

Irrigation district sued over financing plan

Columbia Basin complaint: All area landowners charged the same fee

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A lawsuit filed this week alleges the East Columbia Basin Irrigation District will break state law if it finances a major project with a uniform fee, regardless of the actual cost of delivering water to individual landowners.

The Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association claims a flat development fee would force some farmers to subsidize

service to others.

The lawsuit is the latest bid by the irrigators association, a private group, to change a government plan to bring Columbia River water to some 87,700 acres in the Odessa Subarea. Farmers in the Eastern Washington region now rely on an aquifer that officials say is rapidly depleting.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Washington Department of Ecology and Columbia Basin irrigation districts collab-

orated on the plan. The plan's outline is set, but details, such as financing and exactly how many acres will receive water, are still being worked out.

The agencies have resisted a push by the irrigators association to allow 14 landowners to go ahead and privately finance their own system to serve 14,500 acres north of Interstate 90 and east of Moses Lake.

The lawsuit, filed in Adams County Superior Court, takes aim at a key feature of the government plan.

The plan calls for spreading out the cost equally among irrigators, rather than making farmers farther from main can-

nals pay more.

The irrigation association's representative, Darryll Olsen, said in an interview that the district's approach won't fairly allocate expenses and will make the project too costly for some farmers. Even irrigators who pay to build their own connections to canals would have to pay to the district a minimum development fee of \$120 per acre, he said.

Government officials say Olsen's plan favors landowners close to a main water source, the East Low Canal. It also would undermine the plan's goals to bring relief to a large swath of Eastern Washington,

they say.

The Columbia Basin Development League's government affairs director, Mike Schwisow, said irrigation districts traditionally spread out expenses among its members, even though actual pumping costs vary.

Odessa Subarea farmers farther from delivery canals wouldn't be able to afford water if the costs weren't allocated equally, he said. "Everybody within three miles (of the canal) could have really cheap water," he said.

"It's regrettable because the district now has to defend against the lawsuit, and that's

going to be a cost borne by all district landowners," Schwisow said.

Olsen's group has also filed a lawsuit against the Bureau of Reclamation in the U.S. District Court for Eastern Washington.

The suit alleges the bureau violated federal procedures by failing to seriously consider the association's proposal to lease water for a privately financed system.

The bureau has moved to dismiss the suit, arguing it has no obligation to consider an unsolicited contract. A hearing on the motion is set for Oct. 28 in Richland.

WSDA seeks teachers for manure program

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Department of Agriculture is looking for experts to train farmers to spread manure without fouling groundwater or surface water.

The classes will be part of a two-year, \$575,000 program authorized by the Legislature. The education initiative was an alternative to legislation that would have required manure applicators in some counties to be licensed.

The Washington State Dairy Federation welcomed the alternative and lobbied for funding. The group's director of government relations, Jay Gordon, said the classes will advise farmers on how much, where and when to fertilize with manure.

"We have folks who live downstream from us, and we need to do a better job," he said.

Manure figures prominently in ongoing Washington state environmental issues. The Department of Ecology recently issued informal guidelines to advise ranchers with livestock grazing near streams. DOE also is rewriting rules for concentrated animal feeding operations. The revision could require nearly all producers with manure lagoons to obtain a new DOE permit.

WSDA has the responsibility to oversee dairies, but DOE retains the right to take

action against any livestock operation to enforce the federal Clean Water Act, according to an agreement between the agencies.

WSDA last fall began working on a manure-spreading bill in response to concerns about groundwater pollution in Yakima County and contaminated shellfish beds in Whatcom and Skagit counties. Farm lobbyists and lawmakers from agricultural districts objected. Although Gov. Jay Inslee included funding for a licensing program in his budget proposal, a bill was never actually introduced.

Gordon said the legislation would have targeted dairy farmers without addressing other sources of watershed pollution. "It felt like we were being stigmatized," he said.

The dairy federation, however, embraced what Gordon called "classic extension-service education."

More than 100 producers attended eight-hour workshops in January in Whatcom and Yakima counties on applying manure.

"I think there's a considerable amount of pressure on folks using manure," said Ginny Prest, WSDA's Dairy Nutrient Management Program manager.

WSDA is looking for people with expertise in applying manure or managing irrigation water, she said. WSDA hopes to develop classroom and field courses throughout the state.

Growers check out robotic apple picker

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

PROSSER, Wash. — A robotic apple picker successfully picked two apples from an artificial tree but the third apple fell to the floor during a Washington State University demonstration.

The picker was a star item at a Sept. 17 field day and open house at the new \$4.5 million facilities of the Center for Precision and Automated Agricultural Systems at the WSU Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center at Prosser.

A robotic picker would be a big development in the apple industry in labor savings and meeting labor shortages, but Joe Davidson, a mechanical engineering doctoral student demonstrating the picker, said it is still five to six years from commercialization. The apple that fell on the floor was supposed to go into a tube and into a container.

Trying to mimic the human eye and hand to pick fruit with speed while not bruising it is difficult to do, Davidson said.

So far, the WSU robotic apple picker averages 6.8 seconds to pick an apple in a lab setting compared with 1 to 2 seconds for a human to pick an apple in an orchard, he said. The best recorded time of previous attempts at robotic apple pickers is 8 to 9 seconds, he said.

Big challenges are speed and getting the robot's vision



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Joe Davidson, Washington State University mechanical engineering doctoral student, demonstrates use of a robotic apple picker at a WSU field day in Prosser, Wash., on Sept. 17. Such a device could be a big labor saver for the apple industry.

system to see apples hidden behind leaves and branches, he said.

Cameras, sensors and algorithms are used in identifying fruit, shape, color and texture. The vision system has been field tested but orchard testing of the robotic arm and picking hand will begin at Prosser in the next two weeks, Davidson said.

The project is headed by Manoj Karkee, WSU assistant professor of biological systems engineering.

Among more than 100 growers and agriculture industry members watching the

demonstration was David Allan, co-owner of Allan Bros. Inc., an apple grower, packer and shipper in Naches, northwest of Yakima.

"The concept is very appealing, but development has a ways to go," Allan said.

Labor is tight and the industry is becoming more and more dependent on H-2A visa foreign workers for picking fruit, he said.

There will be less incentive for people to come as H-2A workers as the economies of their countries improve, he said. The program also could be

disrupted by political problems between governments, he said.

Robotic pickers will ride on mobile platforms, feeding apples into vacuum tubes leading to bins. Platforms will need to be all-wheel drive and all-wheel steering to negotiate slopes, Allan said.

With machines likely costing \$500,000 to \$1 million apiece, they will have to operate quickly to be cost effective, he said. That means developing planar or fruiting wall trees so the robot finds fruit on a single plane and doesn't have to reach deeper into foliage, he said.

UI 'bakery' plays key role in wheat breeding

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
Capital Press

ABERDEEN, Idaho — Now is the busy season for a University of Idaho research laboratory that typically smells of fresh-baked bread or sugar snap cookies.

Cereals chemist Katherine O'Brien manages the Wheat Quality Lab at the University of Idaho's Aberdeen Research & Extension Center. It's a small bakery, where UI's experimental wheat lines are assessed for end-use quality.

O'Brien and her three technicians are testing dough and producing bread, cookies and

noodle squares in bulk to help the university's Moscow and Aberdeen breeding programs determine which experimental lines to retain when this fall's wheat trial plots are planted. They operate from wheat harvest through May and experience a second rush in December and January, when planting decisions must be made for spring wheat trial plots.

This is no ordinary kitchen. Along with an oven and flour mill, they operate a machine called a mixograph, which essentially records the "fingerprint" of dough. Each wheat variety produces a unique pattern of markings on a mixograph printout, telling O'Brien and her cohorts details such as dough strength, water retention, peak mixing time and ability to withstand over-mixing.

"A lot of people call it a kitchen, but we're doing actual scientific experiments every day," O'Brien said.

The Idaho Wheat Commission built the lab in 1959 and shares the operational costs, ranging from \$105,000 to \$120,000 per year, with the



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Mary Corbridge, a technician at University of Idaho's Wheat Quality Lab in Aberdeen, takes measurements of bread loaves, baked with experimental grain varieties. The data helps UI assess end-use qualities of experimental lines in its breeding program.

university. The facility evaluates 12,000 to 14,000 individual lines per year, starting with the fourth field generation.

"Unfortunately, there's some stuff that looks beautiful in the field that you end up tossing because the end-use quality doesn't come up to par," said Justin Wheeler, a support scientist under wheat breeder Jianli Chen.

They conduct a battery of flour tests, assessing factors such as protein levels and classification as hard or soft. But O'Brien explained baking is

often the best way to evaluate a line.

Her staff adheres strictly to baking methods developed by the American Association of Cereal Chemists, so their data is consistent with other private and public wheat quality labs, including the USDA facility in Pullman, Wash., where Oregon State University and Washington State University lines are also evaluated.

Each bread loaf includes flour from a single wheat variety. The association mandates that loaves weigh precisely 100 grams, be baked for 21 minutes at 375 degrees and include a prescribed amount of sugar, yeast and shortening.

Each year, the university submits a few lines poised for release to the Northwest Wheat Quality Council, which includes representatives from the industry, for further end-use quality evaluation.

"(A line) is usually not a dog once it gets to that point," O'Brien said.

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WHATCOM COUNTY REQUEST FOR QUALIFIED CONSULTANTS FOR FARM PLANNING

Whatcom County Planning and Development Services is seeking qualified professionals in the area of agriculture nutrient management and farm planning to include in a qualified consultant list. Qualified consultants should be able to assess critical areas and develop best management practices for farm practices that are protective of those critical areas. Consultants should have training in agronomy or a related field, has at least five years of professional experience in farm planning, and is familiar with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation practices and the Whatcom County Critical Areas Ordinance.

Send contact information & qualifications to:

Whatcom County Planning & Development Services
Attn: Ryan Ericson, PDS
Supervisor - Natural Resource
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226
360-778-5900 39-1/#4

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OREGON TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING (OTAC)

WHAT: OTAC Meeting
WHEN: October 1, 2015
@12:30pm-4:00pm
WHERE: Clackamas Community College, Wilsonville Campus, 29353 Town Center Loop E, Room 108-B
Wilsonville, OR 97070
For more information, or to arrange special accommodations for meeting attendees, please contact Tracy Robillard, Oregon NRCS State Office, 503-414-3220.

39-2/#4

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PURSUANT TO ORS CHAPTER 98

Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 10/12/2015. The sale will be held at 10:00am by RANDY'S TOWING 925 WILCO RD, STAYTON, OR 2007 SUZUKI S 50 MC VIN = J51V552A772101239
Amount due on lien \$3,844.00
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