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AN ECONOMIC SPLASH

Oregon's vineyards, wineries emerge as an outsized ag force

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

THE DALLES, Ore. —

This is a good place to start talking about the rippling impact of Oregon's "alcohol cluster," as a state economist calls it. Right here, on the welding shop floor of AAA Metal Fabrication with foreman Antonio Morales, where a half-dozen stainless steel fermentation tanks stand in various stages of production.

The Pacific Northwest's booming wineries, joined now by breweries, distilleries and hard cider makers, are clamoring for tanks, and AAA Metal Fab is one of the few places that make them.

"We are not able to meet the demand," company President Chris Parks says. "It's a nice problem to have, let's put it that way. We see enough coming into production that there's going to be years worth of tanks needing to be built."

A January report by Full Glass Research estimated the Oregon wine industry alone bought \$8.4 million worth of stainless steel tanks in 2013 as it scrambled to process increasingly large harvests.

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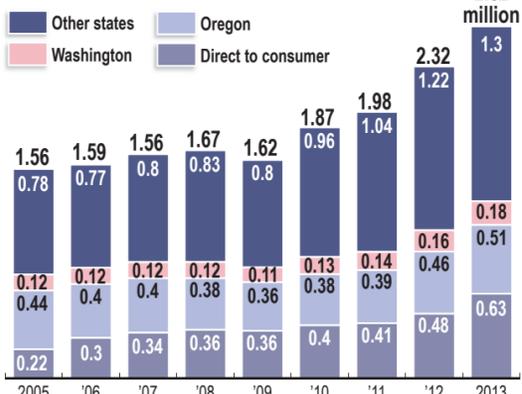
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Jon Casteel, who takes his mobile bottling service to Willamette Valley wineries, monitors the equipment while working at Trisaetum Winery outside Newberg, Ore.

Oregon wineries case sales by market

(Millions of 9-liter cases, excluding international exports)



Source: Full Glass Research

Alan Kenagal/Capital Press



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
An employee places foil tops on corked bottles inside a mobile bottling truck operating at Trisaetum Winery near Newberg, Ore.

Early spring raises frost worries

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PROSSER, Wash. — Above normal temperatures in December and January shot up even more in February, pushing early bud development of fruit trees and waking up other plants and crops.

It was 67.5 degrees at the Washington State University Tri-Cities campus in Richland on Feb. 7, which was a February record at that site, said Nic Loyd, WSU AgWeather-Net meteorologist at the WSU Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center in Prosser.

The average February high at the center in Prosser was 53.5 degrees, which was 6.7 degrees above normal.

"That's pretty impressive. It was 13 degrees warmer than last February, so that's a big change," he said.

It was the warmest February in Prosser since at least 1990, he said.

The February warmth provided the early window fruit tree nurseries needed to finish digging trees for shipment this spring that was cut off early by frozen ground Nov. 10.

"We were done the third week of February. It took us five days. Everyone I talked to (other nurseries) got them out," said Pete Van Well, president of Van Well Nursery, East Wenatchee.

But the warmth also increases the specter of frosts or freezes nipping or doing major damage to buds before tree fruit is set, reducing crops.

Frost protection, field heaters and wind machines were used in the Columbia Basin and Yakima Valley the last week of February and first week of March as nighttime lows dipped below freezing.

Buds are two to three weeks ahead of normal throughout Central Washington, said B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers and the Washington State Fruit Commission in Yakima.

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Wolf report may be starting point for removal from endangered status

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon's latest wolf count is on the agenda March 6 when the state Fish & Wildlife Commission meets in Salem. The commission is due for a briefing on a report that may serve as the foundation for removing gray wolves from

Oregon's endangered species list later this year.

The 2014 report from department wildlife biologists says Oregon has a minimum of 77 wolves in nine packs. More importantly, eight of those packs contained breeding pairs, meaning they had at least two pups that survived to the end of the year.

Under the Oregon wolf plan, the hard-fought compromise that governs wolf conservation and management in the state, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife can propose delisting if the state has four or more breeding pairs for three consecutive

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OR-7, the wolf that wandered across the state to the Rogue River drainage in southwest Oregon, is seen in this file photo. State wildlife managers say at least 77 wolves are in Oregon.

Courtesy of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

THIS WEEK IN THE CAPITAL PRESS



WASHINGTON

Company builds new apple facility
Washington Fruit & Produce Co. began building a new apple packing plant on the north edge of Yakima, Wash.

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CALIFORNIA

Farms to lose federal water again
Many farms in California's Central Valley may have to do without federal water again this year.

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