

Washington



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Fosters Farms' trucks park outside the company's Kelso, Wash., processing plant. The state Department of Ecology has fined Foster Farms \$44,000 for releasing feathers and grease into a municipal wastewater treatment plant.

Foster Farms chicken plant fined for fouling Columbia River

Company says it will pay \$44,000 penalty

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

KELSO, Wash. — Foster Farms has been fined \$44,000 by the Washington Department of Ecology for water pollution violations, including releasing a large amount of grease and feathers into a municipal sewer plant.

Untreated wastewater flowed from the company's chicken processing plant between approximately 1 and 2 a.m. June 6, overwhelming the sewer plant and spilling greasy water into the Columbia River, according to DOE.

Grease and feathers were found throughout the Three Rivers Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant, which serves Kelso and Longview. Plant operators removed half a pickup load of feathers and other chicken processing waste from an inlet screen, according to DOE.

The incident occurred on a Saturday, and Foster Farms didn't tell sewer plant operators about the release until the following Monday morning, according to DOE.

"If they had immediately reported the discharge, the treatment plan could have had a chance to prepare for it

and better protect the river," DOE's water quality manager, Heather Bartlett, said in a written statement.

Foster Farms could appeal to the Pollution Control Hearings Board. In a statement, the company said it will pay the fine and is taking steps to prevent more violations of its permit to discharge wastewater.

The discharge occurred while the company was installing new equipment, according to a DOE investigation.

Foster Farms stated that their employees tried to correct the problem. The company stated it "regrets that notification was inadvertently delayed."

The June 6 discharge resulted in seven violations related to releasing pollution, failing to maintain equipment and failing to alert the sewer plant.

The company was also fined for exceeding pollution levels on eight other occasions between February 2014 and June 2015.

In assessing the penalty, DOE didn't find the discharge endangered human health, but assumed the pollution could have caused environmental damage in the Columbia River.

Foster Farms' Kelso plant uses between 1 million and 1.5 million gallons of water each day, according to DOE's investigation.

Audit finds 'farmland' sowing only lower taxes

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

VANCOUVER, Wash. — A southwest Washington county assessor says he hopes the prospect of losing tax advantages will motivate property owners to restore fallow land to agricultural production.

The Clark County Assessor's Office is reviewing whether lightly taxed parcels designated for agricultural use are actually being used for crops or livestock.

A first-round audit of 7,842 acres has found 362 acres not in agricultural use. The finding means the 33 property owners owe back taxes, interest and penalties totaling \$908,595.

Property owners can avoid a big tax bill by farming their land or leasing it to a farmer, Assessor Peter Van Nortwick said.

"The goal is to get people farming," he said. "It's better for the community to cultivate farmland, rather than having it left fallow."

The Clark County Farm Bureau embraces the audits. The group's president, Vancouver farmer Bill Zimmerman, said growers, including himself, have been rebuffed in their efforts to lease vacant agricultural land by property owners who were waiting to develop it, but still receiving an agricultural tax reduction.

"We very much applaud what the assessor's office is doing. It's finally requiring some



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Farmworker Galdino Marquez harvests Indian corn Aug. 28 at Bi-Zi Farms in Clark County in southwest Washington. Clark County Assessor Peter Van Nortwick says he hopes the prospect of losing tax breaks will motivate property owners to put fallow land into agricultural production.

proof that the tax break is being put to good use," he said.

Taxes on farmland are far lower than on residential or business properties. If the land falls out of production, however, property owners must make up the difference in taxes for the previous seven years, plus 12 percent interest. The statewide law discourages loss of farmland.

The tax savings are especially large in Clark County, where property values have risen much faster than the value of agricultural crops. The 42,000 acres designated for agricultural production has a market value of \$498.8 million, or an average of \$11,876 an acre, according to the assessor's office. While the

land remains designated for agricultural use, the taxable value is \$15.9 million.

Clark County was the state second-fastest growing county in 2014.

The tax savings are smaller in slower-growing counties that have high-value crops growing on a large percentage of the land.

Van Nortwick said the assessor's office had fallen behind in checking whether agricultural land was still in production. He said the back taxes, the county already has collected \$237,000, won't be a windfall for government. It will, however, slightly redistribute the tax burden.

"Some of these people hadn't been farming for 20 years," he said. "That's not fair

to other taxpayers."

Van Nortwick says some property owners were retired or former farmers, but others had not been farmers, or considered it. "If you have a lawn and shrubs, you were never thinking of farming," he said.

Small landowners, with fewer than 20 acres, must show at least a small income from agricultural activities in three of the past five years to avoid back taxes. Landowners with 20 or more acres can escape back taxes by putting the land into production, including by leasing it to a farmer.

"We have seen examples of people who are really going to farm again," Van Nortwick said.

Washington pea trials suffer from hot summer

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Drought and hot weather impacted Washington State University's pea variety trials, but farmers will still want to consider the crop for the benefits it brings to their soil, a university researcher says.

"Of course, peas are very much a cool season crop," said Stephen Guy, WSU extension agronomist.

The crop's ability to establish itself, seed weights and yields were hurt by the weather.

"We hope this is a rather anomalous year," Guy said.

But farmers should still consider pea production, since there's still quality product to sell and high demand he said, noting that all crops suffered.

The majority of peas are spring varieties, but Guy led a winter pea trial in Lind, Wash., to increase crop rotation options in low-rainfall areas.

"We're learning a lot very quickly," he said.

Winter peas also have a lot of potential in higher rainfall

Online

<http://variety.wsu.edu/2015/>

areas. Guy likens them to the difference between spring wheat and winter wheat, where winter wheat has 30 percent to 50 percent more yield potential.

"If a farmer is raising 2,000-pound spring peas per acre on an average, he might expect upwards of 3,000 pounds per acre for a winter crop," Guy said.

One of the major hurdles when bringing in new crops to an area is typically lack of demand, but food-quality peas already have an established market, Guy said.

Weed control is another hurdle. Herbicides are available for peas, but farmers will only be able to clean up some winter annual grass weeds, Guy said. Many legume acres had large weed numbers this year, particularly lamb's quarters. Many herbicides are pre-emergent and require rainfall to activate.

WSU develops carcass calculator

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

There's a new app for helping ranchers estimate the grade and cutability of livestock carcasses, Washington State University researchers say.

WSU recently released the livestock carcass grade and cutability calculator. The tool is free to download.

Sarah Smith, animal sciences extension regional specialist with WSU Extension in Moses Lake, said WSU's tool is the only one she's found as an app, which can be run on a smart phone or tablet.

The calculator figures estimated yield grade, dressing percentage, actual yield grade, percent retail cuts and determines USDA quality grade by reviewing USDA degrees of marbling standards for A maturity cattle carcasses less than 30 months of age.

For pigs, the calculator determines estimated percent muscle, dressing percentage and actual percent muscle for ribbed and unribbed carcasses, correcting for skin on or off or if the head has been removed from the carcass.

For lambs, the calculator determines estimated yield grade, dressing percentage, actual yield grade and percent of boneless closely trimmed retail cuts.

The calculator offers an average, putting users in the proper range, Smith said.

The tool is useful for some-

one learning to evaluate livestock or carcasses, said Lisa Baser, agriculture teacher and FFA advisor in LaCrosse, Wash. Baser gave the calculator a test run.

"For people that don't have a solid knowledge of carcass grading, it's a good way for them to get an accurate calculation without having to do a lot of research," Baser said.

Ranchers may have a general idea of what their live animal will look like as a carcass, she said. The calculator will help those who don't have a local extension agent, FFA advisor or other means of grading, she said.

"To be really good at calculating quality and yield grade, it takes a lot of practice," she said. "Not everyone has time to get into the cooler and do that. Here's a device they can take in, look at their own carcasses and get an accurate number."

Baser expects the calculator to help teachers with students showing livestock at county fairs.

The calculator will help students learning how to grade carcasses or be useful in butcher shops, Smith said.

"We're optimistic it will be used quite a bit," Smith said.

The university may try to build on the tool. Smith hopes to be able to evaluate the ribeye area or the loin eye muscle for hogs and lambs. WSU also plans to release a sheep marketing decision app in the next few months.

You Can't Control The Wind, The Snow Or The Rain...

You Can Plant The Cleanest, Most Robust Cereal Seeds Available

Go With The Blue Tag And Plant The Very Best!



CERTIFIED SEED



Washington State Rules and Regulations, WAC 16-302-115 (limitations of liability), applicable to all certification procedures and results. Copies available.

RETAIN FOR CERTIFICATION RECORD

MEMBER OF ASSOCIATION OF OFFICIAL SEED CERTIFYING AGENCIES



Always Plant Certified Seed

Cleaner Fields • Higher Yields • Guaranteed Quality

Washington State Crop Improvement Association

Located in the heart of The Palouse at the Port of Whitman in Pullman, Washington

2575 NE Hopkins Court Pullman WA 99163

509-334-0461

www.washingtoncrop.com

Online

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=edu.wsu.meatcalculator>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/livestock-carcass-calculator/id1022439322?mt=8>