



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Migrating and resident geese can cause severe damage to ag fields, parks, golf courses and greenways

Farmers to meet with officials to discuss crop damage from geese

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Willamette Valley farmers concerned about crop damage caused by geese will get a chance this month to talk it over with the wildlife official who oversee management of the birds.

The Polk County Farm Bureau is hosting a discussion with representatives from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The meeting will be Wednesday, Jan. 28, from 10 a.m. to noon at Rock-N-Rogers cafe, 670 S. Pacific Highway West, in Rickreall.

Crop damage from migrating and resident geese has been a problem for years, but farmers believe the problem is getting worse. They maintain the geese population is healthy, especially cackling Canada geese, and would like more leeway in hunting and hazing them off fields

Migrating geese are managed under a treaty that involves several states, Canada and Native American tribes, which makes tweaking the plan difficult. The Pacific Flyway Management Plan contains a population estimate goal for cackling Canada geese of 250,000 birds. Since 1999, when the plan was last updated, the population estimate for cacklers has exceeded the goal six times, according to USFWS.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act limits hunting to 107 days between March 10 and Sept. 1, according to USFWS. Farmers can obtain "depredation permits" to take 20 cacklers out of season, but changes to hunting regulations have to originate with the Pacific Flyway Council.

Flocks of geese cause significant crop damage. Some producers assign employees to drive from field to field to haze geese.

Wearable technology is farming of the future

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The evolution of information technology will allow farmers to wear a computer in the relatively near future.

Devices such as smart glasses and smart watches with cellular connectivity are the next wave beyond smart phones, offering a host of opportunities on the farm, said Bruce Rasa, founder and CEO of TekWear, an agricultural technology company based in Buford, Ga.

Involved in the operation of his family's fifth-generation farm in western Missouri and with a bent toward innovation, Rasa competed to be one of 8,000 Americans to participate in a Google Explorers project to test Google Glass smart glasses before public launch of the product.

Chosen among 110,000 applicants — only five of whom were connected to agriculture — he set about applying smart glass technology to farming and the agribusinesses that support it, he told the Far West Agribusiness Association's winter conference in Twin Falls earlier this month.

"In 10 years this will be your computer," he said of the glasses.

Farmers will be wearing their computer, and it'll be about as thick as a postage stamp, weigh about the same as sunglasses, and come with shaded and prescription eye-glass options, he said.

For skeptics in the crowd, Rasa suggested they think of the evolution that has brought the same level of technolo-



Photos by Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Darius Robison, left, and Ryan Klingler of Helena Chemical Co. experiment with Google Glasses following a presentation on wearable technology during the Far West Agribusiness Association's winter conference in Twin Falls on Jan. 6.



Bruce Rasa, right, CEO and founder of TekWear, instructs Brett Whitting of Land View Inc. in using Google Glasses following Rasa's presentation on wearable technology.

gy from desktop computers and laptops to iPads and smart phones.

The technology keeps improving, with expanding capabilities, and devices keep getting smaller and cheaper. Farmers no longer have to sit in their office and type; they can stay in the field, he said.

Smart glasses are like wearing a tiny smart phone, but they don't yet have built-in cellular connection and will have to be

paired with a smart phone, he said.

They are equipped with a high-definition camera, audio and visual capabilities and a tiny projector that projects an image onto the retina. The glasses have a 1 gigahertz processor, 1 gigabyte of memory and 16 gigabytes of storage.

A person doesn't have to be within cellular range to use the device. The built-in storage could last all day, with photos,

Online

Visit TekWear at: www.tekwear.com

videos and texts to be uploaded and shared later. The information is automatically backed up on a private Google-plus site, he said.

Like smart phones, a user can go online, talk to others or let them see what he's seeing in the field in real time, but it's all hands-free, controlled with voice commands. And like the smart phone, it will eventually have a growing number and variety of mobile applications, he said.

Two immediate applications Rasa sees for farmers would be for quick and efficient crop scouting and technical support.

If a farmer spots a problem in the field, he can access previous-year yield maps or show an agronomist what he's seeing for an immediate diagnosis, he said.

Likewise, if he has a problem with machinery, he can more quickly get technical support via phone or online to get it running — and his hands are free to work on the equipment, he said.

Getting information to the field and back will be faster, easier and cheaper, he said.

A few of the other current or future capabilities include Glass-to-Glass communication, remote sensing, language translation between farmers and employees and infrared imaging, he said.

Other than the inevitable challenges that come with new technology, wearable technology such as smart glasses will be challenged with privacy issues and data security, he said.

American agriculture sees potential in Cuba trade

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Efforts by the Obama administration to ease trade and travel restrictions to Cuba are a welcome first step to normalizing trade for U.S. ag organizations, which are renewing their own efforts to lift the 54-year embargo.

Direct commercial exports to Cuba of U.S. food products and ag commodities on a cash-advance basis were re-authorized by Congress in the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000. Afterwards, U.S. ag exports to the country began to grow incrementally.

The Cuban government went along with the cash-only terms in hopes that the U.S. business community would pressure the U.S. government to allow the extension of credit to Cuba, said Paul Johnson, owner of Chicago Foods International, executive director of Illinois Cuba Working Group and vice chairman of U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba.

But that didn't happen, and Cuba's imports of U.S. ag products have been declining since peaking in 2008, he said.

Cuba can buy elsewhere on credit, making the U.S. less competitive. And it is politically opposed to buying from a country that has an embargo on it and is likely getting pressure from its trade partners concerning its purchases from the U.S., he said.

U.S. ag exports to Cuba grew from \$139 million in 2002 to \$710 million in 2008, but dropped to about \$349 million in 2013, according to U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

In 2013, U.S. soybean exports to Cuba were 70 percent of Cuba's soybean imports but dropped to 40 percent in 2014, Johnson said.

Other commodities have dropped completely out of the Cuba market, he said.

While Cuban food imports in 2014 decreased across the board, they declined 18 percent from the U.S., compared with only 1.5 percent from Brazil, he said.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. rice has been out of the Cuban market since 2008 — except for \$13,000 worth in 2012 — and wheat has been out since 2012.

The Ag Coalition for Cuba sees greater potential for U.S. ag exports to Cuba if the embargo is lifted and financial credit is allowed, but it would

take time, Johnson said.

Cuba imports 80 percent of its food, about \$2 billion annually, and much of the country's food needs could come from the U.S., Johnson said.

Cuba is the second-largest importer of rice in the Ameri-

cas, importing 600,000 metric tons a year, said Betsy Ward, president and CEO of USA Rice Federation.

Rice is a mainstay of the Cuban diet, with annual per capita consumption of 200 pounds, compared with U.S.

consumption of 27 pounds, she said.

U.S. rice re-entered the Cuban market in 2001, growing sales to \$64 million by 2004. But sales sharply declined after that, falling to zero by 2009, she said.

The Cuban people prefer U.S. rice and the U.S. could capture more than half of Cuba's import rice market within five years if any and all trade restrictions are lifted, she said.

The Cuban people also prefer U.S. wheat and flour, said

Alan Tracy, president of U.S. Wheat Associates.

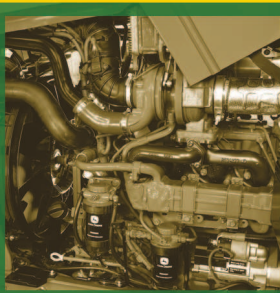
U.S. wheat re-entered the Cuban market in 2002, gradually capturing just under half of the Cuban import market before tapering off to zero in 2011, he said.

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