

U.S. pavilion seeks to be catalyst in food security discussion

By COLLEEN BARRY
Associated Press

MILAN — Fields of waving grain may have come to symbolize the United States' industrialized agriculture, but the U.S. pavilion at Expo 2015 world's fair is seeking to lead the conversation on how to feed 9 billion people by 2050 with a focus on such basics as reviving heirloom seeds, promoting vertical gardens and rediscovering long-forgotten foodstuffs, like cattails.

As befits host Italy, Expo 2015 is focused on food and nutrition. And while many of the 20 million visitors expected during Expo's six-month run will put a priority on the more convivial nature of food by tasting specialties from around the globe, inside the pavilions nations are seeking to raise awareness around such issues as food security, hunger and food waste.

Food, it turns out, is a strong diplomatic tool in its



AP Photo/Luca Bruno

Doug Hickey, commissioner general for the U.S. pavilion, poses in front of the U.S. pavilion at Expo 2015 world's fair in Rho, near Milan, Italy.

own right.

"When you go around Expo, the beauty is everyone understands what the message is," said Douglas Hickey, commissioner general for the U.S. pavilion. "They may differ on implementation. But they are all using their creative strengths to try to find a solution. I don't know that has ever happened before."

A vertical garden — saving both horizontal space and water — and a small pond with cattails (which a plaque informs were once included in the Native American diet) immediately engage visitors to the open-air U.S. Pavilion, designed by architect James Biber. The steel structure is clad in wood recovered from the Coney Island boardwalk in Brooklyn, New York, re-

sponding to the Expo's call that all pavilions be recyclable.

"We are using that not just because it is beautiful timber, but because the boardwalk is a uniquely American interface between entertainment and food and the seaside and public and so on. So it has tremendous meaning for an Expo about food," Biber said.

The feature commanding the most attention by visiting Italian high school students: a digital waterfall that they splashed around in.

It's an easy slope up to the main level, where visitors are greeted by President Barack Obama in a welcome video followed by interactive displays challenging visitors to consider such food security issues as urban food waste and farming inefficiency. Downstairs visitors line up for Foodscape, a walk-through animated presentation of American food traditions and innovations. And regular rooftop talks are scheduled on such topics

as how to build sustainable food networks and how to be sensitive to climate change in growing food.

"We are trying to ignite them so that when they leave they really feel that they can do something," Hickey said. "Whether it be small, like just using less waste, or whether it be large, like working for an NGO or becoming a farmer, understanding technology, getting involved in the ag business."

Food security is a topic of growing urgency since the United Nations sounded a warning that feeding the expanding population can't be done by increased production alone, but must be accompanied by other policies. Food security is on the agenda of the Group of Seven meeting in Germany next month.

The Expo venue, which brings together more than 140 nations along with non-governmental organizations and corporations like Coca-Cola and CNH Industrial agricultural machinery, also allows

for some informal diplomacy, as national delegations visit one another's pavilions and compare notes, Hickey said.

The U.S. pavilion's notion of being a catalyst in many ways mirrors the Milan Charter, an expert-drafted document that the Italian government is backing with an aim of inspiring individuals to contribute to resolving issues surrounding food and nutrition.

The document, which Expo visitors are invited to sign, is meant to be Expo's legacy, but Hickey said the U.S. pavilion hadn't yet been formally contacted.

"Anything that can be helpful to the goal of feeding 9 billion people we are obviously interested in. We just haven't seen anything so far to really comment on this," Hickey said.

Like most of the national pavilions at Expo, the building is scheduled for demolition after the world's fair, which closes Oct. 31.

EQIP funds offered for drought areas

Up to \$2.5 million is available from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to mitigate the effects of drought in 15 Oregon counties.

Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, Lake, Lane, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Wasco and Wheeler counties have received drought declarations from Gov. Kate Brown. Other counties could be added if they receive declarations.

Landowners in those counties should submit applications to their local USDA Service Center by June 26 to be considered. The funding is through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, a financial assistance program in the Farm Bill that allows NRCS to work with private landowners to implement conservation practices and reimburse landowners for a portion of the expense.

NRCS nationwide is also aiding the most severely drought-stricken areas in seven other states: California, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas.

"This funding will help Oregonians in the most drought-stricken areas of the state to mitigate the impacts of drought on cropland, rangeland and forestland," said Ron Alvarado, state conservationist, in a press release.

NRCS will give higher priority to applications in counties with the highest drought status according to the USDA Drought Moni-

tor map, but producers in all counties included in declarations by the governor will be eligible to apply for funding.

In Oregon, NRCS will focus the funding on cropland, rangeland and forestry conservation practices. For cropland practices, NRCS will assist producers with planting and managing cover crops and implementing emergency soil erosion measures. These practices will help farmers protect the soil from erosion, promote more organic matter in the soil, and aid in better water infiltration.

For rangeland practices, NRCS will assist ranchers in developing grazing management plans and installing emergency livestock watering facilities and multi-purpose water impoundments. These practices help reduce pressure on stressed vegetation, allow the soil to retain more moisture, and deliver emergency water supplies to livestock.

For forestry practices, NRCS will help landowners with wildfire prevention measures, such as creating fuel breaks, multi-purpose water impoundments and other fuel reduction activities. These actions reduce excess vegetation in a forest so that wildfire has less fuel to spread higher into the canopy, where it causes the most damage. NRCS is partnering with the Oregon Department of Forestry to focus the funding on areas with a higher risk for catastrophic forest fire.

Applications will be ranked for funding based on the drought level, resource concern, conservation benefit and, if applicable, the wildfire risk factor.

Columbia-Snake River System lock closure set for December 2016

A 14-week lock closure is planned for the Columbia-Snake River System, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The closure will take place from Dec. 12, 2016, through March 20, 2017, while contractors repair and upgrade four locks.

The Pacific Northwest Waterways Association is working with the Corps to ensure key river system users are updated throughout the planning process, according to an association press release.

The Columbia-Snake River System is the top wheat export gateway in the United States. Most of the wheat grown in the Northwest is exported using the Columbia and Snake rivers to barge the grain to export terminals to be loaded onto ocean-going ships.

According to the Corps, repairs and improvements currently planned during the closure include:

- The Dalles Lock and Dam: The upstream gate and portions of the navigation lock controls will be replaced. The gudgeon anchors, which are large iron pins that anchor the swinging gates of the locks, will also be replaced.

- Ice Harbor Lock and Dam: Operating machinery for the downstream gate will be replaced.

- Lower Monumental Lock and Dam: A new downstream lock gate was installed during the 2011 extended maintenance closure. The second phase is replacing the mechanical gear that operates the gate.

- Little Goose Lock and Dam: The downstream gate land-side gudgeon anchor was replaced in April 2014. However, additional work is needed to complete replacement of all downstream gudgeon arms and pintles, which are part of the hinges holding the gate.

California OKs offer of voluntary water cuts

By FENIT NIRAPPIL
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California regulators on Friday accepted a historic offer by farmers to make a 25 percent voluntary water cut to avoid deeper mandatory losses during the drought.

Officials with the state Water Resources Control Board made the announcement involving farmers in the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers who hold some of California's strongest water rights.

The several hundred farmers made the offer after state officials warned they were days away from ordering some of the first cuts in more than 30 years to the senior water rights holders.

California water law is built around preserving the water claims of those rights holders. The threat of state cuts is a sign of the worsening impacts of the four-year drought.

The state already has mandated 25 percent conservation by cities and towns and curtailed water deliveries to many farmers and communities.

The most arid winter on record for the Sierra Nevada snowpack means there will be little runoff this summer to feed California's rivers, reservoirs and irrigation canals. As of Thursday, the U.S. Drought Monitor rated 94 percent of California in severe drought or worse.

About 350 farmers turned out Thursday at a farmers' grange near Stockton to talk over the delta farmers' bid to stave off deeper cuts.

"That doesn't necessarily mean they'll all participate" in the proposed voluntary cutbacks, said Michael George, the state's water master for the delta. But based on the farmers' comments, George said, he believed many will.

Under the deal, delta farmers would have until June 1 to lay out how they will use 25 percent less water during



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli

In this photo taken May 18, farmer Gino Celli checks salt from irrigation water that has dried on the land he farms near Stockton, Calif. Celli, who farms 1,500 acres and manages an additional 7,000 acres, has senior water rights and draws his irrigation water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

what typically is a rain-free four months until September.

The delta is the heart of the water system in California, with miles of rivers interlacing fecund farmland. It supplies water to 25 million California residents and vast regions of farmland that produces nearly half of the fruits, nuts and vegetables grown in the U.S.

Agriculture experts, however, say they would expect only modest immediate effects on food prices from any reduction in water to the senior water-right holders. Other states will be able to make

up the difference if California moves away from low-profit crops, economists say.

State officials initially said they would also announce the first cuts of the four-year drought to senior rights holders on Friday. Water regulators said Thursday, however, that the announcement involving farmers and others in the watershed of the San Joaquin River would be delayed until at least next week.

It is unclear whether the delta farmers' offer would go far enough to save drying, warming waterways statewide.

The 1977 cutback order for senior right holders applied only to dozens of people along a stretch of the Sacramento River.

Although thousands of junior water rights holders have had their water curtailed this year, Gov. Jerry Brown has come under criticism for sparing farmers with senior water rights from mandatory cutbacks.

Increasing amounts of the state's irrigation water goes to specialty crops such as almonds, whose growers are expanding production despite the drought.

Q&A: California farmers with oldest water rights face cuts

By FENIT NIRAPPIL
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Farmers in drought-stricken California with nearly guaranteed rights to water are bracing for historic orders to stop diverting water from rivers and streams. Regulators on Friday said some farmers can avoid a total cut off if they voluntarily conserve.

Some questions and answers about this pivotal development in the state's drought response:

Why is this happening?

California is in its driest four-year stretch on record. Winter provided little rain and snow to replenish rivers and streams, meaning there is not enough water to meet the demands of farms, communities and wildlife. The State Water Resources Control Board is monitoring conditions in rivers and streams across the parched state and

deciding who gets to divert water. Even those with long-standing legal rights to water are under scrutiny.

What are water rights?

The rights allow holders such as cities, irrigation districts serving farms, and corporations to take water directly from rivers and streams. The first to claim the water are the last to have supplies curtailed. Users who obtained rights to divert water after 1914 are the first to be cut off to ensure there is water for senior water right holders with claims dating to the Gold Rush. Landowners with property that touches waterways have riparian rights — the strongest of the senior water rights.

What's already happened?

Thousands of farmers and others with more recent, junior water rights in the Sacramento and San

Joaquin River watersheds have been ordered to stop diverting water for the second consecutive year. Less than 30 percent have told the board they are complying.

What's next?

The board in the coming weeks plans to order those with claims to water in the San Joaquin River watershed dating before 1914 to stop pumping from rivers and streams. Riparian rights holders were scheduled to be curtailed by mid-June. Friday's order would be the first restriction on senior water rights holders since severe drought the late 1970s, and the first in memory for the San Joaquin, which runs from the Sierra Nevada to San Francisco Bay.

How is this enforced?

That's the challenge. Regulators lack enough sensors, meters and other tech-

nology to make sure water isn't illegally diverted. Water rights curtailments are instead enforced by an honor system, complaints and field investigations. Some curtailment orders are easily followed because there's no water to take from streams.

What are rights holders doing about this?

Senior water rights holders see their claims to water as ironclad after they paid top price for land with nearly guaranteed water in dry California. Some of their attorneys have threatened litigation, saying the water board has no authority over them. Other farmers with water rights in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta are offering to voluntarily conserve 25 percent of their water in exchange for assurances that they won't face additional cuts in the middle of their growing season.