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OLYMPIA 2015

WOLVES, WATER AND TAXES TOP AG AGENDA



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington lawmakers will convene Jan. 12 in the Legislative Building in Olympia for a 105-day session. Wolves, water and taxes will be among the agriculture-related issues.

Legislators convene Jan. 12 for budget-writing session

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press



Washington Gov. Jay Inslee

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Wolves, water and taxes are the headline agricultural issues as legislators prepare to convene for their 2015 session in the Washington State Capitol.

Wolves haven't crossed the "Cascade Curtain" that divides Washington state, but anger at livestock predation has. Rep. Joel Kretz, an Okanogan County Republican, says he hopes legislators will address the management of the apex predators and their impact on livestock producers in Eastern Washington. "I think it's in play this year," he said.

Water always occupies the attention of eastside lawmakers from agriculture-rich districts, though to many westside legislators the issue seems dry. This year, however, eastside and westside lawmakers may form an alliance to promote a statewide multi-billion-dollar water bond.

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Sen. Jim Honeyford, R-15



Rep. Judy Warnick, R-13



Rep. Joel Kretz, R-7



Rep. Brian Blake, D-19

USDA clears GMO tall fescue

Lack of plant pest genes lets agency skip enviro analysis

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

The USDA has cleared the way for cultivation of genetically modified tall fescue without conducting an environmental review of the new crop.

The Scotts Miracle-Gro company developed the glyphosate-resistant turfgrass variety with genes from other plants through a process known as "biolistics," in which a "gene gun" essentially shoots DNA-coated metal particles into the plant cell.

Because the method does not involve the use of a plant pest for gene transfer, the USDA has no authority to regulate the tall fescue, according to a document recently released by the agency.

Controversial biotech crops that are also resistant to glyphosate herbicides — such as "Roundup Ready" alfalfa and sugar beets — were made using a soil pathogen, which required USDA to study the plants before deregulating them.

Scotts began to re-orient its biotechnology program after a regulated variety of genetically engineered creeping bentgrass escaped a field trial in Central Oregon in 2003, which eventually resulted in a \$500,000 civil penalty from USDA.

Since then, the bentgrass cultivar has been stuck in regulatory limbo as the USDA has not approved it to be grown commercially without restrictions.

However, over the past four years the company has persuaded the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service that several biotech varieties of Kentucky bluegrass and St. Augustinegrass did not come under its regulatory jurisdiction.

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Port slowdowns among factors hurting hay exports

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — West Coast hay exporters have lost up to 50 percent of their business since early November because of the longshoremen work slowdown and say their industry can't absorb millions of dollars in losses indefinitely.

On top of the slowdown, a 35 percent devaluation of the Japanese yen and tighter restrictions on residue of genetically modified hay in China have dampened those countries' appetite for U.S. hay.

"We have quite a few headwinds right now and they are affecting us short- and long-term in market psychology. We

can't survive like this forever," said Mark T. Anderson, president and CEO of Anderson Hay & Grain Co. in Ellensburg.

Developing markets such as China and Saudi Arabia will begin viewing the U.S. as unreliable and look elsewhere for hay, Anderson said.

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Balers and harrows harvest first-cutting Timothy hay for export in an Anderson Hay & Grain Co. operation south of Ephrata, Wash., in June.

Dan Wheat/Capital Press

THIS WEEK IN THE CAPITAL PRESS



Washington steps up testing for bird flu in the wild

Officials are asking the public to help find wild birds infected with a lethal strain of avian influenza.

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Beekeeper buzzing about neonic ban

Washington county bars family of pesticides from land it manages.

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