

Oregon

West Coast Beet Seed marks 75 years in business

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

On the surface, the idea of four competing companies jointly owning a company sounds like a recipe for disaster. In fact, it may be exactly why West Coast Beet Seed Co. has operated as long as it has, celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

Company Manager Greg Loberg said the formula has allowed the company to survive the sometimes turbulent world of agribusiness.

"If one of the owner members of West Coast Beet Seed goes bankrupt, and this has happened," Loberg said, "somebody else is probably picking up the pieces and carrying on a program."

"With multiple owners that are competitors, the loss of one owner is probably the gain of another owner," Loberg said. "The company, in spite of a shifting ownership, has been incredibly stable for 75 years."

Generating roughly half the U.S. beet seed production in any one year, West Coast

Beet Seed is a model of consistency in the Willamette Valley's shifting agricultural climate.

The company, which started in 1940 with nine shareholders, has had only four managers in its history, and the first lasted only two years. George Burt, who still comes around the office on occasion, ran the company from 1980 until Loberg took over in 2007. Before Burt, Sam Campbell ran the company from 1942 to 1980.

The company also boasts minimal turnover among non-managerial employees. Its 17 permanent staff have been with the company an average of 15 years, providing a level of experience that Loberg described as invaluable in a production regime as complex as beet seed.

In a typical year, staff will start by overseeing transplant operations in January and February, a time when the company's employment swells to between 150 and 200. During March and April, staff will walk production fields looking



Greg Loberg, manager of West Coast Beet Seed Co., discusses the history of the 75-year-old company, depicted in these pictures at the company's Salem headquarters.

for off-types and monitoring past production fields for volunteers. In June they will be separating male plants from females to eventually remove the males and maximize yield. In July and August, they will be harvesting seed and plant-

ing the next crop. And in the fall they will be processing seed.

"It's hard to find that kind of experience in beet-seed production," Loberg said of his staff. "They are multi-tasking people."

Another competitive advantage the company enjoys is it consolidates expenses for the four owners.

"What we do is consolidate overhead expenses into a place where they are shared by multiple companies," Loberg

said. "No one else has that."

West Coast Beet Seed is owned by American Crystal Sugar, Syngenta, Holly Seed and SES VanderHave.

Combined, it and its main competitor, Betaseed, annually supply seed for between 1.1 million and 1.2 million acres of sugar beet production.

Beet seed production averages about 3,000 pounds to the acre, but much of that is removed during processing.

"We may take out 30 percent here," Loberg said, referring to West Coast's Salem plant. "Then the owners further process it, and they may take out another 50 percent."

The owner-companies estimate their annual needs and contract for growers to produce the seed. Seed production contracts can range from less than 10 acres to more than 50 acres, with an average field size of 20 acres.

The company contracts with a steady base of around 75 growers. Production is spread out throughout the valley to avoid issues with cross pollination.



Andy Hulting, speaking at last year's Hyslop Farm Field Day, is back at work after suffering a stroke Jan. 31. He will be presenting a talk on weed control in grass seed at this year's Hyslop Farm Field Day, May 27 in Corvallis.

Hyslop field day marks Extension specialist's return

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

From the surface, all will appear normal when Andy Hulting gives his presentation on weed control in grass seed at Oregon State University's Hyslop Farm Field Day May 27 in Corvallis.

The OSU Extension weed specialist has been a regular on the field day's agenda during the past nine years.

But this year's appearance likely will mean a little more to Hulting and those close to him. It will be one his first grower presentations since he suffered a stroke on Jan. 31 that sidelined him for most of three months.

"It is good to be back," he said. "It beats a hospital room. I can tell you that much."

Life is slowly returning to normal for Hulting, who spent two weeks in a drug induced coma and another month in professional medical care. Hulting said he still doesn't have full range of feeling in his right leg, but he has no memory loss, no cognitive impairment and no issue with concentrating. He returned to work part-time in mid-April and started back full-time on May 11.

Hulting suffered the stroke while delivering a talk on weed control at an extension meeting in Prineville. Five minutes into his presentation, Hulting reportedly sat in a chair, announced he didn't feel well and passed out.

Paramedics transported Hulting from Prineville to the St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, then airlifted him to Oregon Health and Science University.

"I have nothing but good things to say about OHSU," Hulting said. "And I want to thank the Prineville Fire and Rescue, because they were the first ones there."

At OHSU, doctors placed Hulting in the coma to stabilize him, identify the cause of the stroke and operate on him. They brought Hulting out of the coma in mid-February, with his family gathered around his bedside.

"My parents were there and everybody," said Hulting, who is married and has three chil-

dren. "It was a pretty surreal experience."

Hulting spent another two weeks in recovery at OHSU, then two weeks at a rehabilitation center in Eugene before returning home in mid-March.

"It was pretty tough for a while," Hulting said, "but once I got home, things started improving."

Hulting, 40, said he had no sign that anything was wrong until the moment he suffered the stroke.

"I drove over (from Corvallis) in the morning, had lunch, and everything was fine," he said.

Hulting said there is no history of stroke in his family. Also, he said, doctors were unable to explain why the stroke struck when it did.

"It is probably a birth defect, and it just picked that day to happen," he said.

Hulting, who has been at OSU nine years, wanted to thank the many people who have supported him over the past few months.

"I just got tons of emails from growers and industry people," he said. "I want to thank them for all of their support."

"To be missed and be thought of is a pretty neat experience," he said.

Legislative roundup: How ag bills have fared this session

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

With just over a month remaining in Oregon's legislative session, lawmakers have acted on several bills related to agriculture and natural resources.

Controversial proposals that would increase the regulation of pesticides and genetically engineered crops have died in committee, while others — such as restrictions on antibiotics in livestock — are still awaiting committee action.

Following is a summary of bills that have either passed the legislature or crossed significant hurdles on the way to becoming law:

Biotech mediation

A mechanism for resolving potential disputes over cross-pollination between organic, conventional and genetically modified crops has made headway in the legislature.

House Bill 2509 creates a mediation system in which the Oregon Department of Agriculture would seek voluntary resolutions to coexistence conflicts.

After winning support from proponents and critics of genetic engineering, the bill was approved 57-1 in the House. The lone dissenter was Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, who introduced legislation restricting where biotech crops are cultivated. That proposal died in committee.

The mediation bill is now being considered by the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, which is scheduled to hold a hearing and possible work session on HB 2509 on May 20.

Predator control

A proposal to increase funding for predator control by assessing rural landowners up to \$1 per acre in special tax districts was approved by the House 56-2 and is now before the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. While House Bill 3188 won by a strong margin, it is opposed by animal welfare and environmental groups that object to lethal methods and local management of wildlife.

The legislation was supported by ranchers, who say that such additional money is necessary in rural counties facing budget shortfalls and pressure from cougars, coyotes and other predators.

Nursery shipping

A proposal to give farm regulators the authority to revoke nursery shipping permits is making its way through the legislative process.

Senate Bill 256, aimed at stopping nurseries from shipping if they don't abide by sanitary standards for plants, will be up for a vote before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

A subcommittee on natural resources recently decided to move the measure out to the full committee at a May 18 work session.

The Oregon Association of Nurseries supports SB 256 because a disease outbreak tied to an Oregon producer could have serious export implications for the entire industry.

The legislation would also raise the nursery license fee cap from \$20,000 to \$40,000 and the "millage rate" — a mill is one-tenth of a percent — on their revenues from five to 10 mills.

Agritourism liability

Legal protections for Oregon agritourism operators have passed muster in the Senate, which approved Senate Bill 341 unanimously. The legislation would shield growers from liability for visitor mishaps providing they post warnings, among other conditions.

The proposal got off to a rocky start due to opposition from trial lawyers, but managed to overcome that obstacle

with an amendment to the bill.

Proponents hope that greater clarity on agritourism liability will convince more insurance companies to provide coverage for such operations.

Urban farm tax relief

A new method of reducing property taxes for urban farmers was approved 50-10 in the Oregon House, but House Bill 2723 will likely face changes on the Senate side.

The bill allows local governments to create agriculture incentive zones within urban growth boundaries where properties would be taxed at a lower rate if they're devoted to farming for five years.

While HB 2723 appears to have momentum behind it, questions over its potential impact on urban growth boundaries still need to be answered. Supporters are also likely to amend the bill to include a 2023 sunset date and exclude marijuana from the tax relief proposal.

Raw milk advertising

Oregon's prohibition against raw milk advertising, which hadn't been enforced for more than a year, is officially no longer a state law.

Gov. Kate Brown recently signed House Bill 2446, which removes the longstanding ban from statute but doesn't otherwise change restrictions on raw milk sales.

The bill was introduced as part of a legal settlement between the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Christine Anderson, a raw milk producer who sued the agency for violating her free speech rights.

During hearings and work

sessions, HB 2446 faced no opposition and sailed through the legislative process without so much as an amendment.

Aggie bonds

Northwest Farm Credit Services, a major agricultural lender in the region, will be able to participate in Oregon's "Aggie Bond" program, which is aimed at providing loans to beginning farmers under House Bill 3239. The bill was signed into law by Brown recently and expands the definition of lenders who qualify for the program, which provides companies with a federal tax credit for lending to new growers.

Drone hunting

A ban against using drones for hunting and angling was also approved by the legislature and Brown without encountering any objections, though lawmakers did make some adjustments to clarify that such devices can be used for managing wildlife with the approval of state regulators.

House Bill 2534 passed both chambers unanimously. The bill was supported by lobbyists representing hunters and fishermen, who feel that drones threaten the concept of "fair chase."

Bird control

House Bill 2432, which expands the use of fireworks for bird control, was another non-controversial measure that was recently signed into law. The legislation allows managers of golf courses, airports, landfills and similar facilities to use fireworks to repel birds. Before the bill was passed, such uses were limited to farms and forests.

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