

County GMO ban litigation shifts gears

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Litigation over the genetically engineered crop ban in Oregon's Jackson County is now expected to focus on whether the government took farmers' property without just compensation.

A federal judge on May 29 rejected the argument by two alfalfa farms that Oregon's "right to farm" law rendered the prohibition invalid.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Clarke said the "right to farm" statute prohibits ordinances and lawsuits that treat a common farming practice as a trespass or nuisance, but it does not protect activities that harm commercial agriculture.

Oregon's legislature passed the law to shield farmers from urban encroachment and complaints about smells, noises and other irritations, he said.

"While farming practices may not be limited by a suburbanite's sensitivities, they may be limited if they cause damage to another farm's crops," Clarke said.

Growers are able to file lawsuits over such grievances under the "right to farm" statute, and Jackson County's ordinance simply "serves to prevent such damage before it happens" — even if it hasn't yet occurred, he said.

While Clarke has dismissed the farmers' arguments regarding "right to farm," their claim seeking \$4.2 million in compensation from Jackson County remains alive in the case.

The growers, Schulz Family Farms and James and Marilyn Frink, argue that forcing them to remove about 300 acres of herbicide-resistant "Roundup Ready" alfalfa amounts to the county condemning their property for public use, which requires just compensation.

"Their right to make a living, support their families and contribute to the local economy will be seriously damaged by the ban — costing them millions of dollars," said Shannon Armstrong, attorney for the farmers, in an email.

The lawsuit argues that

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WOLVES ARE BACK

Washington's experience unlike rest of the West as ranchers, biologists see predators in their future

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington's wolf population, concentrated in the northeast corner, has reached critical mass, a milestone in a state where recovery standards are high and so are passions.

Washington has fewer wolves than Oregon and far fewer than Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. But Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists say the population is poised to follow the same upward trajectory that other states saw.

But more wolves may mean more conflicts with the state's \$700 million-a-year cattle and sheep industries. While vocal environmentalists downplay the economic risks and hail the return of the gray wolf, ranchers — some whose families have worked the land since the 1800s — say the reintroduction of an apex predator threatens their way of life.



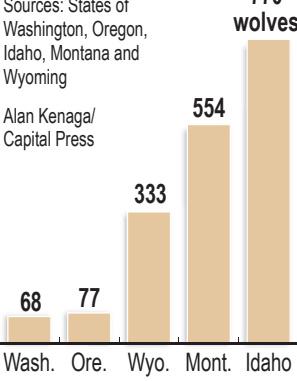
Don Jenkins/Capital Press
Klickitat County ranchers Clay Schuster, left, and Pace Amidon sign in Feb. 5 in Olympia to testify on wolf-related legislation. Ranchers and environmental groups have strong feelings about the reintroduction of wolves, but most Washingtonians may be only mildly interested.

At the center of the controversy is the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. Conservation groups and livestock producers continue to spar over the plan, which guides wildlife managers and lays out recovery goals.

Adopted in 2011, Washington's plan sets a higher bar for success than the objectives established for Idaho, Wyoming, Montana or Oregon. Until the goals are achieved, wolves will be a protected species throughout the state, no matter how many occupy northeast Washington.

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Grey wolf population in five Western states, 2014



Don Jenkins/Capital Press
Washington Cattlemen's Association President Bill Sieverkropp says he hasn't seen any wolves around his ranch in Central Washington, but, he says, "You hear rumors."



Don Jenkins/Capital Press
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Brian Blake, D-Aberdeen, says the state's wolf plan is a recipe for disaster.

"The original wolf plan was flawed. It was a recipe for failure, and a failure is what we're seeing."

Brian Blake, D-Aberdeen

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Drought to cause \$2.7B hit to Calif. ag economy

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — The drought will cost California's agricultural economy about \$2.7 billion in 2015 and leave as many as 18,600 workers jobless, university researchers said June 2.

Researchers from University of California-Davis' Center for Watershed Sciences expect growers to follow 564,000 acres, suffer a crop revenue loss of \$844 million and incur \$558 million in additional groundwater pumping costs, they told the state Board of Food and Agriculture in a meeting streamed online.

The scientists were giving their first economic estimates for this year after pegging total ag losses in the Golden State at \$2.2 billion last year. The center estimated last year's job losses because of the drought at 17,000.

Richard Howitt, a UC-Davis professor emeritus who led the study, noted the



Tim Hearden/Capital Press
Herdsman Jason Dore tends to beef cattle at VanderWoude Dairy near Merced, Calif. A new University of California-Davis study estimates the drought will cause the following of 564,000 acres statewide and a crop revenue loss of \$844 million in 2015.

anticipated job losses come as overall ag employment has been trending upward trend over the last five years. The trend has been fed by industry growth in the Sacramento Valley and coastal regions, he said.

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"This does not negate the fact that jobs were lost" last year, particularly in the San Joaquin River and Tulare basin regions, he said. "The loss is no less painful if it takes place during the time you were counting on getting work, which is in the irrigation season, in the place that you live, which is in the valley."

The preliminary study, prepared for the state Department of Food and Agriculture, also says farmers will have 2.7 million acre-feet less surface water than they would in a normal water year — about a 33 percent loss of supply on average. The impacts are concentrated mostly in the San Joaquin Valley, the researchers found.

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