

Sakuma looks outside family for CEO

Ex-executive with Oregon co-op to lead berry company

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The leadership of Sakuma Brothers Farms examined itself and decided to hire someone from outside the family to guide the berry grower and processor through challenging times, the company's fourth-generation leader, Steve Sakuma, said Wednesday.

"We looked at where we are and where we want to go," he said. "We said, 'We can't fix this internally.'"



Sakuma

Danny Weeden, former general manager and chief financial officer of Oregon Cherry Growers, took over from Sakuma as CEO on Feb. 23.

He's the first person from outside the Sakuma family to head the business, which

traces its roots back to before World War I on Bainbridge Island. The family has been farming in the Skagit Valley since 1935, though during World War II family members were either interned with other Japanese-Americans or serving in the U.S. military.

The change comes as the business continues to be embroiled in sometimes-bitter labor battles waged on several fronts. The state Supreme Court will hear oral arguments March 17 on whether the company's piece-rate workers should be paid separately for

rest breaks. Farm group and labor organizations hope for different outcomes but agree a ruling will have broad implications for the agricultural industry.

Sakuma said the labor strife didn't influence his decision to retire. At age 67, he said he looks forward to spending more time with his family and, in a way, making up for lost time.

He will remain chairman of the board. "I don't know if you ever retire from a family business," he said.

He said he won't inter-

fere with Weeden. "I will make sure I won't cross those lines," he said.

He said he expects a family member to someday lead the company. "That is our long-term vision. That's why we made this short-term decision," he said.

His son Ryan is president of farm operations, but there is no plan of succession, Steve Sakuma said. "He has the right name. He needs to get the level of experience, and he has to perform. It is a business."

Sakuma said the company

searched hard for a CEO before settling on Weeden, who has decades of experience in Northwest agriculture. Weeden spent more than a decade with the cherry growers' co-op.

"He has the family values we felt were very important," Sakuma said. "He understands who we are and who we are trying to be."

One issue facing Weeden will be finding enough workers. The company has encountered opposition to hiring foreign seasonal workers on H-2A visas.

House local food bill passes by slim margin

Opponent says measure downplays ag's contributions

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — A bill hailed by supporters as a way to promote small-scale farming, but panned by critics as unneeded and a put-down of agribusiness passed the House on Friday by a 53-46 vote.

House Bill 1685 would require the State Conservation Commission to form a "food policy forum." The panel would study how public agencies and private organizations could increase production and consumption of locally grown food.

The measure passed the Democratic-controlled House with little Republican support. The bill now goes to the GOP-led Senate.

The bill's prime sponsor, SeaTac Democrat Mia Gregerson, said the forum's recommendations could lead to slimmer and healthier residents.

"This bill is about opportunity, efficiency and building a healthy Washington," she said. "It's about building on existing public-private partnerships and making the most out of our government resources. This forum ensures that every part of the food-related process, from farm to table, is a



Courtesy of Washington House Republican Caucus
In this file photo provided by House Republicans, Rep. Vincent Buys, R-Lynden, speaks on the House floor. Buys said March 6 that a bill passed by the House wrongly implied large-scale agriculture wasn't producing healthful food within reach of all state residents.

complete, integrated and accessible system."

Without offering suggestions, the bill sets down several goals, such as protecting land for sustained production and ensuring everyone has access to nutritious food. It would require Washington State University to participate.

The bill does not specify how many people would be on the food forum, making pinpointing the cost of running the group difficult, according to a report by the Office of Financial Management.

OFM estimated the forum would cost the state \$100,000 in the coming two years and maybe more later, depending on its recommendations.

The State Conservation Commission is the state agency that helps Washington's 45

conservation districts preserve wildlife habitat and farmland.

The ranking Republican on the House agriculture committee, Vincent Buys of Lynden, disputed the idea that some residents don't have access to healthy food grown in Washington.

"We have grocery stores in every area that provide high-quality foods" that come from all parts of Washington state, he said.

"To somehow imply our large-scale agriculture products are unsafe or not as of high quality as some of the locally produced agriculture products, I think does a disservice to the state, and I think is offensive to a lot of those farmers who work those long hours and create a high-quality product. They just don't do it on a smaller scale," he said.

Consultants developing PNW triticale insurance

Industry reps say new federal program would reduce risk to farmers

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Pacific Northwest farmers met last week to hear more about a federal crop insurance program that would allow them to raise more triticale.

"Without that insurance, in the event of a catastrophic situation where they have total or significant loss, the capability of paying their farm loans back to the banks is greatly reduced," said Cliff Parks, AgriLogic consultant.

AgriLogic is developing the program, for approval by the USDA Risk Management Agency.

AgriLogic held meetings in Pendleton, Ore., and Almira, Wash., for growers and industry members to offer feedback on a proposed program.

Jeff Shawver, a Connell, Wash., farmer, usually grows

1,000 acres of triticale, but said he's taking a break from growing the crop this year because of the lack of a crop insurance program. He has a contract to raise more in the upcoming season.

"It would be huge," he said of a crop insurance program, estimating he would increase to 1,500 acres, depending on his rotations. "It's more risky to grow without the crop insurance. You're really dependent on the weather and if the weather's really dry or you have a freezeout, it's really your own dollar. Too many bad years in a row, you're probably not farming any more."

Jason Ludeman, crop insurance agent with Crop Insurance Solutions in Spokane, said more growers in dryland areas are raising triticale as an alternative to winter wheat. It's an area where they don't have many crop choices, he said.

"I think it is easier to grow winter triticale than it is winter wheat," said Bill Schillinger, director of Washington State University's Dryland Research Station in Lind, Wash. "It has excellent winter hardiness, it doesn't have any stripe rust problems, so

you save your money on herbicides."

Schillinger estimated a price of \$136 per ton for triticale compared to \$193 per ton for wheat. Planting in a normal year with moisture, it makes more sense to plant winter wheat, Schillinger said. But when a grower plants triticale late into low seed zone moisture, the crop produces the same amount of biomass as early planted wheat, Schillinger said. If planted into moisture, triticale produces roughly 18 percent more grain than wheat.

"On those years where you can't plant wheat early, winter triticale might be something to look at, especially with a crop insurance package," Schillinger said.

Triticale is a durum wheat-rye cross, but not related to feral rye, Schillinger said. It volunteers like wheat or barley and is easily taken out, he said.

Central Washington Grain Growers hedging manager Howard Nelson expects growers to start growing triticale this summer to establish their yields and production history.

Pesticide worker removals down by one

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Overexposure to pesticides caused eight orders for temporary work removal of pesticide handlers in Washington tree fruit orchards in 2014, according to the state Department of Labor and Industries.

That was one less than the year before and within ranges since a monitoring program began in 2004.

There were nine in 2013, five in 2012, none in 2011 and 2010, 10 in 2005 and a record 22 in 2004. However, the 2004 number was contested by the industry due to procedural problems.

The department's Division of Occupational Safety and Health began a program of testing pesticide handlers for depression of cholinesterase, a blood enzyme needed for healthy nervous systems, in 2004 after the state Supreme Court ruled the agency had to consider testing.

"It's a good program. It's been very successful," said Richard Fenske, director of the Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The percentage of handlers tested who had depressed cholinesterase dropped from 20 percent in 2004 to 7 to 8 percent in 2014, he said. Greater awareness and training because of the program helped the decline, he said.

He agreed with the report that 15 action level cases in 2014 were due to problems handlers have with or using protective gear.

"Wearing rain gear and respirators is not perfect," he

said. "In other industries, we can use ventilation systems or restrict access to certain areas, but we don't have those options in outside work."

The program requires agricultural employers to record hours employees handle cholinesterase-inhibiting, toxicity class I and II organophosphate and n-methyl-carbamate pesticides. Employers must provide cholinesterase blood testing to employees who handle such pesticides for 30 or more hours in any consecutive 30-day period and follow health care provider recommendations regarding pesticide handling practices and medical evaluation.

Employers have to offer the blood testing, but employees are free to decline it, said Pamela Cant, a department industrial hygienist.

All eight temporary removals in 2014 were of handlers employed by five separate tree fruit growers in Central Washington, a department report says.

The report says toxic organophosphates and n-methyl-carbamate pesticides were handled. Those included Lorsban, Sevin and Imidan, Fenske said. Imidan, with its active ingredient phosmet, has replaced Guthion to combat codling moth on apples and pears in May and June, Fenske said.

The EPA banned Guthion in 2012 but allowed growers to use existing supplies through September 2013.

Beside eight workers temporarily removed from pesticide applications for depressed cholinesterase, seven others had depressions requiring workplace evaluations.



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