Oregon Department of Agriculture to form a new task force that would review existing data and recommend solutions to the area's decades-old groundwater problem.

The Lower Umatilla Basin in Northeast Oregon is home to some of the state's most productive farmland, with thousands of grazing cattle and vast fields of irrigated crops. But rising levels of groundwater nitrates could pose a public health threat if left unchecked.

Regulators declared the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area in 1990 to identify and mitigate sources of nitrogen contamination, including from agricultural operations.

Hansell, whose Senate district includes the 550-square-mile management area spanning parts of Umatilla and Morrow counties, said his bill builds on work that is already being done

in the basin. It allocates \$250,000 to ODA for the interagency task force that would evaluate strategies for reducing groundwater nitrates.

"It will go directly to the Umatilla Basin," Hansell said. "We're not asking for a multigroundwater study throughout the state."

The task force would include representatives of ODA and the state Department of Environmental Quality, as well as two members of the local management area committee and three members at large — one of whom must be a farmer or rancher with experience irrigating and fertilizing cropland.

Hansell said the funding was originally proposed in ODA's 2019-21 budget.

"There was no opposition to it, but it did not get funded," Hansell said. "It was brought to my attention how important that would have been to the Umatilla Basin."

Tests of groundwater wells show nitrates in parts of the management area exceed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "maximum contaminate level" of 10 milligrams per liter. Exposure to such high levels of nitrates and nitrites in food and drinking water may be linked to a condition called methemoglobinemia, or a

decreased ability of blood to carry oxygen in the body, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

J.R. Cook, founder and director of the Northeast Oregon Water Association, said Hansell's bill directs the task force to study groundwater connectivity in the basin, which in turn will lead to more targeted, site-specific solutions for reducing nitrates.

"There's been a ton of work in the (management area) to identify each and every potential contributor and develop game plans for each of those nutrient loads," Cook said. "But what we need to do is get into a task force and then break it out by aquifer, because what we can do to manage (nitrates) in one area isn't going to be a fix for another area."

The proposal comes as activists with eight groups and one individual filed a petition with the EPA on Jan. 16 requesting emergency action in the management area. Among other measures, the petition asks the federal government to ban any new confined animal feeding operations, or CAFOs, in the basin, such as the Easterday Farms Dairy near Boardman.

The petition was signed by Food and Water Watch, Friends of Family Farmers, WaterWatch of Or-

egon, Columbia Riverkeeper, Humane Voters Oregon, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, Center for Food Safety, Center for Biological Diversity and Eileen Laramore, a resident of Hermiston.

Nitrates are found in most fertilizers and manure, which are frequently applied to cropland in the area. The activists' petition claims CAFOs are a primary contributor to elevated groundwater nitrates.

Ten CAFOs are currently permitted in the basin with a combined 148,000 animals, according to the petition. Easterday Farms Dairy would add 28,300 cattle if approved by the state.

"Mega-dairies externalize their significant public health and environmental costs to the people of Oregon, and if our state legislators cannot protect Oregonians, we must enforce our federal laws to protect community drinking water," said Amy van Saun, an attorney with the Center for Food Safety.

Critics, however, say the groups used generalized and cherry-picked data to target one specific industry.

While Cook acknowledges there are "hot spots" of elevated nitrates in the basin, he said there is no

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