

Ranchers awarded for cooperative work

Don and Diana Robinson go extra mile to care for fish, wildlife habitat

By LEE JUILLERAT
For the Capital Press

LAKEVIEW, Ore. — Lake County ranchers Don and Diana Robinson received the Riley Freeman Award at the Oregon Cattlemen's Association meeting in Bend last month.

The award is given annually by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and OCA in memory of Riley Freeman, a past chairman of the Oregon Cattlemen's Wildlife Committee. While defending private property rights, Freeman also advocated for partnerships between private landowners and state and federal natural resource agencies to promote good land stewardship.

The Robinsons raise cattle on 3,000 acres near Adel,

where his family has ranched since the 1890s. Robinson, 77, is a third-generation rancher. Also involved are his daughter and son-in-law, Holly and Kerry Way.

The Robinsons raise hay and have their own herd of crossbred red and black Angus and Hereford cattle. Some of their land is leased for grazing.

"The Robinsons are actively involved in protecting and enhancing habitat for fish and wildlife on their land," ODFW Interim Director Curt Melcher said at the presentation. He said examples of the Robinsons promoting stewardship of fish and wildlife habitat on their property include:

- Worked with ODFW to assess the distribution, abundance and movements of the federally threatened Warner sucker in Twentymile Creek.

- Worked with Lake County Watershed Council, Bureau of Land Management and ODFW to replace an aging and ineffective fish ladder and provide fish screening at the Dike

Diversion so that sucker and redband trout upstream and downstream access to upper Twentymile and Twelvemile Creeks is restored.

- Allowed ODFW Native Fish Project access to their property to assess the abundance, distribution and seasonal movements of fish, and install antennas on an irrigation canal to assess the timing and magnitude of fish movement.

- Helped salvage redband trout stranded behind their Big Valley ranch head gate. Also worked with ODFW fish biologists and with the Lake County Watershed Council to improve fish passage.

- Improved fish passage on another tributary on their property in collaboration with the Forest Service.

- Restored habitat for mule deer and other wildlife through a 50-acre aspen stand enhancement project in Big Valley and a 100-acre juniper removal project with the Lake County Watershed Council.

"I think it's a win-win,"

Diana Robinson said of working with various agencies to improve habitat. "We don't want to trample streams with our cattle. Just because we're raising cattle doesn't mean we should make another species extinct. We're fine working with all the different agencies."

"Be positive, cheerful, that's important to us," Robinson said of working with the ODFW and other agencies. "We get along quite well with all of the agencies."

"The Robinsons are exceptional people whose legacy will include a long list of actions to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat on their lands," said ODFW native fish research biologist Paul Scheerer. "They are truly a pleasure to work with."

Lake County ranchers Diana and Don Robinson were recently honored for their cooperation with various agencies.

Submitted photo



FSA offers new insurance buy-up

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — A new insurance program offered by USDA's Farm Service Agency allows producers of eligible commodities such as hay, grass seed, fruit and honey to step up coverage for catastrophic losses.

Idaho's FSA programs chief, Jeff Mitchell, said the Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program has traditionally covered up to 55 percent of the established commodity price for yield losses in excess of 50 percent. It was developed as a mirror program to cover commodities that aren't eligible for a Risk Management Agency catastrophic-loss coverage option.

The new NAP buy-up program allows participants to insure up to 100 percent of established commodity price for yield losses of 50, 45, 40 or 35 percent. The deadline for basic NAP coverage for grass

seed and perennial forage crops was Dec. 1, but producers have until Jan. 14 to enroll in buy-up coverage. The NAP deadline for spring-planted crops is March 15.

"It allows a producer to ensure a greater amount of their production. Therefore, smaller losses may be eligible for payment," he said.

Mitchell said the fee for the buy-up is 5.25 percent of a grower's coverage amount. The maximum fee is capped at \$6,563, and pay-outs are capped at \$125,000.

Mitchell said his office has received several calls about the option since Dec. 26, when most producers received postcards notifying them about it.

Mitchell said in some regions, such as Treasure Valley, hay isn't covered by RMA and is eligible for NAP.

Under basic coverage, he said, growers with at least three cuttings could lose an entire cutting without triggering a payment.

Researcher studies nexus between nematodes and verticillium wilt in mint

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Mint fields irrigated with drip systems had significantly smaller populations of nematodes than furrow-irrigated fields, a University of Idaho researcher has found.

That could be an important discovery because large nematode populations are associated with more severe instances of verticillium wilt, mint growers' main disease problem.

Based on samples taken in April and August, nematode populations dropped drastically in every field that used drip irrigation, said UI professor Saad Hafez, who is conducting the trials at the university's Parma experiment station.

Almost all of Idaho's 18,000 acres of mint are furrow irrigated.

Nematodes love water and their distribution is limited with a drip system, said Hafez, whose research is supported by the Idaho Mint Commission and Mint Industry Research Council.

"It makes sense but I never expected that much of a reduction," he said. "The irrigation result was surprising."

Hafez's research is shedding light on the link between nematode populations and increased verticillium wilt severity in mint plants and he's also trying to find ways to reduce nematode populations.

"If you can control nematodes, you can minimize the damage of verticillium wilt somewhat. That's the theory of his research," said Caldwell farmer Tony Weitz.

Based on 200 samples



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Mint grows in a field near Nampa, Idaho, in June. A University of Idaho researcher is shedding new light on the connection between nematodes and verticillium wilt in mint.

Information

Growers interested in finding out more about the results of Saad Hafez's research can contact him at shafez@uidaho.edu or (208) 722-6701, Ext. 237.

of commercial mint fields, Hafez has determined that lesion and pin nematodes are the two main nematode problems in mint fields in Idaho and Eastern Oregon.

Previous research has documented the link between lesion nematodes and verticillium wilt damage in mint but Hafez for the first time documented the damage pin nematodes can cause to mint hay and yields.

"It was very obvious from the results of this research that the pin nematode can affect mint hay yield significantly," he said.

The nematodes make holes that allow the verticillium wilt fungus to get into the plant. The fungus can get there in other ways but the nematodes facilitate it and make the problem much worse, Hafez said.

Hafez has started testing

some chemicals in mint micro-plots to see how effective they are in controlling nematodes and verticillium wilt. The first-year results were promising, he said.

"We got very, very good results and we are really excited about those (compounds)," he said.

As mint ages, verticillium wilt builds up in the ground and eventually gets to the point where mint can't be grown in that spot any more.

"It's the No. 1 killer of mint," said IMC Administrator Roger Batt. "We're trying to ... see if we can possibly get a hold on this in the future."

\$100 million beef processing facility to be built near Kuna, Idaho

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

KUNA, Idaho — J.R. Simplot Co. announced Jan. 6 it will build a \$100 million beef processing plant near Kuna in Southwestern Idaho.

According to a news release, the plant could process a maximum of 1,700 head per day. It will be operated in partnership with Texas-based Caviness Beef Packers under the name, CS Beef Packers, LLC.

Construction of the 300,000-square-foot plant will

begin in the spring and it is expected to open in 2016, according to the news release.

The facility will primarily harvest cull cows and bulls from Northwest dairy farms and cattle ranches throughout the Intermountain West. It will include hide and rendering processing and will also be able to process niche-fed beef programs.

J.R. Simplot Co. Chairman Scott Simplot said the facility will reduce the need for ranchers and dairy operators to ship their animals out of the area for processing.

Strong dollar to challenge global fertilizer demand

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The relative strength of the U.S. economy — and thus the U.S. dollar versus other currencies around the world — presents a head wind for global demand for agricultural fertilizers, which are traded in U.S. dollars.

That will be one of the major market drivers in 2015, making things more challenging for buyers, said Neil Fleishman, senior industry analyst for Green Markets, which specializes in fertilizer market research.

Other market drivers include weaker global economies and lower ag commodity prices, both of which could weaken demand, he told crop advisers during Far West Agribusiness Association's winter conference in Twin Falls Jan. 5.

Another factor is the global oil price, which could reduce



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Jim Fitzgerald, left, executive director of Far West Agribusiness Association, talks with Neil Fleishman, senior industry analyst for Green Markets, before Fleishman's presentation on fertilizer prices and demand for 2015 at the Association's winter conference in Twin Falls, Idaho, Jan. 5.

investments in oil, affect economies and theoretically increase the low price of natural gas, which is used to produce fertilizers, Fleishman said.

In addition, lower ag commodity prices will affect farm purchases and suggests fertilizer prices have peaked, he said.

Global fertilizer demand was strong in 2014, but with falling commodity prices affordability is becoming challenged, he said.

Green Markets has a generally cautious outlook for fertilizer prices into 2015 and sees downside risk to demand estimates.

In general, the company expects global pricing to be firm for potash, neutral for phosphate and bearish for nitrogen.

Demand growth and prices for potash and phosphates could be challenged by lower crop prices, but demand for nitrogen product is likely to stay strong, Fleishman said.

Potash prices dropped off in 2014, creating more global demand. That demand is expected to remain strong but flat. Prices are likely to remain firm with the probable loss of Russia's Uralkali mine. That mine produces 3 percent of global capacity, but there is still plenty of global capacity if it is lost, he said.

The phosphate market should be well supplied in 2015, and phosphate producers are expected to run at reduced

capacity. Demand in India, one of the largest phosphate consumers in the world, was disappointing in 2014 and could be a challenge again in 2015, but modest growth is expected, he said.

Seasonal price trends are anticipated for phosphate, but the price trend is likely sideways, he said.

As for nitrogen, growing global capacity in both ammonia and urea will likely cap urea prices and bring ammonia prices back in line — after rising in 2014 due primarily to global outages with the civil war in the Ukraine and gas curtailments in Trinidad and Tobago, he said.

In North America alone, there are 30 potential ammonia projects, 25 potential urea projects and 10 UAN (urea and ammonia nitrate) projects, with more of those projects likely moving forward than the market expects, he said.