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Calif. won't dictate crops, irrigation amid drought

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — State authorities have no plans to mandate further water conservation efforts on farms even as Gov. Jerry Brown's order that cities slash their water use by 25 percent has invited more scrutiny on agriculture.

Some environmental groups, news outlets and us-

ers of social media expressed astonishment last week that Brown's drought-related water cutbacks mostly spared farmers. Administration officials have maintained that growers have already faced severe cutbacks which caused some 400,000 acres of farmland to be fallowed last summer.

Though political pressure is sure to mount as urban vot-

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ers start feeling the drought's impacts, state officials told the Capital Press they have no plans for more drastic measures such as requiring more

widespread use of drip irrigation or dictating which crops can be grown in certain areas.

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Allan Fulton, a University of California Cooperative Extension farm advisor who specializes in irrigation, checks a drip irrigation system in a Corning, Calif., orchard in this file photo.

Tim Hearden
Capital Press

OSU: Ban will hamper research

Supporters, critics debate impact of local GMO measure

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

Shawn Mehlenbacher, the Oregon State University hazelnut breeder who developed varieties resistant to deadly Eastern Filbert Blight, says a Benton County ballot measure to prohibit genetically engineered organisms would restrict his research.

Joseph Beckman, an OSU biochemistry and biophysics professor, believes he is closing in on a treatment for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, the fatal and incurable nervous system disorder more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. He says the ballot measure would force him to close down his research or somehow move it off campus and out of Benton County.

An OSU evaluation of Measure 2-89, which is on the May 19 ballot in Benton County, says they aren't alone. The university said the measure might effect 120 or more faculty and stop research projects that have attracted about \$18.3 million in outside funding.

Backers of the measure strongly disagree, and describe the measure as protecting the local food system from "international food corporations whose profit motives limit what you eat and the quality of your life."

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THE TEST AHEAD



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Department of Ecology Director Maia Bellon works in her sunlit office in Lacey. Bellon says she set out to mend a troubled relationship between the agency and agriculture.

Ecology director Maia Bellon wins praise for her personal approach, but tough decisions remain

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Maia Bellon had fences to mend with agriculture two years ago, when she became the Washington Department of Ecology's new director.

Since then, many observers — including those who are leery of the agency — say Bellon has improved relations with the state's farmers and ranchers. She's personable, listens and visits ranches and farms.

A year ago, Bellon invited the then-president of the Washington Cattlemen's Association, Vic Stokes, to co-chair with her a committee on agriculture and water quality. If nothing else, the committee has ratcheted down the rancor between Washington's \$706 million cattle industry and the state's most controversial department.

"She's offered something different than we've seen before, and that's the ability to sit down and always have that open process," Stokes, an Okanogan County rancher, told senators at a recent hearing.

But the good feelings may soon be tested.

The Bellon-Stokes committee has been working on what has been termed a "guidance document" that will outline how ranchers can manage livestock to comply with state and federal clean-water rules. As DOE director, Bellon will have the final say on its contents, and the words she chooses may point to where the agency's newfound relationship with agriculture is headed.

"I think they're more friendly," Cattle Producers of Washington President Lee Engelhardt says of DOE leadership. "We'll see if they're sincere."

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Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington Department of Ecology Director Maia Bellon addresses advisory committee members and guests Sept. 11 in Ritzville, Wash.

"I felt it was imperative upon me to reach out to the producer community and say, 'We need to do this work differently and start talking.'"

Maia Bellon, Washington Department of Ecology's new director.

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