

# Wash. ag director resigns before confirmation hearing

## Bud Hover cites family needs for leaving post

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington Agriculture Director Bud Hover announced his resignation Monday, the day before a Senate committee planned to hold a confirmation hearing on his appointment.

But Hover's path to confirmation may not have been smooth.

"The agency is a mess," said Sen. Jim Honeyford, R-Sunnyside, a member of the Senate Agriculture, Water and Rural Economic Development Committee, which was to hold the hearing.

Honeyford and Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, sharply criticized the department last fall for working on legislation to regulate manure spreading on crop land without involving lawmakers and farm groups.

Honeyford said that was "somewhat" of a problem for Hover with senators.

"But I really think (the problem) was the whole agency," he said.

Honeyford declined to go into further specifics.

Schoesler said that other than the manure bill, which the WSDA dropped, Hover's tenure was "not real controversial."

Schoesler, however, deflected questions about whether Hover's confirmation was in doubt.

"We didn't have the hearing," he said. "I guess Bud missed his farm, like sometimes I do."

Hover's appointment, though made two years ago by Gov. Jay Inslee, had never been confirmed by the Senate. Under Washington law, a gubernatorial appointment can serve unless rejected by the Senate.

The committee chairwoman, Moses Lake Republican Judy Warnick, said Monday the hearing had long been scheduled.

Efforts to reach Hover for comment were unsuccessful.

Warnick declined to speculate whether Hover faced opposition. She said Hover has made contributions while head of WSDA, particularly in the area of the agency's ability to trace animal diseases.

"I have seen good work come out of his office," she said.

"As a farmer himself, Bud has been a tireless advocate for the average farmer, making sure their concerns were heard at the highest levels of government."

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee

Industry members were looking ahead to who might replace Hover, who said in a letter to the governor that his last day will be at the end of the current legislative session.

Mike Gempler, executive director of Washington Growers League in Yakima and who served on Inslee's transition advisory committee when he became governor, said he's sorry to see Hover go.

"From a labor perspective, he did a good job," Gempler said.

There were other good candidates that the governor could turn to now, Gempler said of the field of prospects that were considered when Hover was appointed.

"To have someone who has run a farm business or has been in the industry an extended period of time is a really important qualification," Gempler said. "That's something that's irreplaceable, but maybe someone else extraordinarily talented would do a

good job. The administration would be better served by someone who comes from the industry."

Nicole Berg, past president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers and a Paterson, Wash., wheat farmer, said Hover will be missed.

"Bud served the wheat industry wholeheartedly," Berg said.

Hover had big issues to deal with, Berg said, citing avian flu, port issues and a dispute between grain exporters United Grain Co. and Columbia Grain Co., and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

State grain inspectors needed police escorts to cross ILWU picket lines to enter facilities to inspect grain. The state patrol escorted inspectors for eight months. The wheat industry criticized Inslee when he pulled the troopers and grain inspectors, putting pressure on the companies to settle with the union.

"I think he put his heart into the job," Berg said of Hover. "It'll be sad to see him go."

Berg hopes Hover's replacement will, like Hover, be a farmer.

In his resignation, Hover cited family needs, including caring for his aging father-in-law, as reasons to return to his family farm near Winthrop in the Methow Valley of Okanogan County.

Hover lost a re-election bid as a Republican county commissioner in Okanogan County in 2012 before he was appointed by Inslee, a Democrat, on April 1, 2013.

"I believe we have made great strides in the past two years in advancing new and innovative solutions to help solve some of the pressing issues facing agriculture today as well as making great strides in improving efficiency in the department," Hover wrote in his resignation letter to Inslee.

Inslee thanked Hover for his work.

"As a farmer himself, Bud has been a tireless advocate for the average farmer, making sure their concerns were heard at the highest levels of government," Inslee said in a department news release.

"He provided key leadership in implementing a state

of the art Animal Disease Traceability program that will better protect the state's vital livestock industry and provided important guidance in the difficult situation we faced with issues at our ports."

Capital Press staff writers Dan Wheat and Matthew Weaver contributed to this story.

### Donald 'Bud' Hover

- **Age:** 60
- **Residence:** Winthrop, Wash.
- **Education:** Washington State University, agricultural education; master's degree in public administration, University of Washington
- **Employment:** Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture
- **Budget:** 2013-2015 biennial operations budget of \$154 million
- **Salary:** \$125,000
- **Employees:** 600-year-round employees in six divisions — commodity inspections, market development, food safety and consumer services, pesticide management, plant protection and administrative services



Capital Press graphic

# Rice growers to plant crop despite water-purchase offers

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

WILLOWS, Calif. — Most rice growers with water apparently plan to plant a sizable crop despite offers from urban districts to purchase their water for as much as \$700 per acre-foot.

California farmers told the National Agricultural Statistics Service they intend to seed rice on 408,000 acres, or 6 percent below the acreage seeded in 2014, the agency stated in a field plantings report released March 31.

A 6 percent decrease might be considered fairly meager considering the lingering uncertainty for many growers as to the quantity and timing of water availability amid a fourth straight year of drought.

Larry Maben, a grower here, said area farmers have been told to expect 75 percent of normal allocations, though their water provider — the Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District — is still working out the details of deliveries. Maben is considering making up the shortfall with well water, though he's wary of the drought's impact on aquifers.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Worker Chuck Pentz chisels a field in preparation for rice planting near Willows, Calif., on March 27. As rice growers in the Sacramento Valley await their federal water allocations, some have considered selling some of their water and leaving some fields unplanted.

"I'm sure it would be pretty tempting (to sell water) because you can get a pretty high price for water," he said. "I think I can still get more from farming rice."

Among urban water agencies eyeing farmers' allocations is the Los Angeles-based Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which decided in early March to buy up to 200,000 acre-feet of Sacramento Valley water in 2015 and to secure conveyance and storage

agreements with the state Department of Water Resources and other water districts.

The going price for water is about \$700 per acre-foot — nearly triple the rate in 2010, when the district purchased nearly 90,000 acre-feet at a cost of about \$250 per acre-foot, said Bob Muir, a Metropolitan Water District spokesman. An acre-foot is enough water to serve two family households for a year.

However, the availability of

water has been complicated by the prospect of reduced allocations, Muir said. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation officials have said they're unsure of whether they'll be able to send settlement contractors along the Sacramento River their full 75 percent dry-year allotments, and State Water Project contractors expect to only receive 20 percent of normal supplies.

"No pun intended but the market may be drying up," Muir said. "They might be seeing reduced allocations. We're not sure how this is going to actually develop with each passing dry day. It's going to be quite a challenge to move any

water this year."

Further, many water districts have restrictions on how much water can be transferred — particularly in dry years, said Charley Mathews, a Marysville,

Calif., grower and USA Rice Federation executive committee member.

"It could be that there won't be an opportunity to sell water," Mathews said.



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## Water shortages reduce plantings

Rice is among many California commodities that will see declines in planted acreage this year, according to NASS' prospective plantings report. Among other field crops:

• Corn growers expect to plant 430,000 acres in the Golden State this year, a 17 percent drop from 2014.

• California's expected 1.23 million acres of productive hay ground is down 11 percent from last year as hay shortages could persist throughout the West. Nevada's anticipated

**Online**

California and Nevada Prospective Plantings for 2015:

[http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/California/Publications/Other\\_Files/201503crppd2.pdf](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/California/Publications/Other_Files/201503crppd2.pdf)

340,000 acres of hay would be 21 percent less than a year ago.

• The 430,000 acres of winter wheat seeded in California is down 7 percent from last year, though another 60,000 acres have been seeded to

Durum wheat — 71 percent above the amount planted in 2014, according to NASS.

• Cotton acreage in California will consist of 110,000 acres of American Pima and 45,000 acres of Upland cotton, each down more than 20 percent from the acreage seeded last year.

• Plantings of dry edible beans (50,000 acres), oats (120,000 acres) and sugar beets (25,000 acres) will see increases this year of 4 percent, 9 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

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