

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Observer staff

Union County Cattlemen put meetings on hold

UNION COUNTY — The Union County Cattlemen will not have a meeting in April.

Pat Larson, secretary for the organization, explained in an email the move is due to Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order for residents to stay home and follow social distancing to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Union County Cattlemen, Larson said, have canceled all its meetings until further notice.

Primary nesting season underway

LA GRANDE — Although most CRP participants carry out necessary insect and weed control measures, the Farm Service Agency reminds reminds CRP/CREP participants to be alert to insect and weed growth on your CRP/CREP acres.

The FSA County Committee is required to review all CRP/CREP maintenance work during the primary nesting season, running March 1 through July 15, according to the press release from the Farm Service Agency. Weed control work during this period will be limited to spot treatment of the affected areas.

If you wish to perform any activity during this time, contact the Union County FSA office to sign and submit the required request form.

CRP/CREP participants need to comply with the Oregon Noxious Weed Law and ensure the control of noxious weeds. They also need to make sure annual weeds, insects, and rodents do not inhibit the established practice during the CRP/CREP contract period.

“We strongly encourage you to take the necessary steps to keep your CRP/CREP contract in compliance,” the agency’s press release stated.

Disaster assistance available to Oregon private nonprofits

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Low-interest federal disaster loans are available to certain private nonprofit organizations in Oregon following President Donald Trump’s federal disaster declaration for public assistance as a result of severe storms, flooding, landslides and mudslides that occurred Feb. 5–9.

According to the press release from the U.S. Small Business Administration, private nonprofits that provide essential services of a governmental nature are eligible for assistance. These low-interest federal disaster loans are available in Umatilla, Union and Walla Walla counties and on the the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Private nonprofits should contact the Oregon Office of Emergency Management by calling Julie Slevin at 503-378-2235 or emailing julie.slevin@mil.state.or.us; or calling Dan Gwin at 503-378-3254 or emailing dan.gwin@mil.state.or.us to obtain information about applicant briefings, according to Tanya N. Garfield, director of the SBA’s Disaster Field Operations Center-West.

Applicants may apply online, receive additional disaster assistance information and download applications at <https://disasterloanassistance.sba.gov/>. Applicants may also call SBA’s Customer Service Center at 800-659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information on SBA disaster assistance. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may call 800-877-8339. Completed applications should be mailed to U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155.

W ■ A primer on ordering takeout from local establishments

EO Media Group staff

Below is a small sampling of establishments from La Grande and Baker City that have takeout or delivery options.

This is not an exhaustive list. If you don’t see your favorite restaurant listed, give them a call to see what they have available.

Bud Jackson’s Eatery & Taps

Where: 2209 Adams Ave., La Grande

Hours: 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Contact: Phone (541-962-7858), online (budjacksons.com) or by searching Bud Jackson’s on Facebook, in person for carry out

What’s available: Full menu, except for breakfast. Specials are still running, including prime rib on Friday. Normal turnaround time ranges from roughly 10-20 minutes.

Options: Takeout and delivery (\$3 for delivery). Beer delivery is also available.

Side A Brewing

Where: 1219 Washington Ave., La Grande

Hours: noon-8 p.m. seven days a week



Photo by Phil Wright

Mamacita’s International Grill in downtown La Grande is one of the numerous local establishments offering takeout.

Contact: Phone (541-605-0163), online (sideabeer.com); or in person at garage door on Washington Avenue for carry out

What’s available: Limited menu. List of available options is on the website. Specials, soups of the day still being offered. Suggested to call ahead on soup of the day. Turnaround time roughly

20-40 minutes.

Options: Takeout and delivery (\$5 for delivery to La Grande and Island City). Beer delivery available in 32 oz. crowler cans.

Inland Cafe

Where: 2715 10th St., Baker City

Hours: 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week

Contact: Phone in (541-523-9041), or drive up.

What’s available: Full menu (which is available by searching Inland Cafe online). Also available is a family style 4 for \$35 special, and prime rib dinner Friday and Saturday. Turnaround time is about 15-20 minutes.

See, **Takeout**/Page 3B

Oregon snowpack rebounds

■ Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins measure 143% of normal

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

PORTLAND — An erratic winter for Oregon’s mountain snowpack appears to be ending on a high note.

Recent snowstorms have lifted the state’s overall average snowpack to 109% of normal as of April 8, compared to 91% of normal at the beginning of March, according to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The highest totals are in Eastern Oregon, with the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins measuring 143% of normal; the Grande Ronde, Burnt, Powder and Imnaha basins at 126% of normal; the John Day Basin at 127% of normal; and the Owyhee Basin at 113% of normal.

The Willamette Valley — home of 60% of Oregon’s population and nearly half its gross farm sales — is also above average for snow, at 110% of normal.

Agriculture relies on snowpack to act as a natural reservoir heading into the spring and summer irrigation seasons, gradually replenishing streams and filling reservoirs for farms and

ranches to water their crops and livestock.

Snowpack in Oregon got off to a slow start in November and December before rebounding significantly in January, rising as much as 64% in the Hood, Sandy and Lower Deschutes basins. February and early March brought another round of warmer and drier weather, which turned to snow again by month’s end.

Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor for NRCS Oregon, said snowpack typically peaks in April and May across the state. “The key,” he said, “is going to be how quickly or rapidly that snowmelt runs off.”

“We don’t want it to come out in a sudden flush, with warm temperatures or rain on snow,” Oviatt said.

That sudden flush was felt especially hard earlier this year, when warmer weather and rain-on-snow contributed to massive flooding on the Umatilla and Walla Walla rivers in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington, damaging farms and homes.

With so much snow at higher elevations in the region, Oviatt said local water managers are undoubtedly keeping a close eye on the situation. Conversely, if the snowmelt happens more slowly

See, **Snow**/Page 3B

Resurgence of mint

■ Northwest mint farmers endure deadly fungi and foreign competition

By Sierra Dawn McClain
EO Media Group

JUNCTION CITY — John Reerslev, 65, a second-generation mint farmer, bent and plucked a young mint sprig from the soil. He rubbed it between leathery fingertips and held it to his nose. A breeze rippled his graying hair.

“When harvest comes, everything smells like peppermint,” he said. “It fills the air.”

Reerslev and his family grow mint and distill mint oil in the Willamette Valley, heartland of America’s mint industry.

The Reerslev farm near Junction City is part of a colossal domestic industry impacting how millions of Americans brush their teeth, chew gum, suck cough drops, swallow medications, inhale essential oils and flavor their ice cream.

The Reerslevs run one of just three remaining mint distilleries in the valley in a time when, despite continued con-

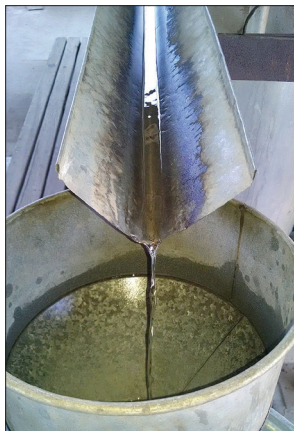


Photo by John Reerslev
Mint oil during the distillation process.

sumer demand for mint, Northwest growers grapple with deadly fungi and foreign competition.

The Reerslevs grow a variety of crops on 2,000 acres. In 2005, the farm grew about 600 acres of mint that yielded 60,000 pounds of mint oil. This year, the farm will grow just 150 acres of mint and produce about 15,000 pounds of oil.

The farm is scaling

See, **Mint**/Page 2B

Western water data coming to new online platform

■ New project encompasses 17 Western states

By Sierra Dawn McClain
EO Media Group

SALEM — Water data has historically been limited in scope and expensive to access. A new project seeks to change that pattern.

Researchers from NASA, the Desert Research Institute and the Environmental Defense Fund, with support from Google Earth Engine technology, are working to create an online platform with free, accessible, satellite-based water data open to anyone.

Farmers have expressed both excitement and concern about the prospect.

Industry leaders and water experts say the project will have a profound impact on water management in the West.

“The implications are tremendous,” said Andrew McElrone, professor and research plant physiologist at the University of California-Davis. “This will impact growing decisions, water usage, water rights and trading.”

The project, called OpenET, will launch in 2021.

OpenET’s leaders say its purpose is to improve “sustainable water management” for communities, rivers, wildlife and agriculture. It is funded by charitable foundations, NASA, agricultural companies and irrigation management districts.

OpenET is so named because it measures evapotranspiration, or ET, the process by which water moves from ground to atmosphere through both evaporation from the land and transpiration from plants.

Project aims to bridge data gap

Forrest Melton, a senior research scientist with the Cooperative for Research in Earth Science and Technology at NASA Ames Research Center, said consistent information on evapotranspiration “is probably the biggest data gap for water management.”

ET technology isn’t new. According to Maurice Hall, who leads EDF’s Western Water program, universities and other groups have used

ET data for years, but the existing approach is “piecemeal at best.”

“Given the importance of water, it’s surprising how archaic many of our tools are for actually managing water resources,” said Buzz Thompson, a natural resources law professor and faculty director for Stanford University’s Water in the West program. “OpenET could be revolutionary.”

Draw a line from North Dakota to Texas, and those 17 states to the west will be included in the initial project. The model may spread to remaining states and other countries.

OpenET will not make private data public, according to Melton of NASA. Instead, OpenET will choreograph fragments

of already-public information, such as weather datasets and field boundaries, into one coherent platform.

“Water management agencies and others already have access to this type of information,” said Melton. “But because in the past it’s often been limited and expensive, not everyone who needs the data has had access to it. I think having equal access to information can lead to better decisions, especially for water management.”

New tool could bring pros, cons

Some farmers are enthusiastic about greater data access.

Don Parrish, senior director of regulatory relations at the American Farm Bureau, said he predicts

OpenET will cut farmers’ costs while increasing productivity and efficiency.

But other farmers said they fear the data could be used against them.

“With the data going open and public, are growers going to have environmental groups sue their pants off for perceived overuse of water?” said a Washington state viticulturist who did not wish to be identified.

The data may also be used to enforce water rights and enable water trading.

According to Thompson of Water in the West, ET data has been used for at least a decade in regulatory and legal conflicts.

“This kind of data will help police and enforce water rights,” said Thompson.