

Farmworker safety program comes in under budget

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

SALEM — A program to reimburse Oregon farms for complying with costly COVID-19 worker protections came in well under budget during the 2020 harvest season.

State lawmakers now are considering what to do with millions of dollars that are leftover.

Oregon OSHA, the state’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration, implemented emergency rules last spring to strengthen field sanitation, housing and transportation protocols at labor-intensive farms, such as fruit orchards and vineyards.

In response, Gov. Kate Brown allocated \$16 million to the Food Safety and Farmworker Security Program, which provided direct payments to farmers for the expense of meeting the OSHA rule — things like buying or renting additional portable toilets, reconfiguring cabins to ensure 6 feet of social distance and arranging more buses to transport workers to the field.

As it turns out, \$16 million was more than enough. Just \$5.6 million was spent before the program expired Dec. 31, leaving \$10.4 million remaining, according to a Jan. 5 report from the Oregon Department of Administrative Services to the Legislature’s Joint Emergency Board.

It is not precisely known what will happen to that money now. In a statement, Nikki Fisher, press secretary for Brown, said the state is discussing priorities for ongoing COVID-19 relief.

“There is a clear need to continue to work to protect migrant and seasonal farmworkers during the COVID-19 crisis,” Fisher said. “And we know that there are growers who are doing the best they can to mitigate the spread.”



George Plaver/Capital Press

Oregon OSHA implemented a temporary rule to protect agricultural workers from spreading COVID-19, including a provision requiring one portable toilet for every 10 workers in the field. A state program to help farmers buy equipment has expired with millions of dollars left over.

The Food Security and Farmworker Safety Program was intended to help Oregon secure its food supply chains while minimizing health risks for frontline workers, Fisher said. It was administered by the state Watershed Enhancement Board, in collaboration with the state’s Department of Agriculture, Health Authority and Housing and Community Services Department.

Meta Loftsgaarden, OWEB executive director, said 228 farms participated in the program, estimating at least 21,000 farmworkers benefited from enhanced safety measures.

Initially, the program had strict caps in place to ensure there would be enough funding left for late-season crops. Once it became clear that would not be an issue, Loftsgaarden said those caps were lifted and the program was expanded to cover the cost of face masks and other personal protective equipment.

Approximately \$1.85 million was authorized in direct payments for farms. ODA and Oregon State University also partnered to distribute 3 million free KN95 masks for agricultural employers with support from the program.

Despite coming in well under budget, Loftsgaarden said she is confident the program was marketed aggressively for producers to take advantage.

“We never in this state, or in this country, have run a program like this,” she said. “None of us knew up front what the ultimate cost was going to be.”

OWEB funded 305 total projects through the program. The vast majority, 74%, were for field sanitation, as farmers had to roughly double the number of portable toilets and hand-washing stations available to workers.

Some 14% of the applications were for housing modifications to ensure workers’ beds would be 6 feet apart, or separated by

an impermeable barrier such as Plexiglass. The remaining 12% was for providing additional transportation, since workers had to be spaced 3 feet apart inside vehicles.

Hood River and Marion counties accounted for nearly one-third of the applications awarded. The crops that were covered represent a vast swath of Oregon agriculture, including pears, cherries, winegrapes, hazelnuts, sweet potatoes, onions, corn, nursery stock, Christmas trees and hemp.

“We feel pretty confident, reaching out through (the media) and agricultural organizations, that we got to the folks who needed the program,” Loftsgaarden said.

Jonathan Sandau, special assistant to ODA Director Alexis Taylor, said nobody was turned away from the program.

“We were prepared, hopefully, for whatever came at us,” Sandau said. “I think we were able to provide complete assistance.”

Oregon Association of Nurseries to host virtual marketplace

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Oregon Association of Nurseries, which represents nearly 700 wholesale growers, retailers, landscapers and suppliers statewide, announced Wednesday, Jan. 13, it will host a virtual marketplace event in February.

The event, called Nursery Guide LIVE, will take place online Feb. 17-18.

“Nursery Guide LIVE is designed to provide nursery industry professionals with sales and buying opportunities just as the spring shipping season kicks off,” Allan Niemi, the association’s director of events, said in a statement.



Capital Press/File

Oregon Association of Nurseries is planning a virtual marketplace event for February.

The virtual event, Niemi said, is intended to complement rather than replace the annual in-person Far-west Show, which is still tentatively planned for Aug. 18-20 if the pandemic is under control by then.

At the Nursery Guide LIVE event, association

member exhibitors will have the opportunity to showcase their plant offerings, services and supplies.

Many nursery owners are already part of a printed guide published annually called the Nursery Guide book, which typically has 300 pages of listings and

content about Oregon nurseries. February’s virtual event was inspired by the Nursery Guide, but will push the concept further by giving customers the opportunity to interact in the virtual marketplace rather than simply read listings in a catalog.

LUMBER

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“We’re happy to meet the needs of the builders in the county,” he said.

As for the Russells, they have no plans to move and are eager to find new interests. They’ll be doing “any damned thing we want,” Jim said. “My roots are three generations deep here.”

They have three grown children, one of whom still lives in the area.

There also are two grandchildren who they’ll

have more time to spoil.

“I’ve enjoyed the experience” of operating the business, Jim said. “It’s been a delightful experience, actually. I have no regrets at all. It’s been good to me and my family. We’ve been able to live where we wanted to live and raise our family where we wanted to live.”

As for the changing of the guard at 1917 Lumber, both spoke positively.

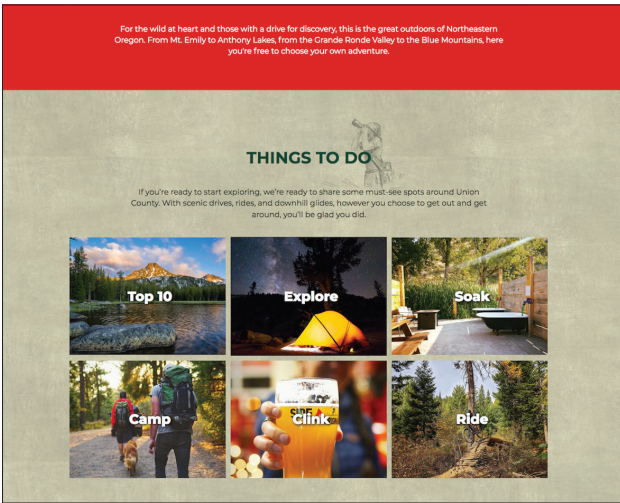
“I wish Kevin and his family well,” Russell said.

“I just want to thank the community and St. Katherine’s Church in Enterprise for welcoming us,” Cod-

dington added. “Everyone has reaffirmed that this was a good decision for my family.”

1917 Lumber is at 301 N. Main St. in Joseph. The

business is open Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 8 a.m. to noon. For more information, call 541-432-1917 or visit its website.



Union County Chamber of Commerce/Screenshot

Union County Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2021, unveiled the new look for its logo and website, which now showcases what to do in the county, along with places to visit and events.

CHAMBER

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we can best interact with our partners; how we can be all-around better in, for, and with our community — how this organization operates and serves Union County.”

The chamber’s new website also fea-

tures more travel-centric imagery and pages for helping people find chamber-affiliated businesses for services from recreation to lodging to dining, including a timely page for local takeout options.

You can visit the Union County Chamber of Commerce’s website at visitunioncounty.org.

GRH

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and loves the region.

New additions to the board include Bob Coulter and Nick Huelter, who replace members and former chairs Brad Trisler (2017-18) and Libby Goben (2019-20). Coulter is a local pharmacist and co-owner of Red Cross Drug Store, Red Cross Institutional Pharmacy and Olive Branch Pharmacy. Huelter is a lieutenant with the Union County Sheriff’s Office and the facility manager of the Union County Cor-

rectional Facility.

The Grande Ronde Hospital Board of Trustees is composed of 13 voting members, which includes 11 volunteer representatives from the community, the hospital medical staff president and the hospital president/CEO.

The board of trustees sets the policy and direction for Grande Ronde Hospital, which includes a 25-bed critical access hospital and 12 primary and specialty care clinics. The board meets monthly with the exception of the months of July and August, and may meet at other times as needed.

TREES

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the planning guideline is implemented on the ground.

However, the decision is being met with some opposition from both environmentalist groups and the timber industry.

Rob Klavins, Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild, said pivoting from the 21-inch standard to a guideline could be “potentially devastating” to the environment, eliminating large trees that store a disproportionate amount of carbon in the forests.

On Wednesday, Jan. 13, Oregon Wild and 32 other organizations sent a letter to the incoming Biden administration, asking to stop the Eastside Screens amendment. More than 100 independent scientists

have also raised concerns about the decision, the groups argued.

“In recent months we have seen proposals on the ground that clearly demonstrate this amendment would result in controversial, destructive, and widespread logging of large and old trees across the region,” the letter states.

Furthermore, Klavins said the public review process for the Eastside Screens amendment was politically driven and rushed, undermining stakeholders’ trust in the Forest Service. He said groups are considering all their options going forward, including litigation.

“I think this is potentially a really huge setback, where we see the old fights about whether or not to log old growth rear their ugly head,” Klavins said. “That doesn’t benefit anybody.”

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