



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A honeybee crawls outside a hive Dec. 29 in Rochester, Wash., in Thurston County. County commissioners there, citing concern for bees, recently banned neonicotinoids from being applied to county property.

Beekeepers nervous over urban hive proposal

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Beekeeper groups in Oregon are nervous about legislation to establish statewide standards for managing honeybee hives in residential zones.

Supporters of House Bill 2653 say they want the Oregon Department of Agriculture to set baseline expectations for safety because cities have divergent rules for beekeepers in urban areas.

However, representatives of beekeeper groups told lawmakers they're worried that regulations will be onerous for hobbyists and result in new fees to pay for enforcement.

"We know nothing the government does is for free," said Fred Van Natta, a beekeeper from Salem, Ore., who spoke on behalf of the Oregon State Beekeepers Association during a recent hearing on HB 2653.

Beekeepers in residential areas often keep only a handful of hives, said Joe Maresh, president of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association.

Even larger operations that sell honey and offer pollination services often don't generate enough income to cover the cost of maintaining bees, Maresh said.

"Our concern is some of our members would be regulated out of a place to keep bees," he said. "We're really terrified of this."

Rep. Chris Gorsek, D-Troutdale, said he introduced the bill to provide a "streamlined process" for municipalities that want to set beekeeping rules.

"Some places have them, some places don't. Some are more stringent, some are less stringent," he said during a Feb. 12 meeting of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The standards established by ODA would not require beekeepers to pay any fees or subject them to penalties, Gorsek said.

Raine Ritalto, a beekeeper who supports the legislation, said she encountered the problem of disparate rules for beekeepers upon moving from Portland to Gresham.

Portland allows up to 15 hives per residence, while Gresham does not permit any, she said. In other areas, no rules exist for urban beekeeping at all.

Ritalto said she hopes the bill will convince communities to open their doors to beekeeping, which poses little risk to residents.

Few people are actually allergic to bee stings, but complete bans limit small business opportunities and reduce pollination in backyard gardens, she said.

"We've created sterile almost-deserts in many of our cities," said Gorsek.

When asked by lawmakers about the pro-beekeeping intent of the legislation, Maresh of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association said he would nonetheless prefer no new regulations.

Beekeeping organizations would rather work with municipalities to resolve questions over beekeeping and convince them to allow the practice in residential areas, he said.

If statewide standards are developed, beekeeper groups want to participate in crafting them, Maresh said.

New committee defends sheep research station

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

DUBOIS, Idaho — The University of Idaho and sheep industry stakeholders have formed a committee to defend the USDA Agricultural Research Service U.S. Sheep Experiment Station and plan for its future.

USDA has made multiple attempts to shutter the facility — including a recent proposal included in President Barack Obama's federal budget request to close it in Fiscal Year 2016. Congress has thus far kept it open.

Sheep industry leaders emphasize it's the only U.S. facility devoted solely to sheep research, employing 18 federal workers and operating on a \$1.98 million budget. Though USDA owns the facilities, the sheep, including 1,800 head of breeding ewes, belong to the University of Idaho.

Don Thill, UI's director of the Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station, said the committee includes about 45 representatives from UI, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Wool Growers, the Clark County Commission, Idaho's congressional dele-



Photo submitted

Sheep graze at the USDA Agricultural Research Service Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, Idaho. The facility has been proposed for closure in Fiscal Year 2016 in President Barack Obama's proposed federal budget.

gation, the Wild Sheep Foundation and other groups.

The group formed a 10-member subcommittee to draft a document to present to Congress highlighting the importance of the station. Thill said the full committee will review a draft of the report on Feb. 23. Thill said deans from UI and other land-grant universities will reference it when they head to Washington, D.C. in March to lobby Congress and meet with federal agencies, including USDA.

He said the committee may remain intact to help plan the future of the station, once the threat of its closure is addressed.

USDA first proposed the closure to cut costs last June. Peter Orwick, executive director of the American Sheep Industry Association, believes lawsuits against the facility by the conservation group Western Watersheds Project also played a significant role in USDA's decision.

But leaders in the House and Senate argued they

didn't have enough information to support the administration's plans to close the station.

In August, USDA conducted listening sessions to gather feedback on the planned closure.

Orwick said little more happened until December, when USDA was poised to send representatives to Dubois to alert staff of the station's imminent abandonment. Again, Congress blocked the plan, based on its appropriations pow-

er, said Nikki Wallace, a spokeswoman for Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

"Congressman Simpson will fight to keep defending it," Wallace said.

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., has worked closely with Simpson and other station supporters on the issue.

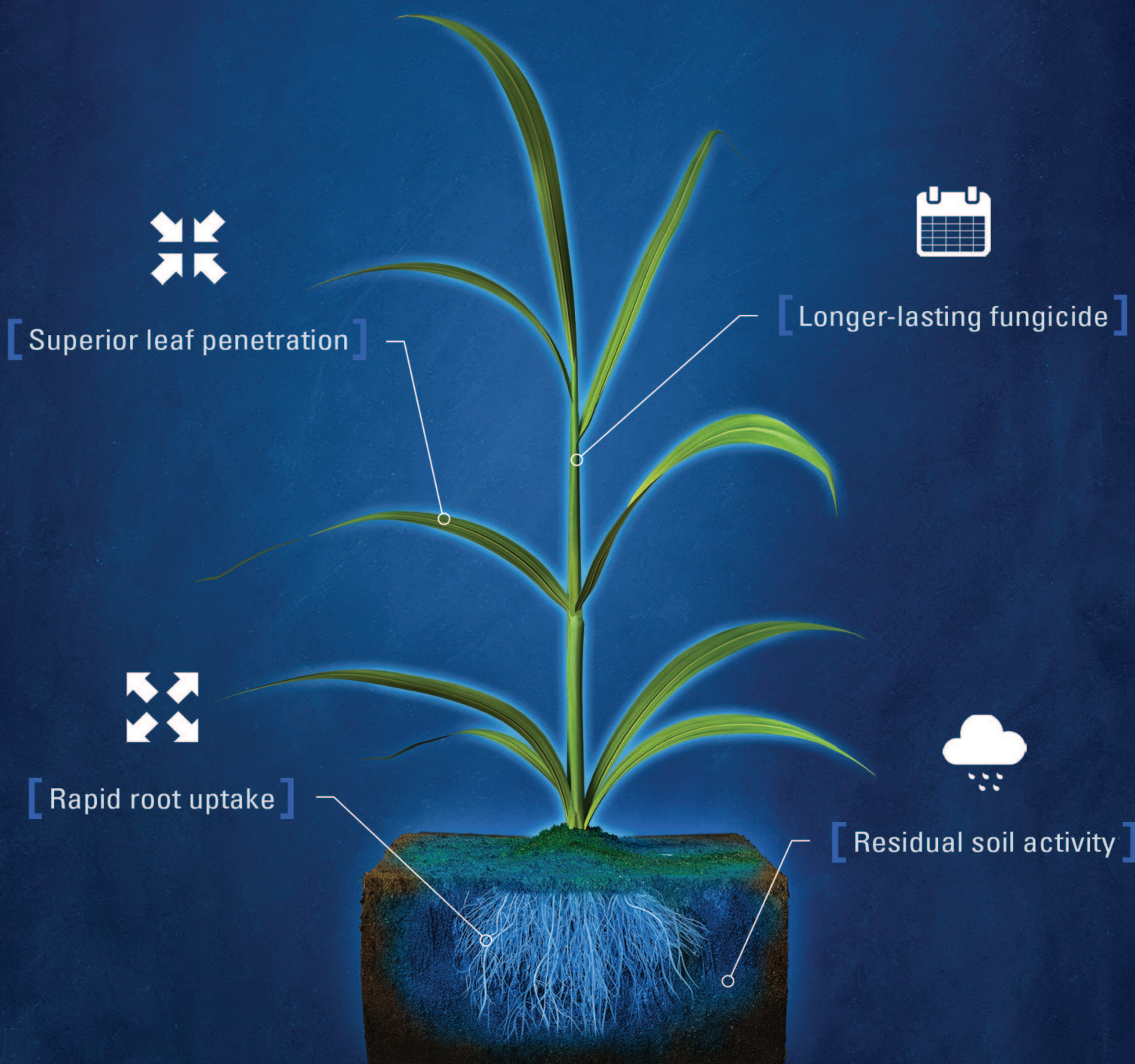
"Greg has heard a lot of concern from sheep producers in Eastern Oregon about the loss of this research without a plan to do it someplace else," Walden spokesman Andrew Malcolm said.

If the station were to close, Thill said USDA has discussed moving some sheep research to a Nebraska facility and its Animal Disease Research Unit in Pullman, Wash., but UI would have to sell its sheep.

A USDA spokeswoman in Washington, D.C., could not be reached for comment.

Bret Taylor, the station's research leader, declined to comment on the future of the facility but said current research there is focused on respiratory infections in domestic sheep that may be passed on to bighorn sheep, grazing effects on wildfire and sagebrush recovery, breed evaluations and alternatives to antibiotic treatments.

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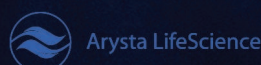


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