

OSU to recruit slug researcher, other experts

Additional state funds will pay for several new positions

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Farmers in Oregon will soon get some much-needed assistance with battling the slugs that are devouring their crops.

Oregon State University plans to recruit an entomologist who specializes in slug research as part of a broader hiring spree made possible with added money from state lawmakers.

Earlier this year, the university held a "Slug Summit" with farmers who complained that the pests have grown more problematic in recent years.

Theories abound as to why slugs are more prevalent — increased restrictions on field burning and reduced tillage were among the reasons proposed — but concrete proof is scant.

Methods of controlling the mollusks, such as bait containing the pesticide metaldehyde, aren't reliably effective, growers reported.



Courtesy of Robin Rosetta, OSU

European red slugs are quite common in gardens and landscapes. Oregon State University is hiring an entomologist who will focus on slug control.

The new research position will focus on the best ways to kill slugs or otherwise disrupt their life cycle, said Dan Arp, dean of OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences.

The Oregon legislature

recently approved \$14 million in additional funding for OSU's agricultural experiment stations, extension service and forest laboratory over the next two years.

Agricultural experiment stations will receive more

than \$6 million of that amount, which will fund 16 new assistant professor positions and six support positions, said Arp.

OSU will begin trying to fill the positions as soon as possible, but the recruiting process usually takes about eight months, he said.

"We're really grateful to the legislature for making this possible," Arp said.

Following is a summary of the other research positions that OSU's agricultural experiment stations will be looking to fill:

- Rangeland ecology with a focus on conserving the sage grouse, a bird species that's a candidate for federal protection. Ranchers fear that threatened or endangered status for the species could result in grazing restrictions.

- Integrated management of cropping systems, focusing on managing nutrients, water and pests for crops with intensive rotations.

- Weed and pest management primarily for horticultural crops like vegetables and berries.

- Water management and efficient use, such as examining innovative tools for irrigation.

- Fertilizer rate and transport, which involves the

study of how much fertilizer is consumed by crops and where surpluses end up.

- Near-shore fishery and oceanography, looking at sustainable practices.

- Food processing and safety, researching new technology and food safety concepts such as improving shelf life.

- Food microbiology, studying ways to prevent contamination with pathogens.

- Pesticide management, including the best management of rates and timing.

- Integrated pest management response to climate and weather, with a focus on modeling how changes will affect pest control.

- Consumer demands and marketing, which involves the study of how people make buying decisions and how to influence them. The main focus will be on products of fermentation like alcohol and cheese.

- Brewing microbiology, which will examine how to use microbiology to improve flavor.

- Quantitative plant genetics, which requires the use of modern molecular tools to improve breeding.

- Vegetable and specialty seed breeding and management.

- Seafood processing and innovation, which will include new methods and safety components.

- Two pollinator biology technicians, one focused on lab work and the other on field work.

- An experiential learning coordinator who lines up internships for students.

- Supplemental funding for three positions in fermentation science.

OSU's Forest Research Laboratory will receive \$3.5 million of the additional funding, which will be spent on a two-year study of the marbled murrelet, a threatened bird species that nests in coastal forests.

The birds will be banded with radio transmitters so researchers can find out more about where they travel and how far inland they lay eggs.

"We really don't understand much about their behavior. They spend most of their lives out at sea," said Thomas Maness, the laboratory's director.

OSU's extension service will receive nearly \$4.5 million of the added funding but is still in the process of prioritizing which positions will be filled, said Scott Reed, the service's director at the university.

Two farms accuse ConAgra of contract breach

Cases center on potato-buying contracts by subsidiary

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Two potato farms in Washington are accusing a subsidiary of ConAgra Foods of violating crop-buying contracts.

In one case, Charles Wood of Franklin County, Wash., alleges that representatives of the Lamb Weston subsidiary agreed to buy 12,355 tons of potatoes at \$150 per ton, but the company later reneged on the deal by seeking a lower price.

Wood is seeking \$1.85 million that he claims to be entitled to under the original contract.

Attorneys for ConAgra

have filed a motion to dismiss the complaint, arguing that Wood does not have written proof of a contract and merely alleges a "handshake" agreement on tentative terms.

In the second case, Zuriel Inc. claims that its potatoes were subject to rejection by ConAgra due to bruising, but the processing company refused to release them for sale on the open market.

Instead of allowing Zuriel Inc. to take possession of the crop, ConAgra processed the potatoes and paid a reduced price, which is a contract breach, according to the complaint.

Zuriel seeks unspecified damages to be determined at trial.

ConAgra is planning to soon file a motion to dismiss Zuriel's complaint as well, said Gerald Kobluk, attorney for the company.

The company doesn't believe there is any merit to either case, he said.

New group will represent Treasure Valley water users

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Several irrigation districts and canal companies have formed a Treasure Valley Water Users Association that will represent farmers and other water users in Southwestern Idaho.

"Until now, there's been no association or group comprised of one voice to protect our water rights ... in the Treasure Valley," said dairy producer Lou Murgotio, a member of the group's board of directors. "This is monumental. Water is everything to us out here."

Pioneer Irrigation District Manager Mark Zirschky said the formation of a group that goes to bat specifically for Treasure Valley water users is long overdue.

"It's something that should have happened a long time ago but we're sure welcoming it now," he said.

The group represents water users in Water District 63, which encompasses an area from Boise to Parma. It formed in June and its membership already includes five major irrigation districts and two canal companies.

Its eight-member board is comprised of seven people representing irrigation or canal companies and Murgotio is the at-large member.

Agricultural groups, including the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Seed Association, and individual farmers and ranchers have also joined the group



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

A potato field is irrigated in Meridian, Idaho, June 25. The newly formed Treasure Valley Water Users Association will represent water users in Southwestern Idaho.

as non-voting members, said TVWUA Executive Director Roger Batt.

The response from municipalities and elected officials has been positive, Batt said.

"They say this is something that will unify the water user community in the Treasure Valley and that's exactly what we intend to do," he said.

Batt said the group expects its membership to include water delivery entities that represent a total of 350,000 irrigated acres by the end of 2015.

The group has filed articles of incorporation with the Idaho Secretary of State and its board recently approved by-laws.

"This organization is alive and going," Batt said. "We keep getting more people (join) as we continue to spread the message."

Several TVWUA members said the impetus for the group's formation was the state's plan to start counting water released for flood control on the Boise River system against stored water rights.

"(This) issue is really what brought this organization together," Batt said. "There's been no other issue we can think of that has unified the irrigation delivery folks in basin 63 as much as (this) issue has."

One of the group's other priorities will be learning more about a Boise River Enhancement Plan advocated by environmental groups.

TVWUA officials have invited members of those groups to discuss the plan with them Aug. 10.

The plan's summary suggests farmers in the basin use only drip or sprinkler irrigation but that's not possible for the region's \$500 million seed industry, which depends on furrow irrigation to address certain disease and insect issues, Batt said.

"We want to learn more about what they're trying to do," he said.

Canadian official warns of possible retaliation for COOL

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A Canadian trade official based in California says she's encouraged by efforts in Congress to repeal a 2008 meat-labeling rule that's been the object of a six-year dispute between the U.S. and its two biggest trade partners.

Cassie Doyle, the Canadian consul general in San Francisco, said she understands retaliatory tariffs imposed by Canada and

Mexico could be devastating for major Western commodities such as California's \$24 billion wine industry.

"Our role has been raising awareness on the lack of fairness in" mandatory country-of-origin labeling, Doyle told the Capital Press. "We've been trying to get a fix for COOL. I've been reaching out to members of Congress from California and some of the legislators in Sacramento because retaliation will have a disproportionate impact on California being that they're such big ... exporters of agricultural goods into Canada."

"The bottom line is Canada does not want to retaliate, but we need to fix this discriminatory labeling scheme," she said. "It's



Doyle

had a real, real impact on our industries in Canada and has been very harmful to U.S. industry as well."

The Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives voted, 300-131, last month to repeal the label requirements after the World Trade Organization ruled for a fourth time this spring that the labels put Canadian and Mexican livestock at a disadvantage. The U.S. has exhausted all of its appeals before the WTO in defense of the rule, which requires meat labels to show where the animals were born, raised and slaughtered.

Canada and Mexico are now quantifying their level of harm from the rule and awaiting the WTO's go-ahead to begin sanctions, which Doyle said could be put in place this fall.

The lopsided House vote and looming sanctions put pressure on the Senate, where Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has called for legislation to address the issue.

"California in particular would feel the brunt of (retaliation), as tariffs against wine, cheese, beef, apples, tomatoes, chocolate and other products could cripple many companies," Feinstein said in a statement. "Consumers deserve to know where the food they buy comes from, but we need to make sure it's done in a way that doesn't destabilize California exports."

Canada has threatened to impose retaliatory tariffs on more than three dozen American commodities, including beef, pork, rice, corn, apples, cherries and wine. The Canadian government has complained that the labeling regulation has cost cattle producers and related industries north of the border as much as \$1 billion a year, though proponents of the rule dispute that figure.

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