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DOL threat forces grower to pay \$16K fine

'Basically, they had me over a barrel' owner said after DOL stopped his packing

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MESA, Wash. — An apple grower says he feels unfairly treated by the U.S. Department of Labor that fined him \$16,000 after finding children in his orchard.

"Basically, they had me over a barrel," said Bret Gledhill, owner of Gledhill Farms, a small orchard near Mesa.

DOL wouldn't let his apples be packed and sold until he paid the fine, which he did Aug. 21. Gledhill said.

Gledhill said he was loading apple bins in his loading yard the morning of Aug. 18 when a car with two women in it stopped and asked directions to a nearby Allan Brothers orchard. He told them it was a couple miles down the road. A few minutes later, they returned, identified themselves as DOL investigators and told him

two children were working in his orchard, he said.

"The parents said they weren't picking, but all it takes is a child placing one apple into a bin. DOL designates that as child labor," Gledhill said.

"So they seized my crop and wouldn't let my apples be run (packed)."

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Workers pick apples at a Washington state farm in this file photo. A Yakima Valley grower was forced to pay a \$16,000 fine after U.S. Department of Labor investigators allegedly saw children working in his orchard.

Associated Press file

Ranchers hit hard by fires' carnage

Okanogan is largest wildfire in history of Washington state

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OKANOGAN, Wash. — Numerous ranchers have lost their spring and fall pastures, state and federal grazing allotments, hay stacks, timber and cattle in the massive Okanogan Complex fire that has burned more than a quarter of a million acres in north-central Washington state.

With only a small area assessed, 25 residences, 15 mobile homes and 48 outbuildings are confirmed burned, said Jim DeTro, an Okanogan County commissioner and hobby rancher north of Riverside.

What began with multiple lightning strikes on Aug. 15 grew to threaten towns and burn more than 280,000 acres as of Aug. 26. That's an increase of more than 20,000 acres from the previous day. It has surpassed last year's Carlton Complex fire as the largest in state history. It is mostly northeast of where the Carlton fire burned last summer.

"I'm burned out. I have no hay, no pasture, no timber and no place for my cows to go," said Gerald Scholz, a rancher in Pine Creek west of Highway 97 between Riverside and Tonasket. Its property his great-grandfather homesteaded in 1888.

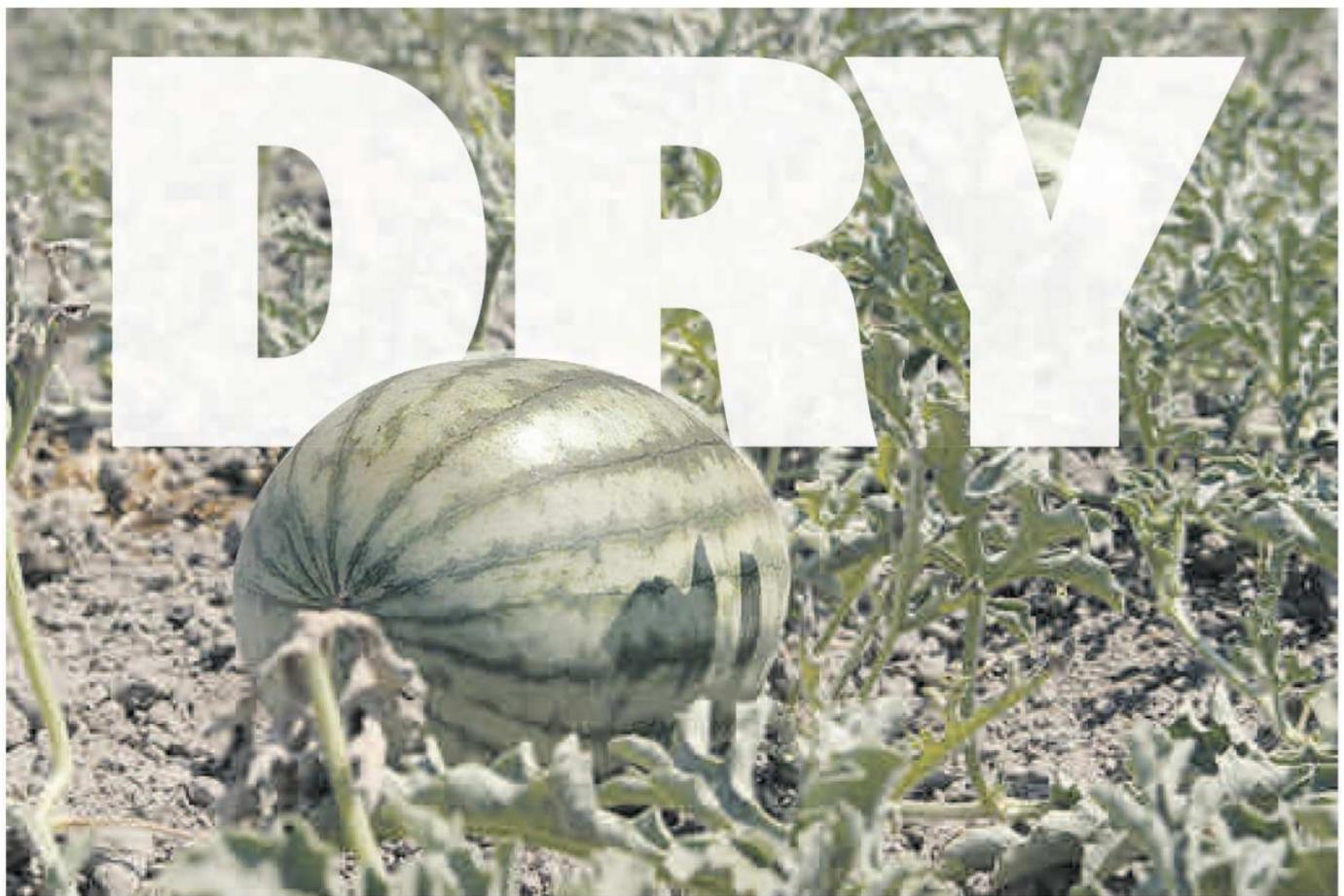
"The timber was my bank account. It's gone now. The DNR lit it on fire," Scholz said.

He blamed back burning

See Fire, PAGE A12

OSU project produces crops without irrigation

GROWING



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

A dry-farmed watermelon variety called Little Baby Flower won a taste test over irrigated melons during a field day at Oregon State University in early August.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Amy Garrett, an instructor with OSU Extension's Small Farms program, shows vegetables grown without irrigation this summer in Corvallis, Ore. Dry farming may be an option for some growers if drought persists in the West.

As drought continues dry farming may be an option for some producers

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — The squash plants' leaves are wilted and crinkled in the mid-day heat, and look like they desperately need water. But unless it rains, they won't get any.

In fact, they've never been irrigated since they were planted this spring. Neither have the zucchini, dry beans, potatoes, melons and tomatoes growing alongside them.

The vegetables are part of a dry farming demonstration project at Oregon State University's Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture. In three 10-foot-by-100-foot plots, OSU Extension instructor Amy Garrett is examining the possibilities of growing food crops without irrigation.

It's a topic under serious review as drought grips the West.

Hold the water

Irrigators throughout the Pacific Northwest and California have been restricted or shut off entirely this summer, the mountain snowpack that feeds streams in late season has already melted and many storage reservoirs are at alarmingly low levels.

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