

# Newhouse leads letter for guestworker reform

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

Any bills to stem the flow of illegal immigration must be accompanied by reforms that give farmers access to a legal, reliable and stable workforce, 61 members of Congress say in a letter to the House leadership. Freshman Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., whose district has a lot of labor-dependent agriculture, initiated the March 30 letter to House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Va. The letter is

signed by 55 Republicans and six Democrats in agricultural districts across the nation. That's a "fairly impressive start" and shows a movement to bring balance to House immigration reform, said Mike Gempler, executive director of Washington Growers League in Yakima, Wash., in Newhouse's district. Enforcement-only bills are unlikely to make it through the Senate, he said. The letter notes the committee has begun consideration of immigration enforcement legislation such as E-verify, a computer-based means of checking

the employment eligibility of new hires. While supportive of E-verify, the members wrote that enforcement of it without strong reforms to assure adequate farm labor will cause serious problems. "Our farmers and ranchers must have access to a legal and reliable workforce in order to provide the world with a safe and abundant supply of food," the letter states. "It is imperative that any effort to implement E-verify be coupled with a solution to agriculture's unique labor needs. Failure to couple these

reforms together would create an unworkable situation for American agriculture," the letter states. They feared that E-verify enacted alone would eliminate what government, industry and labor unions have estimated as about 70 percent of the nation's agricultural workforce that is in the country illegally. The current H-2A foreign guestworker visa program for agricultural workers is unworkable and supplies only 10 percent of agricultural workers and doesn't provide for dairy at all, the letter states.

Solutions range from amending the H-2A program to replacing it with a new program. Signers of the letter include California Democrats Jim Costa and John Garamendi and California Republicans David Valadao, Devin Nunes, Doug LaMalfa, Jeff Denham and Ken Calvert. Signers include Oregon Democrats Suzanne Bonamici and Kurt Schrader. There's also Idaho Republican Mike Simpson and Washington Republicans Newhouse, Cathy McMorris Rodgers,

Dave Reichert and Jaime Herrera Beutler. Other signers are from New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Arkansas, Colorado and Nevada. There were no signers from Texas or Arizona. Gempler said he's disappointed and surprised by that. A well-designed guestworker program will help control illegal immigration, he said.

## Stripe rust forecast 'severe' for Pacific Northwest wheat

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

Experts say the likelihood of stripe rust outbreaks in the Northwest is severe, and they advise wheat farmers to monitor their fields.

USDA Agricultural Research Service research geneticist Xianming Chen upped his stripe rust forecast from moderate to severe after finding the wheat fungus in research plots in Walla Walla, Wash.

The relatively warm winter allowed stripe rust to survive, Chen said.

Chen said this year will not be as bad as 2011, when a warmer winter and heavy fall infections promoted the disease throughout the Northwest. Unusually early cold weather in November 2014 killed the rust in much of northern Washington, but the disease did survive in the southern portion of the state, he said. The fall infection was not heavy, he said.

This year may be similar to 2010, when rust started normally, but weather conditions in May and June were wet and cool, allowing rust to develop quickly.

The best conditions for rust are about 50 degrees Fahrenheit at night and 65-70 degrees during the day, Chen said.

"At this point, things are holding, but if we continue to have this type of warm weather, the pathogen's going to like it," Oregon State University Extension cereals specialist Mike Flowers said. "We're just going to continue to have to fight it. It might be another tough year where we have to make multiple applications (of fungicide) in some areas to control rust."

Flowers has received reports of rust in Sherman County.

Chen recommends farmers plant spring wheat varieties that are resistant to stripe rust, if



Courtesy of Chris Mundt, OSU A "severe" warning for stripe rust has been issued in the Northwest. Experts urge growers to scout their fields for the fungal disease.

possible. He acknowledged that farmers also consider other factors, such as yield and quality.

Winter wheat farmers should include a fungicide with a herbicide if they have a variety that's susceptible to stripe rust or if they see rust in their fields, Chen said.

Tubbs 06, Xerpha and Clearfield 102 are moderately susceptible varieties, Chen said.

Flowers hopes farmers continue to plant more resistant varieties, noting the OSU variety Bobtail has strong resistance.

He recommends growers scout their fields and speak with neighbors to find out what's happening.

"If rust starts to show up and you've got susceptible varieties, that's when you need to be particularly attentive and get prepared to make fungicide applications," he said. "When it pops up, you need to pull the trigger and make an application."

## Apple commission discusses GM position

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The Washington apple industry opposed USDA approval of genetically-modified apples, not on the science but on potential damage to apple sales.

But now that propagation and sales of GM apples has been approved in the U.S. and Canada, the Washington Apple Commission is discussing its future position.

Commission President Todd Fryhover has said the commission will need to educate the public that Washington apples are not GM apples, but at a March 24 commission meeting he said: "We support sound science is our position."

Washington growers may need to plant GM apples for scab resistance or some other reason 10 years down the road, he said.

"There will come a day when we have to address it and there are a lot of foreign countries that won't accept GE products, period," he said.

The apple industry has benefited tremendously from science and it's "crystal clear" the science behind GM apples is sound, Fryhover wrote in a recent opinion piece in Good Fruit Grower magazine.

In today's world of instant communications through

hand-held devices, public opinion can be shaped on emotion and scant factual information, Fryhover noted.

More assets need to be allocated toward increasing fresh apple consumption than defending merits of GM apples, he wrote. He questioned the need for GM apples, saying the industry is providing higher quality apples without genetic modification.

While GM apples won't be on the market for several years, they raise many marketing questions and how the industry differentiates and educates is key in cost to the grower, Fryhover wrote.

In the meeting, Fryhover said a dozen environmental organizations are asking fast food restaurants for commitments to not buy genetically-modified apples and potatoes.

"Do we support labeling?" he asked commissioners.

"Technical groups have to advocate for sound science, but as marketers we have to take retailer leads and retailers will tell us to find sound consumers," said West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, and a commissioner.

"The industry needs to be for sound science, but we don't have a lot of leverage to do other than what retailers say," he said.

## Sprayer drone suited to awkward terrain

### Unmanned helicopter is tested for pesticide applications

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

The possibility of using unmanned aerial vehicles for pesticide spraying is more than just hype, according to an agricultural engineering expert.

The excitement over drones has led farmers and entrepreneurs to conjure up many potential uses for the devices, said Ken Giles, a biological and agricultural engineering professor at the University of California-Davis.

"When you have a new hammer, everything looks like a nail," he said at the recent Precision Farming Expo in Salem.

However, Yamaha's R-Max helicopter shows promise in spraying pesticides in areas that are challenging for conventional ground and aerial applicators, Giles said.

Wine grapes and other specialty crops are sometimes grown in irregular configurations on slopes and in the vicinity of trees — awkward conditions for existing spray systems but ideal for unmanned aerial vehicles, he said.

Tests conducted in 2013 and 2014 show that the UAV can treat 3 to 7 acres per hour, compared to an acre per hour or less with ground-based sprayers, Giles said.

In terms of chemical deposition on the crop surface, the



Mark Koball of DropCopter, left, speaks with Steve Markofski of the Yamaha Motor Corp. next to the Yamaha RMax drone display at the Precision Farming Expo in Salem.

unmanned helicopter performed the same as aerial and ground applications, he said. Chemicals were applied more uniformly with the UAV compared to ground spraying because of the air movement caused by its rotors, Giles said.

A drawback of the technology is that the helicopter can only hold up to 4.2 gallons of liquid, he said. The capacity constraints will necessitate working with concentrated levels of chemicals.

"We are sensitive to payload limitations and this will certainly be a factor in any spraying that we do," Giles said.

The UAV is already used by farmers in Japan on rice fields but the university is conduct-

ing studies in the U.S. to assure pesticide and aviation regulators that the device can be used safely here.

Using ground-based robots in specialty crop production also presents opportunities but such technology continues to face practical challenges, said Qin Zhang, director of Washington State University's Center for Precision Agricultural Systems.

Advanced robots are used in manufacturing but agriculture poses unique problems for such machines, he said. Identifying and harvesting fruit, for example, is difficult in a biological system.

"Every tree is different, every apple is growing in a different location and orientation,"

Zhang said.

The mechanism for picking, while simple for a human, requires twice as much force for a robot and thereby will cause more bruising, he said.

Apart from the technical hurdles, robots need to be affordable and simple to operate for users, Zhang said.

Even so, the declining availability and increasing cost of labor means researchers must tackle these issues before the situation is dire.

For example, by the time an automated asparagus harvester was developed, the U.S. asparagus industry was already greatly diminished, Zhang said.

"We cannot wait, we need to react now," he said.

# INSURANCE

FOR WHATEVER CROPS UP IN IDAHO, OREGON & WASHINGTON

FARM INSURANCE

Call for a review & proposal  
**509-483-3030 or 800-326-8583**

5727 N. Division St.  
Spokane, WA 99208

www.norhtowninsurance.com

Experienced Insurance Agent Opening!

- Understands the farm/ag field
- Quoting multiple carriers to create the best package
- Highest level of professionalism and integrity
- Market to business owners and research their needs
- Lucrative compensation options!

Email Lisa LeBlanc - lisa@norhtowninsurance.com

Do You Have the Right Coverage?

With thin profit margins, it's more important than ever to have the right crop insurance coverage.

For details contact:

Rain and Hail Northwest Division

200 North Mullan Rd  
Suite 111  
Spokane, WA 99206  
1-800-967-8088

www.RainandHail.com

If you grow it, we'll help protect it!

No matter what you specialize in, COUNTRY has got you covered from planting to harvest. We offer great coverage for your farm vehicles, too. Let us put our experience and financial strength to work for you.

Brian Donne

Corvallis, OR  
**541-757-0899**  
brian.donne@countryfinancial.com

Policies issued by COUNTRY Mutual Insurance Company, Bloomington, IL

Customized Insurance Plans to fit your farming operation

Clarkston, WA | Genesee, ID | Nezperce, ID  
(509) 758-5529 | (208) 285-1661 | (208) 937-9816

http://stonebrakermcquary.com

Exclusive Crop Insurance Services

Jud Taylor  
(208) 790-1618

Lisa Prado  
(208) 790-3722

PO Box 1630  
1525 Idaho Street  
Lewiston, Idaho 83501

Fax (888) 221-0318  
ecis2009@gmail.com

Make one of these companies your choice for insurance coverage every season.

(CALL 1-800-882-6789 TO INCLUDE YOUR INSURANCE AGENCY HERE.)