

Tax relief proposed for urban farms

Legislation would reduce property tax rates

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Farmers who raise crops or livestock in urban areas could obtain property tax relief under an Oregon bill that would create urban agriculture incentive zones. Supporters of House Bill 2723 say that urban farmers improve food security and teach city dwellers about agriculture but face a high property tax burden. The legislation would allow cities and counties to designate zones where undeveloped land is subject to lower property tax rates so long as it's used for agriculture for a minimum of five years.

Farmland in urban areas already qualifies for deferred property taxes, but HB 2723 creates a new system in which growers could benefit from lower rates right away, rather than in the third year of farming as currently required, said Ivan Maluski, policy director of the Friends of Family Farmers group. Also, growers would not have to pay back taxes under the new program if they decide to stop producing crops or livestock after five years, he said. Maluski said the bill encountered some concerns about enforceability and land use implications, which are addressed in a proposed amendment. The revised language clarifies that HB 2723 only relates to property taxes and doesn't affect the inventory of land available for development within urban growth

boundaries, he said. The amendment also lays out "checks and balances" that specify how local governments will assess properties that take advantage of the urban agriculture incentive zones, Maluski said. If only a portion of a property is used for farming, the special assessment would only apply to that area under the bill. The Oregon Farm Bureau's main concern with the bill is that it not undermine the existing property tax deferral system for farmland, said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the group, during an April 7 hearing on the bill. Because the urban agriculture incentive zone idea is novel, the program should be subject to a sunset in roughly five to six years so that lawmakers can evaluate how it's performing, she said.

Study: Mental evals predict livestock judging success

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press



POCATELLO, Idaho — Written psychological assessment results can be used to accurately predict future performance among students competing in collegiate livestock judging, according to recently published research led by Idaho State University.

The paper, which was published in the March edition of North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture, was authored by Michael Meyers, an associate professor of sports science at Idaho State University, and Texas A&M University sports psychology faculty members Anthony Bourgeois and Arnold LeUnes.

Meyers and his colleagues had 161 male and 104 female competitors from 13 top collegiate teams complete six written psychological assessments, evaluating characteristics such as mood, motivation, attitude, performance anxiety, concentration, team emphasis and confidence. The assessments were collected throughout the past two decades.

Though the researchers were provided no information about participants' knowledge of livestock or judging performance history, they matched coaches' ratings of competitors' abilities 88 percent of the time based solely on mental assessments.

Meyers, a former livestock judging competitor with Oklahoma State University, said livestock judging competitions can last up to eight hours and require participants to maintain concentration and endure high pressure.

"Agricultural departments take this as seriously as somebody in basketball," Meyers said, adding top teams offer scholarships to participants. "The better the judging team is, the more notoriety the college of agriculture gets, which helps with recruitment."

Meyers believes coaches could use the tool for recruitment, making tough decisions on how to rank mid-level competitors and to identify strengths and areas in which participants need more work.

Blake Bloomberg, the 2014 livestock judging coach of the year with Oklahoma State, said

Michael Meyers, associate professor of sports science at Idaho State University, has published research on livestock judging competitors.

deciding between a few competitors for the final slot on a five-person judging team is among his most difficult tasks. He's intrigued by Meyers' research.

"The typical contest starts at 7 a.m. and probably gets done at 5 p.m. or 6 p.m.," Bloomberg said. "It's pretty mentally draining. You can't talk to anybody during that time, and you're pretty much on your own."

Mental assessments have been more often used to evaluate potential among sports athletes, LeUnes explained. He said his past research with professional baseball demonstrated psychological assessments could improve a scout's ability to choose a successful player by 6 percent. He also used assessments to predict with 87 percent accuracy which Texas A&M football players would drop out of school.

"Certainly, it was a stretch to think it might apply to judging in the (livestock) context that we're talking about," LeUnes said.

He's come to believe sports psychologists should call themselves competition psychologists.

"The same kinds of traits that make you a good judge would be the same kinds of things that would make you a good athlete," LeUnes said.

Ron Richard, adviser to University of Idaho's livestock judging team, looks for students with the desire to succeed and willingness to put in the time and effort.

UI, which doesn't give livestock judging scholarships, has a judging club and offers a basic livestock evaluation class, which prepares students to join the elite team as juniors or seniors.

Commission delays decision on proposed Idaho ethanol facility

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — Canyon County commissioners have delayed a decision on a proposed ethanol facility near Greenleaf until May 5.

After a seven-hour public hearing April 7, commissioners said they needed more time to digest the evidence and complex issues surrounding the project, which would use barley and tubers as feedstock.

The project, which would include a food-processing plant and fertilizer processing facility, would make \$26 million worth of purchases annually from Idaho's farm sector, said the applicant, Sot Chimonas, chief operations officer of Demeter Bio-Resources.

The county's planning and zoning commission denied a request for a conditional use permit to build the ethanol facility and Demeter appealed that decision to the commission.

No CUP is needed to build the food-processing and fertilizer components of the project.

Two of the three commissioners said they were leaning toward voting against the CUP request.

The hearing room was packed with people opposed to the project who wore red "No" tags signifying their opposition to the ethanol facility, which they claim would cause noise, odor, traffic and pollu-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

People opposed to a proposed ethanol facility near Greenleaf, Idaho, wear red "No" stickers during a public hearing on the project April 7. Canyon County commissioners delayed making a decision on the project until May 5.

tion problems and negatively impact property values.

Commissioners Tom Dale and Craig Hanson both said they like the potential jobs and economic development such a project could bring to the county. But they also said it is hard to ignore the concerns of the large number of people who have testified against the project over five public hearings.

"I find myself coming down on erring on the side of caution," Dale said. "I'm just not ready to go down the road

of authorizing the ethanol side of the plant."

Commissioner Steve Rule said he was leaning toward supporting the CUP request.

Commissioners unanimously agreed to postpone their decision to give them more time to mull over the facts.

Chimonas said 70 percent of the feedstock for the project, which would produce high-value food ingredients, would come from barley and the rest from a hybrid tuber-bearing crop called Sun

Spuds.

Tina Wilson, executive director of the Western Alliance for Economic Development, said the \$60 million project would conservatively result in an additional \$350,000 in property taxes for the county.

She also pointed out that agriculture and agribusiness provide 32 percent of base sales and 23 percent of jobs in the county.

"Food processing plants and businesses such as Demeter Bi-Resources are a part of that foundation," she said.

'Industrial reserve' bill criticized for threatening some farmland

Legislation allows counties to designate areas for large-scale development

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A proposal to allow industrial development outside urban areas in several Oregon counties is touted as economically stimulative, but opponents claim it threatens statewide land use planning.

Senate Bill 716 would permit three counties near Portland to designate a "large-lot industrial reserve" of 150-500 acres without having the property within an urban growth boundary, as is currently required.

Proponents say the legislation would allow counties to seize on opportunities for high-tech development that are currently barred by a lack of adequate large industrial sites.

"Generally, we don't have big blocks of those," said Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, who introduced the bill.

The Oregon Farm Bureau opposes the bill because large tracts would take farmland out of production, changing the character of the surrounding areas.

Such shifts lead to increased development pressures and prompt agribusiness suppliers to leave as they lose their base of farm customers, said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for OFB, during an April 6 hearing before the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Re-

sources.

"We're not getting more high value farmland in Oregon," she said. "It's a limited resource we need to protect judiciously."

The original version of SB 716 would affect Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, but a proposed amendment would substitute Columbia County for Washington County in the pilot program.

Tootie Smith, a Clackamas County commissioner, said the bill includes a mitigation component under which the total acreage of urban and rural reserves within each county would remain unchanged despite the new industrial designations.

Making large lots available for development is critical to attract job-creating companies that are seeking to build new facilities, she said.

"By having this tool at our disposal, Clackamas County can better market itself," Smith said.

However, several opponents disputed whether Portland metropolitan counties face a scarcity of industrial land.

Tim Knapp, mayor of Wilsonville, said there are currently more than 7,800 acres of industrial property available in the metro region, but some portions aren't adequately supported with roads,

sewers, water pipelines and other infrastructure.

"We're very concerned that adding more acres competes with the scarce resources that already are available," he said.

Companies seeking to develop large tracts of more than 100 acres are actually rare and considered the "white whale" of economic development," said John Williams, deputy director of planning at the Metro regional government.

Lawmakers who want to spur jobs should instead focus on funding infrastructure within existing industrial parcels, he said. "The real focus in our region is to make them development-ready."

Opponents also criticized the bill for undermining the land use planning process, which allows for long-term decisions on where industrial zones should be located.

Urban and rural reserves that set out areas for development and farmland preservation were created with public input and were subject to litigation and a legislative settlement last year.

Through that process, it was decided that land south of the Willamette River near Wilsonville, known as French Prairie, should be a rural reserve due to the burdens that development would place on transportation and water, said Charlotte Lehan, a councilor for the city.

Lehan said SB 716 is meant to undermine those decisions to allow for the development of the area.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Ron DeLay plants potatoes about nine miles southwest of George, Wash., March 26. He always flies a U.S. flag atop his tractor cab to honor U.S. troops serving overseas.

Spud planter says GPS has dulled abilities

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

GEORGE, Wash. — Ron DeLay says he's gone soft. GPS has spoiled him for the last 10 years or more when it comes to planting potatoes.

"They use to call me 'bubble butt' because I could plant real straight and it was all in the feel of the field," says DeLay, 58, of Royal City.

"I would mark out a line and follow it, eyeball and seat of my pants. I could feel the contour of the land and keep it (the tractor) straight. A lot of guys couldn't do it. It was a gift I had," he says.

But now, DeLay reads the newspaper some as he plants since GPS, the satellite navigation Global Positioning System, keeps him on track.

"It's a good thing I was younger when I did that," he

says. "I would go home and I couldn't sleep because I was all knotted up in my back from holding the line."

DeLay has been planting potatoes and managing them and doing other jobs for Jerry Allred, a Royal City grower, for 34 years.

DeLay flies a U.S. flag from the cab of his tractor.

"As long as there's troops dying overseas, I'll fly the flag," he says. "I'm the kind of guy that if I see a soldier I go up and thank him for his service."

His potato planting usually runs March 21 to April 21. This year was no exception, even with the early spring. DeLay started planting 900 acres on March 21. Ranger Russets are first and later Umatilla Russets.

"We buy our seed out of Canada, Montana and north of Spokane, 90,000 pounds.

Those are colder areas where disease and bugs are less. We buy a year ahead of time. It's shipped down and we cut it ourselves," he said.

Their production is contracted with ConAgra Foods, in Quincy, for french fries.

The Allred Farm is planting the same amount of potatoes as it did last year, despite the work slowdown at West Coast ports that cost the industry \$48 million of lost frozen potato product exports in November, December and January alone. That's according to the Washington Potato Commission.

"ConAgra was full. Farmers couldn't get rid of them. Some were starting to rot. Japan couldn't get french fries," DeLay said. "But farmers are on contract. They get their money whether they sit or not."