

# Bill would forgive school loans for farmers, ranchers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

A bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on Monday would make farmers and ranchers eligible for the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, available to public servants such as teachers, nurses and government employees.

The Young Farmers Success Act, HB 2590, introduced by Reps. Chris Gibson, R-N.Y., and Joe Courtney, D-Conn., seeks to address the shortage of young people entering agriculture.

The bill would recognize farmers and ranchers who produce food and fiber as public servants, said Matt Sheehy, Gibson's press secretary.

The legislation is specific to farming operations and would apply to employees as well as owners, he said.

"Lots of folks would qualify," he said.

Farmers provide a service every bit as valuable as other professions currently covered by the program, and this common-sense legislation makes it far easier for college graduates to return to the family

farm or begin production on land of their own, Gibson said in a press release.

The legislation has broad support from nearly 100 farming organizations, including National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), National Farmers Union and FFA.

The shortage of young people going into farming is a major crisis facing American agriculture, NYFC stated in a press release on Tuesday.

U.S. agriculture will need at least 100,000 new farmers to take the place of existing farmers as the majority — at an average age of 50 — near

retirement. Yet the number of young farmers increased by only 1,220 between 2007 and 2012, according to NYFC.

"If we want to support rural economies and feed our nation, not just for the next five years but for the next five generations and beyond, we must make recruiting young farmers a top priority," NYFC executive director Lindsay Lusher Shute said in a press release.

An NYFC survey of young farmers found 78 percent of respondents struggle with lack of capital and carry an average of \$35,000 in stu-

dent loans.

It also found that 53 percent are currently in farming but have a hard time making their student loan payments, while another 30 percent are interested in farming but haven't pursued it because income from farming wouldn't be enough to cover their student loan payments.

The PSLF Program forgives the balance of student loans after 10 years of payments — 120 qualifying payments.

It requires those seeking loan forgiveness to be employed full time — an annual

average of 30 hours per week — in public service during the period they are repaying their student loans under the Federal Direct Loan Program.

Qualifying for the expanded debt-forgiveness program would require a serious endeavor to commit to production agriculture, Sheehy said.

To qualify as public service employment under the PSLF program, people with student loans would have to work on a farming operation with annual gross revenue of at least \$35,000.

## Idaho begins restrictions for livestock virus

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho State Department of Agriculture has implemented special restrictions on the movement of livestock from New Mexico and Arizona into Idaho, seeking to avoid introducing a viral disease that has surfaced in those states.

Vesicular stomatitis mostly affects cattle and horses but can also infect sheep, goats, swine, llamas and alpacas, said Idaho state veterinarian Bill Barton.

The disease, known to be transmitted by black flies, rarely kills animals but creates sores in their mouths and causes them to lose weight, and dairy cattle to reduce milk output, Barton said.

He said cases of the disease are reported almost every year in the Southwest, especially Texas, but the disease has arrived much earlier than normal this summer. Livestock may not be imported from any operation in which vesicular stomatitis has been reported within the previous 30 days.

All livestock, including horses, entering Idaho from a state in which animals are under quarantine for the disease must have a certificate of veterinary inspection, with an accompanying statement from the veterinarian and an ISDA import permit.

Idaho's trade restrictions remain in place until 30 days from a state's most recent infection. New Mexico notified Idaho about its first case in mid-April. Idaho was poised to remove trade restrictions when another case was discovered in New Mexico on May 15. Utah also had trade restrictions, based on exposure to sick horses from Arizona that were in the state for a trail ride. Utah's restrictions were lifted on June 1. Horses from Idaho were also exposed to the sick horses in Utah, but the Idaho horses were removed from quarantine after 14 days without symptoms, Barton said.

Barton said Idaho's last case of the disease occurred about a decade ago, and its most recent major outbreak was in 1982, when more than 140 premises in Magic Valley reported infections.

## State approves recharge infrastructure projects

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — The Idaho Water Resource Board has approved \$6.25 million to finance six infrastructure projects designed to broaden the state's Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer recharge capacity.

The funding, approved during a May 21-22 meeting, was part of \$10.5 million in the Water Board's Fiscal Year 2016 budget to promote aquifer stabilization statewide. Some of the revenue was authorized by the 2014 Legislature, while other funds came from cigarette tax dollars that will be allocated annually to the Water Board.

Once completed, the new infrastructure should increase the state's annual recharge capacity from about 75,000 acre-feet to 200,000 acre-feet, said Idaho Department of Water Resources Water Planning Bureau Chief Brian Patton.

Patton said additional projects are planned to help the state meet its commitment to average 250,000 acre-feet of annual recharge. The state's goal was included in a pending proposal to settle a water call by irrigation companies with the Surface Water Coal-



Courtesy of Idaho Department of Water Resources

This concrete channel on the Milner-Gooding Canal near Shoshone, Idaho, is scheduled for upgrades with some of the \$6.25 million the Idaho Water Resource Board has approved for aquifer recharge infrastructure. IDWR officials say the project should expand the state's winter recharge capacity by about 50,000 acre-feet.

ition against junior groundwater users, seeking a long-term plan to avoid well curtailment while stabilizing the aquifers.

Patton said work on many of the projects should commence this fall, and the major project on the list, involving the Milner-Gooding Canal,

should be completed and ready to carry recharge water after this winter.

"We're definitely getting the push from the governor's office and other legislative leadership to prioritize shovel-ready projects that will enhance our ability to maximize recharge as soon as possible," Patton said.

He explained the projects fall into two categories. Upper basin projects — including an enlargement of Fremont-Madison Irrigation District's Egin Canal to handle increased flow volumes and infrastructure to utilize gravel pits for recharge along the Great Feeder Canal — are intended to maximize recharge of spring flood-control releases from the reservoir system. Projects in the lower basin seek to increase capacity of a new winter recharge program, involving a state water right that turns on at the end of the irrigation season.

The Milner-Gooding project, which entails overhauling a concrete flume to accommodate winter flows to a recharge site near Shoshone, should add 50,000 acre-feet of winter recharge capacity.

Louis Zamora, of Twin Falls Canal Co., said the fund-

ing will cover maintenance and staff costs to allow his company to keep water in an 8-mile stretch of its canal and Murtaugh Lake year-round, recharging at least 14,000 acre-feet into the aquifer through seepage.

Upgrades to Northside Canal will allow winter recharge water to bypass hydro-power turbines, and state-owned recharge infrastructure will be built upstream of Milner Dam.

The board also approved \$1.2 million for aquifer and water-quality monitoring and for payments to defray irrigation companies' costs of conducting recharge. Another \$1 million was allocated for work in other Idaho priority aquifers.

The board allocated \$200,000 for a pilot project proposed by Chairman Roger Chase. Chase explained the fund will award competitive grants, capped at \$20,000 and requiring two-thirds matches, to help cities, school districts and other small water users implement water conservation measures.

"We're excited the state has really stepped up, because the state is recognizing we've got to recharge the aquifer," Chase said.

## Farmers ponder options following loss of container carriers

### Leaders urge grassroots efforts to develop plan to address labor problems

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

LEWISTON, Idaho — Farmers should tell Congress how labor problems and the related loss of container carriers at the Port of Portland are impacting their wallets, a Washington state hay exporter says.

Mike Hajny, vice president of Wesco International in Ellensburg, Wash., recommended farmers speak to members of Congress in an effort to change the labor law that allowed the longshore union to slow container traffic at West Coast ports.

Many agricultural products, including hay, potatoes and apples, are shipped via containers to customers in Asia and elsewhere.

The longshoremen have signed a five-year contract, but the issues will resurface



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Gifford, Idaho, farmer Gene Butler, center, takes the microphone to ask a question of company representatives May 28 during an industry meeting at the Port of Lewiston, Idaho, to discuss transportation options following the loss of container carriers and labor issues at the Port of Portland. Butler is worried growers will lose the Lewiston port if it doesn't remain active. "This is the end of the line for the river traffic, this is the last sea port from Portland," he says. "We'll surely lose it if we don't use it and keep it going."

again, Hajny said. It will have a "trickle-down effect" on West Coast farmers for years to come, who "absolutely, positively" lost market share with overseas customers who moved on to suppliers in other countries when they couldn't get it from the United States during the labor dispute, he said.

"It's made the U.S. West

Coast an unreliable supplier," he said.

Citing long loading and unloading times at the port, container carriers Hapag-Lloyd of Germany and Hanjin Shipping of South Korea pulled out of the Port of Portland early this year.

Of the 99 port districts in the Pacific Northwest, now only the ports of Seattle and

Tacoma export containers, said David Doeringsfeld, Port of Lewiston manager.

"We've got a backlog of some product already, we've got new crops coming on that need shipped," said Terry Largent, board member for the Latah County Farm Bureau. A wide variety of commodities is affected, including pulses, hay, potatoes, vegetables and apples, he said.

The situation impacts farmers' bottom lines, likely tripling freight costs and affecting overseas markets, Largent said.

Tim McGreevy, CEO of the USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council, said he is concerned that the loss of container carriers comes as pulse production is expected to increase. Between 55,000 and 60,000 metric tons of pulse crops — roughly 2,300 to 2,500 containers — were shipped to the Port of Portland from Lewiston in 2014, he said.

McGreevy expects to see growers relying more on truck traffic to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma, increasing congestion there.

"We have to have good transportation systems, be-

cause we can add more acres, but if we have no efficient way to ship it, it's really going to cost our growers, processors and exporters dearly," McGreevy said.

McGreevy is hopeful the port can attract smaller carriers to resume container shipments at the Port or Portland, although the prospects aren't good in the short term, he said.

A grassroots effort by farmers may be the best bet, said Steve Claassen, chairman of the Washington Grain Commission. He'd like to see the industry develop a way to handle future labor issues.

One idea that has been floated is to add the ports to the Railway Labor Act, which bans work slowdowns or strikes by railroad and airline unions. Under that law, labor disputes must go through mediation.

"We have to have a plan, because it's not going to go away," Claassen said.

"If we get enough awareness, maybe we can get enough people involved to create a solution," Largent said. "We've got five years to get this done, we better do it in four."

## Idaho wine, dairy industries unite for promotion

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho's top agricultural commodity teamed up with one of the state's fastest-growing farm sectors June 2 during a free tasting event in downtown Boise.

June is Idaho wine month and it's also national dairy month, so getting the two commodities together was a long time coming, said Idaho Wine Commission Community Relations Coordinator Shelley Bennett.

IWC places a big focus on increasing Idaho wine's in-state market share and part of that marketing plan involves bringing the state's

wines directly to consumers, she said.

Teaming up with dairy, by far the state's top farm commodity in terms of farm gate receipts, made good marketing sense and a free tasting event was a fun way of accomplishing that, she said.

"Who doesn't like wine and cheese?" Bennett said. "We thought it would be a great way to get both Idaho wine and Idaho cheese together and promote (both of them)."

The event was hosted by Juniper restaurant and held in the city's mural- and graffiti-covered Freak Alley.

Several hundred people flowed through the alley

during the three-hour event, which included representatives from eight Idaho wineries and four Idaho cheese companies.

Cindy Miller, senior director of consumer confidence for the United Dairymen of Idaho, said the state's dairy industry believes it's important to connect directly with consumers and events like this one are a great opportunity to do that.

"I think it's important for consumers to be connected to where their food comes from. A lot of people have never been on a farm," she said. "For us to help them understand how their food is made, and show them the

people behind it, gives them a greater understanding and appreciation for how hard farm families work."

Leah Clark, who manages the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred program, said it makes great sense for the two industries to work together to accomplish their goals.

"They're great partners and they should be partnering," she said. "The Idaho wine industry is a really fast growing industry and the state's dairy industry has long been a staple of Idaho agriculture. I think this is a great new event and one that will probably happen more than once."



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Cindery Winery sales associate Kristen Lawrence offers wine and wine samples to people during a free tasting event in downtown Boise June 2. The event was sponsored by the Idaho Wine Commission and United Dairymen of Idaho.