

As world's population increases, so may the amount of pulse crops

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Dry pea acres in the United States were up 13 percent over 2014, from roughly 888,000 acres to 1,005,000 acres in 2015. The biggest increases in acreage were in Montana and North Dakota.

U.S. chickpea acres fell 2.5 percent, from roughly 202,000 acres in 2014 to 196,900 acres this year. At 70,000 acres, Washington state has the most chickpea acreage in the United States, according to the council.

McGreevy attributes the overall growth in acreage to increased demand and relatively low stocks.

Pulse prices have been strong compared to grain prices, he said. According to the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, chickpeas bring \$30 per 100 pounds on the Washington and Idaho market; lentils bring \$28 to \$30 per 100 pounds; and peas bring \$14 to \$15 per 100 pounds.

According to the council, the average yield in 2014 was 1,324 pounds per acre for chickpeas, 1,300 pounds per acre for lentils and 1,907 pounds per acre for peas.

That pencils out to about \$397 income per acre for chickpeas, \$551 per acre for lentils and \$286 per acre for peas.

The council estimates the total production cost in Washington and Idaho in 2014 was \$355.28 per acre for chickpeas, \$308.36 per acre for lentils and \$316.47 per acre for peas.

Scholz said pea yields are much higher — 2,500 to 3,000 pounds per acre — in the Northern Plains, making the crop more attractive there.

Farmers raise pulses for reasons beyond the economic return, Scholz said, pointing to the benefits to the soil and as a rotation crop.

Peas aren't dug very deep, so they basically require moisture from the top foot and a half of soil, Scholz said. Lentils require the least moisture. Chickpeas go a little deeper and are on the ground longer. In a dry year, the crop following chickpeas would show signs of moisture stress, but in a normal year, the moisture profile is recharged. Some growers choose peas over chickpeas, especially in drier regions, Scholz said.

"The value of having it in your rotation outweighs that concern," he said.

Most farmers in the Palouse area already raise pulses, said Genesee, Idaho, farmer Jay Anderson. He initially hesitates to recommend pulses to other farmers, but finally gives a convincing reason.

"Lentils are a fairly low-use water crop," he said. "If they're having water problems, yeah, maybe they should put some



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Farmer Allen Druffel demonstrates how he checks to see if his peas are ready for harvest. If they're starting to show up on the ground, he says, he begins harvest in a hurry. Druffel will harvest his peas three weeks early this year because of the heat and dry conditions.

U.N. promotes pulses in 2016

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Growers hope an international year-long celebration of pulses will grow the popularity of peas, lentils and chickpeas.

The United Nations has designated 2016 as the International Year of Pulses. The kickoff is in November.

According to the Global Pulse Federation, the campaign will position pulses as a primary source of protein and nutrients. The event will

promote "broad discussion and cooperation" nationally, regionally and globally to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by pulse farmers," according to the federation.

USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council CEO Tim McGreevy expects the year to provide "a major promotional push."

Events include "major launches" in New York City in November and Napa, Calif., in January; a national pulse recipe competition; and a school lunch competition,

challenging students to create a recipe using pulses.

"It's got protein, it doesn't have gluten — it's fitting a lot of the bills out there," said Jay Anderson, a Genesee, Idaho, farmer.

Colton, Wash., farmer Allen Druffel points to the successes of the "Got Milk?" and "Beef: It's What's For Dinner" promotions and hopes for a similar push for pulses.

"If we can match that kind of marketing in any way, I will be very happy," he said.

pulses into their rotation."

Growing needs

Besides kick-starting demand, the pulse industry's biggest needs in the coming five years are related to transportation, McGreevy said.

The loss of container carriers at the Port of Portland was "a real blow," he said. Last winter, the two biggest container carriers stopped calling at Portland.

"We have terrible congestion problems at the ports of Tacoma and Seattle," he said.

Railroad service has been a problem, too.

"We've had over the past five years just really challenging rail problems — trying to get rail cars, trying to get them on time," he said.

McGreevy has called for more investments in roads and bridges. Most of the 55,000 metric tons of pulses formerly shipped in containers by barge down the Columbia River to Portland have been switched to trucks that take them to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma.

Roughly half of the chick-

pea production, 65 percent of peas and 75 percent of lentils are exported.

"When you're exporting that kind of volume, you have to have a very efficient transportation system so your customers will keep coming back," McGreevy said.

Farmers would like to see more research and development on pulses.

Druffel wants varieties he could plant in the fall. Planting in early spring can harm the soil, he said. There are not many winter pulses, but winter pea and lentil varieties are in development, Druffel said.

Meyer said he'd like to see new chemicals to combat weeds, disease and insect problems.

"We're pretty limited right now," he said.

Anderson agreed. He would like more chemical options for pulses. Chickpeas don't have many choices once they emerge, he said.

"If it doesn't get rain, it doesn't activate the chemical and we end up with some weedy crops out there," he

said.

Pulses aren't considered a major crop, which makes finding funding for research difficult, Meyer said. The council is backing further research into the nutritional value of pulses.

"We know they're very healthy foods to eat, but we don't have a lot of the research there to back that up," he said.

Looking ahead

Meyer doesn't hesitate when asked if he will continue raising pulses.

"Oh, yes of course," he said. "I believe in them, believe in the health aspects and all of that. They'll be part of my rotation as long as I'm farming."

Druffel is optimistic about the future.

"I think when the First World discovers pulse crops, there's going to be an increased demand," he said.

"We honestly believe that part of the solution to reducing and ending hunger in our lifetime is to increase the consumption and production of pulse crops worldwide," Mc-

Insurance program provides safety net to pulse farmers

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

In 2012, the USDA Risk Management Agency approved a pilot crop revenue insurance program for pulses, another factor behind the growing popularity of the crops among farmers.

Farmers worked for 13 years to get a revenue protection program, USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council CEO Tim McGreevy said.

"It makes us competitive with other crops like wheat, barley and canola, that have revenue insurance in their quiver," he said. "It's always better to get a good crop, but it's also really helpful if you can cover at least your variable cost."

Most farmers agree that the insurance program gives them a safety net. Genesee, Idaho, farmer Jay

Anderson hasn't collected yet, because his yields have been good enough so far.

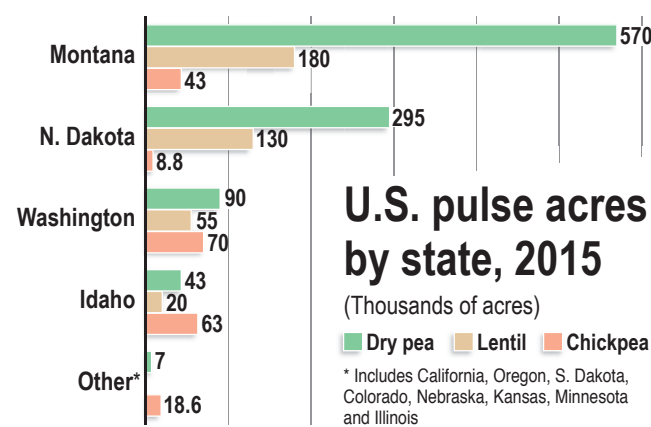
"It's nice to have it in case there is a disaster," he said.

Moscow, Idaho, farmer Kevin Meyer said having an insurance program helps when he goes to the bank.

"I have that backstop there to tell my banker on an operating line, I can be guaranteed a certain amount of income," he said.

Kendrick, Idaho, farmer Pat Smith said the insurance program is going to come in handy, particularly this year. He expects lowered yields on his green peas and lentils due to lack of rainfall.

"With Mother Nature, especially this year, people will be glad that they have it," he said.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council CEO Tim McGreevy speaks about the need to resolve transportation concerns for pulses and other crops May 28 during an industry meeting at the Port of Lewiston in Lewiston, Idaho. Transportation is the biggest need for the industry in the coming five years, McGreevy says.

Greevy said.

He expects more to turn to pulses as the world's population increases.

"We're facing water shortages," McGreevy said.

"These are low water-use crops. They build the soil profile, they put nitrogen back in the soil. They're just a really important crop as we move forward."

'Giant' food retailers are more vulnerable to activists' campaigns

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They are having some success because consumers want their purchases to align with their values, she said, and consumption becomes political practice as a result.

Bain's remarks came as the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that prohibits state and local governments from enacting their own mandatory GMO labeling laws but allows creation of a USDA-certified voluntary national standard. The bill, H.R. 1599, passed with bi-partisan support, 275-150, but faces an uncertain reception in the Senate.

The debate in Congress may reflect the state-by-state argument over GMO labeling. Voters in Oregon, Washington, and California have defeated mandatory labeling proposals in recent years, but it's been a hotly-contested and expensive fight. In Oregon in November 2014, a GMO labeling initiative was defeated by a scant 837 votes out of more than 1.5 million cast.

Vermont, Connecticut and Maine have passed laws requiring GMO labels.

Meanwhile, the marketplace is finding its way through the debate.

Big chains such as WalMart



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Iowa State University sociology professor Carmen Bain said science cannot solve the GMO labeling debate. But voluntary labeling may settle the issue, she told reporters.

are powerful players in food retailing, but the "rise of these giants" has made them more vulnerable to activists' campaigns because they want to protect their valuable brand names and reputations, Bain said.

Under pressure from activists, some large retailers have announced they won't carry items such as genetically engineered salmon, eggs from caged hens or new GMO potatoes — and their suppliers have to fall in line.

But Bain said the companies

aren't victims in these developments. They clearly recognize the "enormous" economic and social value of niche markets made up of consumers who hold those beliefs and are willing to spend more to maintain them, she said.

"I think they could care less about the science," she said. "If they can sell something they are going to do it."

A YouTube video of Bain's remarks to the National Press Foundation is available at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9P4CGM_XU8w

Only remedy is changing state law

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Switching entirely to hourly pay puts him at a competitive disadvantage, Hayden said. Fast pickers and packers make substantially more money on piece-rate than hourly pay.

"You go with piece-rate to attract good workers. Generally, good workers like piece rate. Slower workers want hourly and cruise," he said.

Hayden pays hourly for color-picking apples but pays piece-rate when trees are strip picked.

"I do Rainier (cherries) by the hour but it's tough because I have to compete with higher wages," he said.

"The bottom line is costs will go up. We're the highest minimum wage in the country now (\$9.47 per hour) and people want to make it \$15. Fine and dandy, except in agriculture everything is variable. We don't know if we will have a crop, what the yield will be and if we'll get paid. It's not like making widgets in a factory. We produce what we produce and labor is typically a deciding factor if we make money or not. If we don't make money there's no jobs," Hayden said.

Mike Gempler, executive director of Washington Growers League in Yakima, said the ruling will cost growers

paying piece-rate \$20 to \$30 more per worker per week, depending on how much they are earning.

It's not just fast picking but fast packing that's rewarded by piece-rate, he said.

"Another big issue is the cultural shift in the workplace for workers," Gempler said. "Many want to maximize every minute they have to work whether they get extra pay for breaks or not. The theory is that paying them for breaks removes the incentive for them to skip breaks, but they want money, they'd rather be working."

State law says workers "shall be allowed" rest breaks by employers but does not mandate them. The court emphasized rest breaks are mandatory, Fazio said.

Fazio believes employers have a third option. Paying hourly wages and a bonus for fruit picked or packed over a certain amount. However, attorneys advising WAFLA say that creates more risk and it can't be used for H-2A visa foreign guestworkers because it's not in their contract, he said.

The ruling threatens small growers and growers with small profit margins, Gempler said. People are upset but will adapt and just want to know how, he said.

Tree fruit, berries, grapes,

asparagus, hops and any other crops using piece-rate are affected, he said.

Major tree fruit companies are grappling with the ruling. They probably will keep using piece-rate and use the Supreme Court formula to calculate separate rest-break pay, DeVaney said. "It gets complicated. There are different rates of pay for different varieties," he said.

Compliance will cost "a lot of money, which will be painful" and harder for small growers, DeVaney said.

The only remedy is changing state law, which would be difficult and take time, he said.

David Douglas, president of Douglas Fruit Co. in Pasco, said he's keeping piece-rate and figuring out rest-break pay and that other companies probably are doing the same.

The president of another large company, who did not want his name used, said the 9-0 decision does not bode well for the industry regarding retroactive pay.

Hayden said that would be "a disaster" and said would be impractical and immoral.

Fazio said employers should preserve pay records for the last three years in case that happens. Attorneys advising WAFLA said retroactive pay could include interest and penalties.