

GMO control area proposal dies in Oregon House

Concept may be revived before end of session

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A bill to create “control areas” for increased regulation of genetically modified crops in Oregon has died in committee, but the basic idea may be revived.

House Bill 2674 would require the Oregon Department of Agriculture to designate control areas where biotech

crops would come under new restrictions, such as isolation distances to prevent cross-pollination with other crops. Genetically modified organisms growing outside control areas would be “subject to eradication.”

Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, said the bill was too narrow in scope to keep alive, since Oregon agriculture

faces other conflicts between crops that don’t involve genetic engineering.

For example, growers have similar cross-pollination concerns about canola and related brassica species and between the newly legalized crops of hemp and marijuana, he said.

While Clem allowed the bill to die during an April 21 work session of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Wa-

ter, he said there will be an ongoing effort to create a tool for ODA to resolve such disputes.

It’s possible such a proposal will be considered by the House Rules Committee, where bills can stay alive until the end of the legislative session.

Oregonians for Food and Shelter, an agribusiness group that supports biotechnology, is heartened that HB 2674 has died in committee

and plans to oppose similar concepts, said Scott Dahlman, its policy director.

“Coexistence is not enhanced by directing a state department to tell farmers what they can grow and how they can grow it,” he said.

Farmers who own land that’s often been in their family for generations can’t simply move their operations to grow a genetically engineered crop within a designated control area, Dahlman said.

It instead supports ODA conducting mediation to resolve such conflicts.

Friends of Family Farmers, which supports GMO regulation, favored a more specific mechanism for dealing with biotechnology conflicts, said Ivan Maluski, the group’s policy director.

“Our preference would have been that we focused very narrowly on the issues surrounding genetic engineering,” he said.

Maiden season for new apple line

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

EAST WENATCHEE, Wash. — McDougall & Sons Inc. began operating its new multi-million dollar apple packing line eight months ago, just in time to help handle its share of the industry’s largest crop on record.

The 39-year-old Wenatchee company typically packs about 3 million 40-pound boxes of apples in a season but this year had an extra 500,000.

The new line, at double the speed of the old line, enables the company to pack the additional volume while maintaining two, eight-hour shifts per day, five days a week, said Bryon McDougall, director of operations.

Without it the company would have extended its shifts to 10 to 12 hours, six days a week, costing more money, he said.

Each shift operates with 105 to 110 employees and an additional 40 in repacking, said Brenda O’Brien, packing manager.

“It’s going quite well. We’re still figuring some things out and have identified some areas for improvement. In general, it’s working like we thought,” McDougall said.

The line began running in early September in the company’s new 527,000-square-foot North Baker Flats facility north of East Wenatchee.

There’s racked storage for 400,000 boxes of packed apples that ship out through 15 truck loading bays. There’s controlled atmosphere storage for 48,000



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Brenda O’Brien, packing manager, on new North Baker Flats apple packing line of McDougall & Sons Inc., April 9. Lighting is augmented by 200, 2-by-2-foot skylights.

bins of apples. The company has capacity for another 152,000 bins in facilities elsewhere.

A new, high-tech cherry line is being built in an 82,000-square-foot room for this year’s cherry season. With Unitec optical sizer-sorters it will be 20 to 25 percent faster and reduce sorting labor by at least 50 percent, McDougall said. There will be 20 lanes for red cherries and 10 lanes for Rainiers and organic reds.

The new apple line is in a 157,000-square-foot room that has space for an additional apple line of the same size in the future.

The new apple line was built to stay competitive and handle an anticipated 20 to 25-percent

increase in apple volume in five years from the company’s orchard expansions. It saves 25 to 30 percent in labor over the old line at Olds Station north of Wenatchee that now is being used exclusively to pack organic apples.

The new apple line is capable of receiving 80 to 90 bins of apples an hour, but more often runs at 60 to 70 given variability of trays, bags and clamshell packaging, McDougall said.

That’s still 50 to 75 percent more fruit than the Olds Station plant, he said.

“We’ve definitely increased productivity but maybe not to the level we anticipated,” he said. The line packs 18,000 to 20,000 boxes per day, double

that of Olds Station.

A big part of the increased speed are two, Dutch-made Greefa sizer-sorters that take 16 images of each apple in a second and instantaneously sort for size, color and external and internal defects.

Different sorting profiles are followed depending on how rough or clean the fruit is. Line speed, flume water temperature, brush beds and many other aspects are controlled by an operator overlooking the entire line and using several large monitors.

Four robotic arms move packed boxes to pallets for shipment, reducing manual stacking 75 percent. Each arm can handle four different sizes and grades of fruit simultaneously.

Idaho lawmakers approve rule lifting elk import restriction

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — After significant debate and several votes, Idaho lawmakers approved a rule that commercial elk breeders say will help their industry be more competitive but opponents argue will endanger wild elk and other animals in Idaho.

The rule lifts the state’s ban on domestic elk from states where the meningeal worm is endemic. The parasite can cause fatal neurological problems in elk, sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas.

The rule change also requires elk to be treated for meningeal worm within 30 days of being shipped to Idaho.

Commercial elk breeders told lawmakers they needed the restriction to be lifted so they can compete for genetics and elk with other Western states that don’t have the restriction.

Those who supported the rule argued that elk are a dead-end host for the parasite, the same as sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas.

“Why isn’t there a meningeal worm restriction on those species?” Shawn Schafer, executive director of the North American Deer Farmers Association, asked lawmakers. “It is because science tells us that just like elk, they are a dead-end host.”

Ada County Fish and Game League representative Forrest Goodrum, who led the opposition, said lawmakers were presented with evidence that shows the worm can be passed on by elk in Idaho and there is no 100 percent effective de-worming treatment but he believes they were confused by the widely conflicting testimony presented during public hearings.

Goodrum said lifting the

import restriction was foolhardy.

“Elk are not a dead-end host,” he said.

The rule change was opposed by Idaho Department of Fish and Game Director Virgil Moore, who told the Idaho State Department of Agriculture in a letter that the department is “very concerned about the potential importation of meningeal worm.”

The Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee rejected the rule but the House Agricultural Affairs Committee approved it. In Idaho, a pending rule that doesn’t involve a fee increase only needs one committee to approve it for it to become final.

Rep. Ken Andrus, the House ag committee chairman, who voted in favor of the rule, said the fact that sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas can also carry the worm but there are no import restrictions on those animals played an important role in the debate.

Andrus, a Republican sheep rancher from Lava Hot Springs, said he was convinced by testimony and the state veterinarian that Idaho lacks the intermediate host, a mollusk, necessary for the worm to complete its life cycle and be passed on.

“It really came down to whether or not we were basing the rule on science or whether (some people) have an aversion to domestic elk,” he said.

Idaho Wool Growers Association Executive Director Stan Boyd, who represented commercial elk breeders on the issue, said other Western states have lifted similar restrictions “and there’s been no problem in those states with meningeal worm. Idaho did not break new ground here.”

New Calif. FFA leaders strive to meet challenges

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

FRESNO, Calif. — California’s new FFA president says the youth organization has a key role in bringing agriculture’s message to urban residents amid all the challenges facing farming.

“The members of FFA are going to be the ones who are the future farmers,” Joelle Lewis of San Luis Obispo said in an interview moments after being announced as the new state leader for the next year.

“I’m just excited to meet all of the members and get to know” fellow leaders, said Lewis, who was the South Coast Region president for 2014-2015.

Lewis leads a slate of new officers elected at the 87th annual California FFA Leadership Conference, held April 18-21 at Fresno’s convention center complex. More than 5,000 high school agriculture students attended the conference, whose theme was “Reach Out.”

Lewis was among 59 candidates for state office, including 35 who were interviewed and 12 who were named as finalists. She is joined by new Vice President Sydney Sousa of Tulare, Secretary Breanna Holbert of Lodi, Treasurer Trevor Autry of Nipomo, Reporter Danielle Di-ele of Merced and Sentinel Tim Truax of Turlock.

In remarks during the last of six rock concert-like general sessions in SELLAND ARENA, Lewis urged fellow members to take whatever inspired them during the four-day conference back to their hometowns.

“Whatever that moment was, don’t let it stay here in SELLAND ARENA,” she said. “Use what you heard to help everyone around you.”

The new officers were announced after each of the outgoing state leaders had taken turns giving heartfelt speeches about their time in office. Each also had their parents and advisers on stage to thank them



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Outgoing California FFA President Dipak Kumar, left, gives incoming President Joelle Lewis a new jacket to signify her role during the organization’s state conference April 21 at SELLAND ARENA in Fresno.

Haley Warner of Angels Camp, the outgoing vice president, noted that people today “live in a world of words” in texts and social media and urged her fellow members to use words constructively.

“The power of our words is stronger than we know,” she said. “Those words — our words — can cut deep and they leave scars. But I have seen people empowered to do more because of the helpful, constructive words that people said to them.”

in moving tributes.

Outgoing president Dipak Kumar of Tulare spoke of his admiration for his father, a doctor who moved the family from what was then war-torn India to the Central Valley and planted almonds, walnuts and pistachios.

He said his family’s experience taught him to use challenges as well as good fortune to help others.

“In life, each of us has been

given something,” Kumar said. “No matter the nature of what we have, we can choose to have amazing outcomes.”

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