

## Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

### Producers may be eligible for assistance after flooding

SALEM — According to the Oregon Farm Service Agency, Union County producers who have experienced flooding may be eligible for assistance under the Emergency Conservation Program administered by the Union County Farm Service Agency.

A producer qualifying for ECP assistance may receive cost-share levels not to exceed 75% of the eligible cost of restoration measures. Eligible socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers can receive up to 90% of the eligible cost of restoration.

The following types of measures may be eligible:

- removing debris from farmland
- grading, shaping or releveling severely damaged farmland
- restoring permanent fences
- restoring conservation structures and other similar installations

For more information on eligibility for ECP assistance and the application process, visit the Union County FSA Office, 1901 Adams Ave, Suite 5, La Grande; call 541-963-4178; or go to [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

### Bank of Eastern Oregon celebrates 75th anniversary

HEPPNER — This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of Bank of Eastern Oregon. The bank in a news release announced it will celebrate the anniversary with open houses throughout the year at each of its 20 branches, including Enterprise, starting in February. The Arlington and Condon branches go first with celebrations Feb. 10-14.

A group of farmers and ranchers in 1945 saw a need for a bank in Eastern Oregon founded the Gilliam County Bank in Arlington, according to the announcement. The bank expanded in the 1950s, opening branches in Heppner and Ione and changing its name to Bank of Eastern Oregon. The headquarters moved to Heppner where it remains.

“Our current mission hasn’t changed from what our founders established in 1945,” CEO Jeff Bailey said in a written statement. “We still serve the needs of our rural communities, our local markets, by providing them financial services. In some areas we’re not only the only bank in town, we’re the only bank in the county. And we take pride in that.”

For more information and to see a historical video about the bank, visit [www.beobank.com](http://www.beobank.com).

### Feb. 28 is deadline for Conservation Reserve Program general signup

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture in a press release reminds agricultural producers interested in the Conservation Reserve Program 2020 general signup to enroll by Feb. 28. This signup is available to farmers and private landowners who are either enrolling for the first time or re-enrolling for another 10- to 15-year term.

“This is the first opportunity for general signup since 2016,” FSA Administrator Richard Fordyce said in the release. “It is critical that producers and private landowners make their final determinations and submit offers very soon to take advantage of this popular conservation program.”

Farmers and ranchers who enroll in CRP receive yearly rental payments for voluntarily establishing long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”), which can control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands.

For more details on the program and to enroll, contact your local FSA county office or go to [fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://fsa.usda.gov/crp).

### Chamber seeks nominations, sponsors for awards banquet

LA GRANDE — The 86th annual Union County Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Banquet is set for April 17. With the theme “Roar into the Twenties,” the evening honors the amazing individuals and businesses in our community.

Nominations are being accepted for Public Employee of the Year, Educator of the Year, Business of the Year, Entrepreneur of the Year, Woman of the Year and Man of the Year. For nomination criteria, details and forms, call the Union County Chamber at 541-963-8588 or stop by the office, 207 Depot St., La Grande. All nominations must be submitted by 5 p.m. March 6.

The chamber is also seeking table sponsors, who will decorate a table and

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Photo by Liang Xiaopeng/Xinhua via AP

Workers produce face masks in the workshop of a textile company in Jimo District of Qingdao in eastern China's Shandong Province on Wednesday. Qingdao Municipal Bureau of Industry and Information Technology has mobilized two large textile companies to produce face masks to help the fight the spread of the coronavirus.

## New cases of virus drop

By Ken Moritsugu  
The Associated Press

BEIJING — The number of new cases of the coronavirus in China dropped for a second straight day, health officials said Wednesday in a possible glimmer of hope amid the outbreak that has infected over 45,000 people worldwide and killed more than 1,100.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, meanwhile, promised tax cuts and other aid to industry as the ruling Communist Party tries to limit the mounting damage to the economy. And in Japan, 39 new cases were confirmed on a cruise ship quarantined at Yokohama, bringing the total to 174 on the Diamond Princess.

A look at the latest developments in the crisis, which started in December in the city of Wuhan:

### New cases decline

The number of new cases has trended down in the past week, raising hopes that the epidemic may be plateauing.

China's National Health Commission said 2,015 new cases had been tallied on Tuesday, the second straight daily decline and down from nearly 3,900 a week ago. Commission spokesman Mi Feng said the situation is still grim but “we have seen some positive changes.”

“I’m going to be optimistic that is a sign that their aggressive actions have been effective, but I really do think it’s too soon to say that for

sure, not having hands on the data ourselves,” said Dr. Nancy Messonnier of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

She said she is hopeful an advance team now in China from the World Health Organization will be able to examine the findings: “It would certainly be reassuring if we were now seeing at least a slowdown of this outbreak in China.”

All but one of the deaths recorded so far have been in China, as have more than 99% of all reported infections in the world. The country has put an unprecedented 60 million people in a near quarantine.

### Economic fallout

China is struggling to restart its economy after the annual Lunar New Year holiday was extended to try to curb the spread of the virus. Traffic remained light in Beijing, and many people were still working at home.

Xi’s announcement of tax cuts came as companies face increasing losses because of the closing of factories, offices, shops and other businesses in the most sweeping anti-disease measures ever imposed.

A large cluster of cases in Tianjin, a port city southeast of Beijing, has been traced to a department store, Chinese state media said. One-third of Tianjin’s 104 confirmed cases are in Baodi district, where the store is situated, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

A salesperson in the store’s home appliance section was the first diagnosed on Jan. 31, Xinhua said, and a series of cases followed.

None of those infected had visited Wuhan recently, and with the exception of one married couple, they worked in different sections of the store and did not know one another.

Elsewhere around the world, DBS bank in Singapore cleared its office, telling 300 employees to work from home after it learned that an employee had been infected. The city-state has 50 confirmed cases.

A Formula One race in Shanghai in April became the latest event canceled because of the virus. Nokia, Vodafone and Deutsche Telekom became the latest companies to pull out of a major wireless trade fair this month in Spain that usually draws 5,000 to 6,000 Chinese visitors.

### Citizen journalist disappears

A citizen journalist reporting on the epidemic in Wuhan has disappeared, activists said, becoming the second to vanish in recent days amid tightening controls on information in China.

Fang Bin, a seller of traditional Chinese clothing, stopped posting videos or responding to calls and messages on Sunday, activists Gao Fei and Hua Yong said, citing Fang’s friends. His phone was turned off Wednesday.

Fang had posted videos of Wuhan’s overcrowded hospitals, including bodies in a van waiting to be taken to a crematorium. The last video he posted was of a piece of paper reading, “All citizens resist, hand power back to the people.”

## Northwest ag commodity returns leveling up

Northwest Farm Credit Services

SPOKANE — Northwest Farm Credit Services, an agricultural lending cooperative, released its quarterly Market Snapshot reports covering

the state of major agricultural commodities in the region. Northwest FCS industry teams throughout Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington monitor conditions and report outlooks

for commodities financed by the co-op.

Northwest FCS’ 2020 outlook for the agricultural commodities most common in Northeast Oregon are summarized below.

### Cattle: profitability throughout the beef sector

Slaughter facilities are very profitable as they remain in a position of leverage over

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## Economy looks resilient despite virus risk

By Martin Crutsinger  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Tuesday the U.S. economy appears durable, with steady growth and unemployment near a half-century low, but faces risks from the broadening viral outbreak that began in China.

Powell also said the Fed is content with where interest rates are, suggesting that no further rate cuts would be contemplated unless economic conditions were to change significantly. Since last fall, the Fed has kept its benchmark short-term rate in a low range of 1.5% to 1.75%, well below levels typical during previous economic expansions.

The chairman made his remarks Tuesday to the House Financial Services Committee on the first of two days of semiannual testimony to Congress.

The Fed is monitoring developments stemming from the coronavirus, Powell said, which he cautioned “could lead to disruptions in China that spill over to the rest of the global economy.”

In response to questions, Powell said it was too early to assess the scope of the threat the virus poses to the U.S. economy. But he observed that the economy “is in a very good place,” with strong job creation and steady if modest growth.

“We will be watching that carefully,” he said about the virus’ impact. “And the question we will be asking is will these be persistent effects that could lead to a material reassessment of the outlook” in the United States.

The daily death toll in China topped 100 for the first time, raising the number of deaths there from the virus above 1,000. China remained mostly closed to business,

with around 60 million people under virtual quarantine in the country.

The lockdown has raised concerns about how much damage the loss of production in China, the world’s second-largest economy, will inflict on global supply chains. China accounts for more than 80% of smartphone and notebook production globally and more than half of global TV and server production, according to recent estimates.

In the midst of his testimony Tuesday, Powell drew an attack from a familiar corner: President Donald Trump, the man who nominated him to the Fed’s chairmanship but who has repeatedly attacked him since for not cutting rates more aggressively.

“Fed rate is too high,” Trump tweeted. “Dollar tough on exports.”

The president complained in his tweet

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