Idaho ag fared well in legislative session

By SEAN ELLIS Capital Press

BOISE — There were no big-ticket bills for agriculture during the 2015 Idaho legislative session, but most legislation supported by the industry fared well.

Lawmakers "took good care of a lot of smaller items that were of importance to the industry," said Idaho Wool Growers Association Executive Director Stan Boyd.

Sen. Bert Brackett, a Republican rancher from Rogerson, said the 2015 session lacked some of the major farm-related proposals that past sessions have had.

"But small things add up to big things," he said. "Generally, I think the session was pretty successful for agriculture."

Lawmakers passed a bill that solidifies the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's primacy when it comes to governing the state's seed industry. That update to Idaho's Pure Seed Law will stop local governments from banning the planting and use of genetically modified crops.

The Legislature also passed a joint memorial to Congress in support of a federal policy for the voluntary labeling of genetically engineered foods.

Taking steps, even moderate ones, to protect farmers' right to plant genetically modified crops was a good development, said Rep. Clark Kauffman, a Republican farmer from Filer who introduced the Pure Seed Law bill.

"I think those are incremental steps on that issue that are good for agriculture," he said.

Most farm industry leaders say the session should get an incomplete grade when it came to addressing the state's \$262 million a year transportation funding shortfall.

The last bill of the session to get passed will raise an additional \$94 million a

year in transportation funding through increased fuel taxes and registration fees.

Idaho's farming industry, which got the conversation on increased transportation funding rolling two years ago, realizes how important good roads and bridges are to agriculture, said Food Producers of Idaho Executive Director Rick Waitley.

The \$94 million raised by the lone transportation funding bill that passed "is far from the necessary amount to make headway on the continuing problem," he said.

The state's honey and cherry industries successfully pushed legislation that makes small modifications to their commissions "which should help them operate more efficiently going forward," Waitley said.

The Legislature passed a bill that will allow the free movement of hops plant material between Idaho, Washington and Oregon and require hops material from other

states to be certified disease-free.

Legislators also approved a rule that will result in goat producers being charged an assessment of 80 cents per head when they sell their animals at auction yards and provided University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences an additional \$2.27 million for research and extension.

Lawmakers failed to act on two bills that would have set statewide standards for cottage food products produced in home kitchens and they also rejected a proposal that would have allowed potato growers in a federal pale cyst nematode quarantine area in East Idaho to receive a refund of their state potato assessment fee.

"We didn't have any controversial issues this year, which is good, and we got done a few things that needed to be done," said Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Observers say the 2015 Idaho legislative sessions was successful for agriculture interests.

McFerson considering WSU research director position

By DAN WHEAT Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash.

— The manager of the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission, Jim McFerson, is looking at becoming director of the Washington State University Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center, and possibly holding both jobs.

Both are in Wenatchee.

WSU's College of Agricultural Human and Natural Resource Sciences "has determined, after consulting with faculty, to offer Dr. Jim McFerson an invitation to interview for the position," said Jay Brunner, who is retiring as center director in August.

McFerson shared his leadership vision and experience in a public seminar at the center April 20, Brunner said.

That was followed by private discussions by WSU faculty and USDA scientists with McFerson, Brunner said.

Both men emphasized there's been no job offer and referred to the interview as exploratory.

The center dates back to 1937, and operates with a \$4 million annual budget. It has 50 full-time and 20 seasonal

Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Jim McFerson, manager of the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission in Wenatchee, is shown in this file photo. In addition to his commission job, he is exploring the possibility of becoming director of the Washington State University Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center.

employees and more than 100 research and extension projects involving many aspects of growing, harvesting, storing, grading and packing tree fruit.

Brunner, 67, is an entomologist and has divided his duties between entomology and center administration.

The Tree Fruit Research Commission was established by the Legislature in 1969 and is governed by industry members and allocates more than \$2 million collected annually from growers for tree fruit research. Projects are done by commission staff and universities and organizations to which the commission awards research grants, including WSU.

McFerson doesn't award the grants. Commissioners make those decisions based on committee recommendations, but McFerson is involved in discussions.

McFerson said he doesn't foresee a conflict of interest in the usual sense in serving in both roles but more of an issue of divided loyalties.

"When I came to Wenatchee (as a commission scientist), relationships between the commission and WSU were not good," he said. "They have come a long

way since that time. My vision is to continue and deepen that partnership.

"As partners there are

differences in organizations, interests and perspective, but ultimately we're all working for profitability and sustainability of our tree fruit industry and to contribute to Washington's economy and the well-being of its citizens and the rest of the world that enjoys our tree fruit products."

The industry, through the commission, has committed to the largest WSU endowment of \$32 million over eight years to build and sustain tree fruit research at WSU, McFerson said.

Because of that, the commission already is biased toward WSU, he said. There could be questions both ways,

but it's a creative way to proceed, he said.

WSU's agricultural funding has been cut in half in recent years, leaving university scientists competing for more federal grants, such as specialty crop block grants, he said.

Whether he could remain active at the national level in the USDA's specialty crop research initiative and Clean Plant Network are questions, he said.

At 64, McFerson said a one-, two- or three-year appointment with a possible renewal is an option and that he doesn't foresee long-term employment.

The idea of him considering the job came from WSU leadership and would be a big change from choosing a professor for the role, he said.

Antibiotics bill stays alive, heads to Senate Rules panel

Legislation would limit "nontherapeutic" uses in livestock

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI Capital Press

SALEM — A proposal to restrict "non-therapeutic" uses of antibiotics in livestock has stayed alive in the Oregon legislature and may be subject to further deliberations.

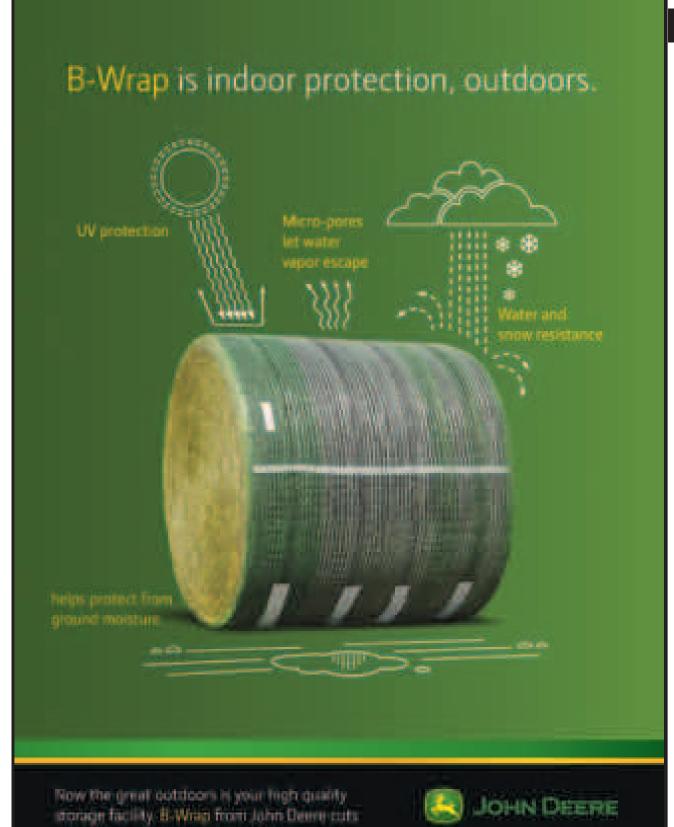
On April 20, the Senate Committee on Health Care voted 3-2 to refer Senate Bill 920 to the Senate Rules Committee with a "do pass" recommendation.

The bill would prohibit treating farm animals with antibiotics for disease prevention and growth promotion in most circumstances.

By moving the SB 920 to a new committee, law-makers have kept the bill viable without bringing it to a vote on the Senate floor.

The proposal has divided groups representing Oregon physicians, who fear antibiotic overuse will foster resistant pathogens, and veterinarians, who claim the bill will unnecessarily limit their options in managing herd health.

Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, said the testimony in favor of the bill was misinformed and presented a distorted view the livestock industry, which is economically important and technically competent.



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