

Oregon

Hermiston delivers watermelons, goodwill

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Jokes and seed spitting contest aside, there was a polite edge to Hermiston's renewed tradition of handing out free watermelons and potatoes in downtown Portland.

This time, Hermiston's growers and civic leaders stood in Portland's Pioneer Square as representatives of Eastern Oregon's biggest and fastest growing city and one of the state's agricultural powerhouses.

As a line formed for the giveaway Friday, Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann acknowledged the two cities vary greatly in scale — Portland has about 570,000 more people — but said they share issues such as public safety, livability, transportation and water.

"Those are all common things, regardless of size," he said.

Drotzmann said he hoped the event reminded Portland residents of Hermiston's agricultural prowess. Umatilla

County ranks second in the state, behind Marion County, with about \$500 million in annual gross farm and ranch sales. The region is best known for Hermiston watermelons, but grows a wide variety of irrigated vegetables as well.

"We provide the fruit and vegetables you pick up in the grocery store every day," Drotzmann said.

In his remarks to the crowd at Pioneer Square, Drotzmann said the eastern side of the state gladly extends its hand to Portland.

"We know when Portland is successful, all of Oregon is successful," he said.

Began in 1991

The watermelon delivery and accompanying melon seed spitting contest began in 1991 with a friendship between longtime Hermiston mayor and councilor Frank Harkenrider and colorful Portland Mayor Bud Clark.

The event ran for 17 years then faded, but was renewed this year by civic leaders and



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann oversees a watermelon and potato giveaway Friday in downtown Portland. The city renewed the exchange — and a seed spitting contest that Hermiston won — as a goodwill gesture to urban consumers.

the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce. Harkenrider and Clark attended Friday's renewal, and Harkenrider admitted the city slicker bested him at seed spitting. "He got

me all the time," he said with a laugh.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said the exchange "was a good idea then and is a good idea now."

"This is what good neighbors do for each other," Hales said, "they share their bounty."

Hales presented Drotzmann with a tie embossed

with a depiction of Portland's new Tilikum Crossing bridge, which opens in September and will carry light-rail trains and bikes over the Willamette River, but not cars and trucks.

The melons and potatoes, donated by Walchli Farms, Bellinger Farms and Bud-Rich Potato Inc., disappeared in about 20 minutes as a long line of pleased Portlanders took advantage.

Seed spitting sweep

For the record, Hermiston swept the seed spitting contest. City Councilor Doug Primmer took first, and Drotzmann was second. Both sent seeds flying more than 300 inches. Hales showed he was no slouch with a 296-inch launch, and Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman managed to spit one 126 inches.

Primmer indicated the city boys didn't have a chance against people who grew up in watermelon country.

"You live in Hermiston, you get into competition when you've got brothers," he said.

Oregon wolves disperse, establish new territory

EO Media Group

A pair of wolves from northeast Oregon packs have dispersed and established new territory in Klamath and Union counties.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife has posted two new areas of known wolf activity after OR-25, of the Imnaha pack, traversed the state to just north of Klamath Falls, and OR-30, of the Mount Emily pack, crossed Interstate 84 between Starkey and Ukiah.

Both wolves have been in their new homes since May.

OR-30's territory includes a mix of national forest land between I-84 and Highway 395, split down the middle by Highway 244.

Once ODFW establishes an area of known wolf activity, the department works with local landowners to determine appropriate non-lethal deterrents, such as fladry fencing and range riders.

Wolves remain listed as endangered by the state in Eastern Oregon, though that could change before the end of the year. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission will con-

sider whether to delist wolves during an informational briefing Oct. 9 in Florence, and a November meeting to be held in Salem. The date of the November meeting has not yet been set.

Public testimony will be taken at the meetings, but can also be emailed to odfw.comments@state.or.us. Please make sure to include "Comments on Wolf Delisting Proposal" in the subject line of emails.

Oregon has 77 wolves and nine packs statewide, though the animals are federally listed as endangered west of highways 395, 78 and 95.

OSU onion field trial seeks optimal thrip-control program

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — Oregon State University researchers in Eastern Oregon are trying to help onion growers figure out which mix of insecticide treatments is most effective, and economical, for controlling thrips populations.

Researchers are rotating chemistries, using them at different times of the season and applying them in varying intervals, said Stuart Reitz, an OSU cropping systems extension agent.

Onion thrips cause feeding damage and are also a vector for the iris yellow spot virus, which can significantly lower onion yields.

There are no good biological controls for the insects and onion growers say that not spraying for them in this region isn't an option.

"Onion thrips are a bigger problem than anything else in onion production," Reitz said. "If you don't do anything to manage thrips in the Treasure Valley, you're not going to have very good onions."

Onion growers used to spray three or four times a



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

year for thrips but in recent years they have had to spray as many as eight to 10 times in a season, said Nyssa farmer Paul Skeen.

"The key ingredient in controlling thrips is getting on it early and keeping their populations down," he said. "When in doubt, you spray."

But each treatment costs money and the main goal of the OSU trial is to try to find a season-long control program that will allow grow-

ers to reduce the number of times they spray, Reitz said.

Researchers are also trying to determine if products have a longer residual effect at certain times of the season. If they do, growers could get by with spraying less often.

"It's getting so costly to control them and we want to see if we can reduce that cost for growers," he said.

There are only six products that are effective for controlling onion thrips and researchers also want to develop a treatment program that allows growers to rotate chemistries often to avoid insect resistance, Reitz said.

Malheur County farmer Bill Johnson said the ongoing OSU trial is helping growers zero in on the optimal treatment program for thrips.

"We continue to have issues with flexibility in some of the chemistries we work with," he said. "We're just trying to find the right mix of chemistries. There are a lot of complexities (involved)."

This year's trial includes some experimental onion varieties that could have resistance to thrips.

The varieties come from New Mexico State University's onion breeding program, which wants to see how they perform in an area with strong thrips pressure, and the early results are encouraging, Reitz said.

"We seem to be seeing lower numbers of thrips on some of these experimental lines," he said.

If any of the varieties do have genetic resistance to thrips and that trait can be bred into commercially acceptable lines, that would help onion growers in this region immensely, Reitz said.

"It would have huge benefits all around, helping growers' bottom line as well as avoiding problems like insecticide resistance," he said.

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