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FOOD SECURITY



Workers chop tops and tails off Romaine lettuce for Scaroni Family of Companies either in U.S. or Mexico. Scaroni grows most of his lettuce in Mexico to avoid labor shortages in California.

Courtesy of Scaroni Family of Companies

Some worry as production moves outside the U.S.

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Ten years ago, Steve Scaroni looked south seven miles from his farm near El Centro, Calif., to Mexico and thought “why not farm there since it’s so hard getting legal workers here.”

One of the largest lettuce producers in the nation, Scaroni was dealing with labor shortages he knew would only worsen.

“Our workforce was aging and going to other industries. Without immigration reform there was no way to replace them,” he said.

Another large salad producer had moved to Mexico five years earlier and was “getting it done.”

In early 2006, he began renting fields, 1,500 miles to the south in the state of Guanajuato in central Mexico. It was where the other company had gone and the climate was great for year-round production.

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U.S. food production shifting overseas



“Above 75 percent of your tomatoes come from Mexico now. We are outsourcing our food supply.”

Steve Scaroni, El Centro, Calif., farmer

Oregon’s industrial hemp growers look for solid ground

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Cliff Thomason’s goal is to be growing 10,000 acres of industrial hemp in five years. But right now he’s dealing with opposition from medical marijuana growers and Oregon legislators.

Thomason is among the first growers licensed by the state to raise hemp, which lacks the THC levels that gets pot smokers high but is valued because it can be used to make a wide variety of food, health and fiber products.

Thomason’s Oregon Hemp Co. has grow operations in Murphy and near Grants Pass, in Southwest Oregon, and he is negotiating to share-crop space on an organic farm near Scio, in the Willamette Valley.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has issued 13 hemp licenses, but it’s unclear how many growers have a crop in the ground this summer.

Thomason said growers are hampered by infrastructure and political problems. First, it’s difficult to obtain seed, although Thomason said he has seed from China, Lithuania, Slovakia and Germany. “Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” he said.

The Oregon Legislature is another matter. Medical marijuana growers in Southern Oregon believe pollen from industrial hemp will contaminate their potent pot and reduce THC levels. A bill in the Legislature would force a 5-mile separation between hemp and pot growers.

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Calif. issues shutoff orders to 114 senior water right holders

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Water regulators began issuing shutoff notices June 12 to holders of some of California’s oldest water rights while warning that more curtailment notices are likely.

The State Water Resources Control Board sent stop-diversion orders to 114 individuals and agencies holding 276 water rights along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The hardest-hit area is along the Sacramento River, where 86 right holders were told to stop using 127 water rights, according to the board.

As of now, the curtailment orders only affect landowners whose rights date back to 1903, and they don’t apply to holders of riparian rights — those with land directly adjacent to a water body.

But holders of even more senior rights may be next, said Tom Howard, the water board’s executive director.

“We anticipate every one or two weeks through the summer we’ll be issuing another batch of these as the supply of water declines and demands continue,” Howard told reporters in a conference call.

The notices issued June 12 shouldn’t affect this season’s water deliveries to Sacramento River settlement contractors, said Stan Wangberg, general manager of the Anderson Cottonwood Irrigation District. The contractors are seen as accessing previously stored water, he said.

“This announcement excludes those who have previously stored water under a valid right,” he said.

Curtailments of even senior right holders have been expected since January,

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Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press

Gino Celli inspects wheat nearing harvest on his farm May 18 near Stockton, Calif. Celli has senior water rights and draws his irrigation water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. The State Water Resources Control Board sent stop-diversion orders to 114 individuals and agencies holding 276 water rights along the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and in the Delta.



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