

# Oregon

## Cattle industry tops Oregon's ag production list

By ZANE SPARLING  
Capital Press

SALEM — In a record-breaking year, cattle and calves became the most valuable agricultural commodity in Oregon, ending a 20-year reign in the top spot by greenhouse and nursery products.

The production value of beef jumped to \$922 million in 2014 from \$669 million in 2013, a 38 percent increase, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The value of Oregon nursery products was up 11 percent, from \$754 million in 2013 to \$830 million last year.

Cattle last ranked No. 1 in Oregon in 1994.

"In agriculture things go up and down, but beef producers have seen good returns this year," Oregon Beef Council executive director Will Wise said.

Wise said many factors — from the millennial generation's fascination with the "paleo" diet to improved market access abroad — helped spur the increase. Thanks to a lobbying effort funded in part by the Beef Council, Japan dropped an onerous regulation in 2013 prohibiting the import of cattle slaughtered after 20 months of age.

According to the U.S. Meat

Export Federation, beef exports now add \$350 of value per head to cattle. That statistic was pegged at just \$109 per animal in 2009.

This year's NASS statistics contained other surprises, too. Wine grapes, valued at \$118 million in 2014, joined the top 10 list, passing onions.

Onions, Christmas trees and blueberries all topped \$100 million in production value, but didn't make the top 10.

There are now 34,600 farms in Oregon, a slight dip, with an average size of 474 acres.

On the top 10 list, only wheat and potatoes decreased in value. Wheat's value dropped 18 percent, from

### Oregon's top 10 ag commodities, 2014\*

Rank	Item	Value (\$ millions)
1	Cattle/calves	\$922
2	Nursery	830
3	Hay	703
4	Milk	656
5	Grass seed	449
6	Wheat	302
7	Potatoes	164
8	Hazelnuts	129
9	Pears	127
10	Wine grapes	118

Source: Oregon Dept. of Agriculture \*Preliminary Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

\$368 million to \$302 million in 2014. Potatoes lost about \$6 million in value, from \$170 million in 2013 to \$164 mil-

lion last year. Kathryn Walker, a special assistant to the ODA director, said in a press release that Oregon's

severe drought could negatively affect the value of agricultural commodities this year.

However, she cautioned that it was still too soon to say.

"We are going to have to watch to see how the weather impacts our producers and the yields of their commodities," Walker said. "But our agriculture industry is resilient. They have faced these kinds of challenges before and typically bounce back."

All told, Oregon's farmers and ranchers added \$5.4 billion to the state economy. Oregon farmers produce 17 commodities each valued at \$50 million or more, and 220 crops overall.

## Oregon cold storage plant announces expansion

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

ALBANY, Ore. — Sno-Temp Cold Storage, which added 100,000 square feet just five years ago, will break ground this month on the eighth expansion of its Albany plant since 1974.

The work, expected to be done by May 2016, demonstrates the company's continued commitment to production agriculture and local food and beverage processors, CEO Jason Lafferty said.

The company freezes and stores bulk vegetables and ingredients for repackers such as NORPAC Foods Inc., the farmers' cooperative, and provides frozen or cold storage for other customers ranging from ice cream and dessert makers to craft breweries.

The company's storage capacity is the equivalent of 15 football fields, each piled 25 feet high with frozen food, Lafferty said.

Sno-Temp, which began in Eugene in 1957 and still has



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Sno-Temp CEO Jason Lafferty, left, and cousin Caroline Lafferty, the company's accounting and resource manager, look over plans for expansion of the company's Albany, Ore., cold storage plant.

storage facilities and administrative offices there, will expand the Albany cold storage plant by about 20,000 pallet positions arranged in vertical racks. The work will make it easier to accommodate small to mid-size processors that struggle to gain a foothold in the marketplace.

"In a bulk warehouse environment, bringing in a pallet or two or three is a challenge,"

Lafferty said. "We've had to say no to the smaller folks. We've been protecting space for our core customers."

The additional storage space may benefit processors, for example, who have put all their capital into kitchen facilities.

"What they need to get to the next step is cold storage," Lafferty said. "In Albany, we've had to turn people

away."

Adequate and accessible cold storage is among the problems hampering "ag of the middle" producers and processors, according to a recent report by EcoTrust, a Portland nonprofit.

Small processors "always run out of cold storage first," said Amanda Osborne, EcoTrust's vice president of farms and food and lead author of "Oregon Food Infrastructure Gap Analysis."

The report examines the hurdles faced by small- to mid-size growers and processors who are too big to survive by farmers market and CSA sales but too small to joust with commodity and corporate competitors.

Additional cold storage is critical to support regional food systems, Osborne said. She is familiar with Sno-Temp's relationship with small processors. "They're willing to work with very small players," she said. "I can't overstate how important that is."

## Oregon's Mt. Emily wolf pack blamed for sheep death

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

A ewe found dead in Northeast Oregon Aug. 4 was killed by members of the Mt. Emily wolf pack, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Investigators said the sheep was mostly consumed when they examined the scene and probably had been killed

the previous night. Bite marks on the carcass and large paw prints found around it were consistent with wolves, according to an ODFW report.

Data from GPS collars showed three wolves from the Mt. Emily pack were in the area when the attack is believed to have occurred. The same pack was blamed for a June 22 livestock attack 5.4 miles away, according to ODFW.



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Sand beds make plant care easy. Mike Ridling, one of Sevenoaks' owners, pulls a weed from a bed of aspen seedlings. The nursery is near Corvallis, Ore.

## Sevenoaks has been growing for 37 years

By GAIL OBERST  
For the Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — When Mike Ridling and Scott Anderson bought Corvallis-area Sevenoaks Native Nursery in 2006, there were not many wholesale native nurseries in Oregon. They began selling to the few Portland and suburban-area nurseries that sold natives, but growers closer to the metro area soon entered the market.

Ridling and Anderson re-evaluated their markets and, although they continue to sell to the Portland area, that market makes up fewer of their sales than before.

About half of Sevenoaks' sales is bare-root stock to contractors and businesses conducting restoration projects that require native plants. These projects include highway construction where disturbed areas are replanted with native trees and shrubs.

Conservation groups continue to be a staple of Sevenoaks' sales. Watershed councils, conservation districts and other groups also purchase nursery natives for planting along creeks and rivers and in upland areas, to conserve water or improve its quality, create shade and prevent erosion. Some of the bare-root stock also goes to nurseries that grow the plants on in larger containers.

The other half of Sevenoaks' sales is container stock, much of which also goes to restoration projects. The demand for larger and larger container plants is increasing, Anderson said. As a result, Sevenoaks is expanding their 5-gallon container sales and is growing larger trees.

When they first purchased the business, Ridling and Anderson began improving the looks of their products and increased their varieties from 150 to nearly 400 native plants, all grown on the nursery's 16 acres. Federal

construction projects along Interstate 5, Army Corps of Engineers, buffer zones in forested areas, farmers working on conservation plans, landowners who want to landscape natives for drought tolerance — all of these projects and activities are increasing the demand for native plants.

Sevenoaks was founded in 1978 by Ron and Barbara Cameron, who developed the raised sand-bed system still in use today. Walking past the long bed of small aspens, Mike spots a weed and pulls it effortlessly from the sand bed, roots and all. Aspens are still one of the nursery's mainstays. The nursery grows about 150,000 aspen seedlings every year.

Scott and Mike met at the University of Oregon and connected their passion for native plants to a business plan. Mike worked for a year with the previous owners and then Scott joined for the last few months before they took over the business.

Scott and Mike grow 95 percent of their stock from seed and the rest from cuttings, Scott said.

"We're passionate about that — genetic diversity comes from the seed, not the cuttings," he said.

Weather conditions have opened up new markets for other states' natives. California and Nevada companies, attracted to Willamette Valley's longer growing season and abundance of water, has contracted with Sevenoaks to grow their natives and ship them south.

In addition to the owners and Mike's wife, Amy Ridling, who manages the books, the company has nine or 10 year-round employees, a number that doubles during the bare-root harvest in the winter. The company sells to about 500 clients in a year and has no more room for plants, but the owners will probably not expand, Scott said.

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