

Rain, snow dampen N. Washington fires

Big backburn avoided; Interior secretary visits

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OKANOGAN, Wash. — Rain and snow dampened the 371,960-acre Tunk Block and North Star wildfires northeast of Okanogan over the Labor Day weekend.

Ranchers say they talked fire managers, led by the U.S. Forest Service, out of burning 22,000 acres of grazing allotments between the two fires before the rain and snow fell. Ranchers also voiced their concerns about government forest management to U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, who visited the fires on Labor Day.

Large portions of the fires are in mop up and patrol mode, fire lines continue to



Courtesy of Kallenia Vejraska

Part of Moses Meadows, about a foot deep in ash, is shown on the southwestern edge of the North Star Fire on Sept. 6. Kallenia and Todd Vejraska fixed some fence and spent five hours looking for cows that day. They found some orphan-looking calves and saw five bears, deer and some moose tracks.

be built and burnouts to secure uncontained areas are expected by the weekend, said Shannon O'Brien, a Forest Service fire spokeswoman.

On Sept. 4, ranchers were alarmed by plans for a large

burnout to protect several hundred residents in the Aeneas Valley north of the fires.

"They say 22,000 acres is an overstatement and that it was a contingency plan, but my (USFS) rangecon told me about it and to start moving

cows and it seemed more likely to happen than not," said Todd Vejraska, one of three ranchers directly impacted.

"It was the last piece of our allotments that hadn't burned yet," he said.

Much of the Vejraskas' own 4,500 acres of grazing land burned in the Tunk Block fire along with about one-third of their agency grazing allotments. Their permits total about 100,000 acres with the Colville Confederated Tribes and 28,000 with the Forest Service.

The Vejraskas run 600 to 700 pair of cattle and have not found any dead. Many, they believe, are in meadows in the unburned stretch between the fires.

Vejraska called state Rep. Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda, and Okanogan County Commissioner Sheilah Kennedy, who spoke with fire managers. Collectively, Kennedy, Kretz

and ranchers talked fire managers out of the backburn, Vejraska said.

"They said it was always a contingency plan, but it seemed likely to happen," he said.

O'Brien said the area in question was about 3,600 acres and that it wasn't close to being backburned but that ranchers were being notified in case it was.

About 170 firefighters built seven or eight miles of fire line on the northeast edge of the Tunk Block fire, she said. Backburning may still be needed to protect Aeneas Valley and will be done to protect the town of Republic from the North Star fire, she said.

Moisture dampened fires but was not enough to finish them off, Vejraska said.

Jon Wyss, government affairs director of Gebbers Farms and Gamble Land & Timber in Brewster, issued

a public statement following the meeting with Jewell saying locals emphasized forest management could reduce fuel loads and wildfire intensity. Massive fires are challenging the ability of riparian areas to hold water for fish, he said.

Proactive forest management is "squashed" by threats, lawsuits and appeals by certain groups, Wyss said.

Agencies and their foresters know how to manage, but the environmental community won't let them do it, Vejraska said.

"A happy medium of allowing some activity to thin and manage riparian buffer zones in a responsible manner has to start in conjunction with regular timber sales," Wyss said. "This string of wildfire, destructive events could and should be the catalyst to find the proper balance again in our Western forests."



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Cool nights after a record warm summer can improve wine quality this year, as it did for these Oregon Pinot Noir grapes in 2014.

Arrival of cool nights should help wine quality

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Unusually warm weather made for an early start to the wine grape harvest in the Pacific Northwest and Northern California, and continued cool nights should assure quality is top notch, a research climatologist said.

Gregory Jones, a professor at Southern Oregon University who tracks the industry and specializes in how climate variability affects vine growth and wine production, said many growers are reporting the earliest harvest since 1992, or the earliest harvest ever at their vineyards.

Early ripening and sparkling wine varieties were the first picked, Jones said in an email newsletter he circulates to about 3,000 subscribers in the West.

"All other varieties are lining up for harvest but the recent shift to cool nights will allow for some timely queuing for flavors to develop," Jones said in his Sept. 5 newsletter.

The unusually hot summer, of course, is the reason for an early harvest.

Average temperatures for August were one to four degrees above normal in California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho, Jones reported.

The increase in degree-day accumulation — the combination of heat and time required to complete a

plant's growth — was even more striking, especially in Oregon and Washington, Jones said.

Degree-day accumulation in both states as of Sept. 1 was 10 to 15 percent above 2014, another hot summer, and 30 to 35 percent higher than 1981 to 2010 averages, he said.

The arrival of cooler nights, if the pattern holds, can put a good finish on what appears to be another good grape crop.

"There are two things that help plants to start ripening, especially wine grapes," Jones said. "Shorter days, and cool nights. That is an environmental cue to tell the plant, 'We have to ripen this fall.'"

The same thing happens with tomatoes, which take on a deep red color as summer ebbs, he said.

"Those cooler nights tell them to do this soon or you're not going to ripen," Jones said.

Jones said vineyard managers face day to day harvest decisions in such conditions. "How long do they leave fruit out there to get the different flavors they want?" he said.

Jones agreed Oregon growers are optimistic at harvest time no matter the conditions.

"It's kind of like in Bordeaux, in France," he said with a laugh. "It's always the vintage of the always."

Farm Bureau sponsors live milking at fair

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BLACKFOOT, Idaho — Children who lined up for the main attraction of the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation-sponsored Meet the Animals booth at the Eastern Idaho State Fair each got to produce a couple of squirts of milk from a live cow.

The experience was short lived.

But Connie Boger, co-owner of the traveling educational animal exhibit Animal Specialties, believes the experience serves a vital purpose and makes a lasting impression on participants, who take advantage of an opportunity that's becoming increasingly hard to find.

"It's not just for kids. It's for adults, as well, because there's a lot of women that come up and say, 'This has been on my bucket list for years,'" Boger said.

Prior to a scheduled milking time at the fair, hosted from Sept. 5-12, Boger explained to her audience that Holsteins produce a greater volume of milk



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Connie Boger helps a girl milk a cow at the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation-sponsored Meet the Animals Display during the Eastern Idaho State Fair on Sept. 7.

than the Jersey she brought. She also explained cows don't produce milk until after they have a calf.

She said the most common question from children is, "Why does the milk come out warm?"

She feeds the milk to her calves and pigs, which are also part of the display.

Boger, of Lowell, Ark., travels 18,000 miles per year trucking her display to fairs and

events throughout 12 states. She's been doing it for 20 years, ever since she discovered as a former elementary school administrator, librarian and substitute teacher that children have become disconnected from food production.

"Kids were so uneducated about farm-related things," Boger said. "I thought it was time somebody go out and try to teach them."

For Kenzie Bingham, whose

family has a dairy in Weston, Idaho, milking a cow at the fair was nothing new. But Boger, who was raised milking cows on a South Dakota ranch, said large dairies won't allow public milking due to the liability, and most children no longer have access to family farms and dairies.

"Milking a cow is almost gone," Boger said. "It's a part of Americana that we have got to keep alive."

Children who missed live cow milking times could still enjoy a virtual experience with Farm Bureau's replica cow, Maggie. Children who attempted "milking" the artificial cow, on display at the fair, were each given a carton of milk.

Bingham County Farm Bureau President Gary Judge explained the state organization has three Moving Agriculture to the Classroom trailers, which visit about 100 Idaho schools each year. In addition to Maggie, Judge said the trailers have agricultural lessons, and students using the trailer get to make pancakes from hand-milled grain, and their own butter from a small container of cream.

IPC to cover costs of using heart health checkmark

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — The Idaho Potato Commission plans to cover licensing fees for any member shipper using the American Heart Association's heart health checkmark on packaging, thanks to savings achieved in a recently renegotiated contract.

IPC announced the change to the AHA program Sept. 3 during the Idaho Grower Shippers Association's annual meeting. AHA officials say they now plan to offer the same discounted rates for all other qualifying commodities.

After completing nutrition assessments, IPC obtained AHA Heart-Check certification for four potato categories in the spring of 2011. The recognition came at a cost, however.

Under the original contract, IPC paid \$20,000 per year to license Russets, fingerlings, reds and yellows. Shippers had to pay \$1,000 per year for each category eligible for the checkmark.

The new contract reduces IPC's base rate to \$12,000 per year. Discounts for shipper licenses will be tied to participation. For example, IPC President and CEO Frank Muir said the cost of 50 shipper licenses would drop from \$50,000 per



Bill Schaefer/For the Capital Press

Linda Rupp, of the American Heart Association's Heart-Check Certification Program, presents details of a renegotiated contract with the Idaho Potato Commission on Sept. 3, during the annual Idaho Grower Shippers Association meeting in Sun Valley.

year to \$15,000. Muir said only five of 30 Idaho shippers took advantage of the checkmark under the old contract, and he asked top AHA executives whether they considered it more important to generate revenue through their program or educate consumers about healthy food choices.

"I felt like we could get much more participation if we were able to restructure our program with our shippers," Muir said.

Alex Barbieri, director of the AHA program, said the organization will meet with other commodities about the new contract options. The 20-year-old program licenses 700 products, and research shows it influences more than 60 percent of consumers. Barbieri said the program is revenue-neutral, with funds reinvested in staffing and promotion.

"Not enough Americans are eating healthy foods, especially fruits and vegetables," Barbieri said. "There's a lot of work we need to do to get that message out."

Another change in the new contract allows shippers to obtain approval for new packaging using the checkmark through IPC rather than AHA, which often requires several months to process requests.

Randy Hardy, an IPC board member from Oakley and chairman of the board with Sun Valley Potatoes, said his company hasn't participated in the checkmark program but likely will soon, due to the changes.

"I think having that expense waived, you'll see guys pick it up more," Hardy said.

Hardy said shippers must still bear the cost of updating printing plates to use the checkmark, but he likes that the new logo uses just two colors, which is far cheaper than

the previous four-color logo.

Muir said the timing for a third-party potato health message is ideal, with new federal nutrition guidelines expected to come out soon, listing potassium — a nutrient found in abundance in spuds — as a key concern.

Also during the meeting:

- Muir announced an independent research company, Joyce, Julius & Associates, commissioned by ESPN concluded the annual advertising value of the IPC-sponsored Famous Idaho Potato Bowl is \$2.8 million. Under its new contract, IPC pays \$450,000 per year to sponsor the college football game, which will be played at 1:30 p.m. Dec. 22.

- IPC's new Great Big Idaho Potato Truck commercial was scheduled to debut during the Boise State University football game against University of Washington, which airs starting at 8:15 p.m. Sept. 4. The commercial features grower Mark Coombs and his dog and ESPN sideline reporter Heather Cox. The next potato truck tour will begin next spring with "a big helping" as the theme.

- IPC has launched a redesigned website intended to work better with hand-held devices. The website receives about 1 million hits per year.

Taiwan flour millers pledge \$544 million to U.S. wheat exports over two years

Delegates touring Idaho industry

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Taiwan flour millers will pledge \$544 million to export U.S. wheat over the next two years.

The Taiwan Flour Millers Association will sign an agreement supporting U.S.

wheat exports during a signing ceremony Sept. 12 in Lewiston, Idaho. The agreement is part of a delegation visit Sept. 10-13.

The deal means the association will import more than 70,000 metric tons, or 2.5 million bushels of wheat, every month to be distributed among all the millers, according to a press release from Idaho Gov. Butch Otter's office.

The association signs a letter of intent every other year, said Blaine Jacobson, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission. In the months following, the association puts through purchase orders for wheat tenders that total up to at least that amount.

"There's never been a time that they haven't actually exceeded what they committed to purchase,"

Jacobson said. "\$544 million is what they're comfortable committing to, but we expect them to actually buy more than that."

The total has gradually increased, with \$544 million the largest total yet, Jacobson said.

The agreement shows the depth of Taiwan's commitment to buying wheat from the United States, particu-

larly soft white wheat from the Pacific Northwest, Jacobson said.

The delegation will visit a grain terminal, wheat farm and grain elevator in the Lewiston area, and will be the wheat commission's guests of honor at the Lewiston Roundup Rodeo Sept. 12.

"They're coming in to take a look at this year's crop, which is very good

again," Jacobson said. "They'll assess the quality of it. They always like to connect ... with the country elevators and the various pieces of the supply chain."

Taiwan is one of Idaho's five largest export customers, coming in fourth-largest last year. Idaho imported more than \$470 million to Taiwan last year, according to the press release.