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GOING ROBOTIC



Automated machinery reduces labor costs, stress on cows

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

TILLAMOOK, Ore. — The cows at the Averill family's dairy seem unimpressed by the high-tech gadgetry surrounding them.

They calmly pass through an automated gate that sorts the cows based on how recently they've been milked, which is monitored using radio-frequency identification devices on their ears.

Those who have been milked too recently are returned to their stalls, while those who are ready to be milked are ushered toward one of six robotic milkers.

After waiting their turn in line, each cow steps into a pen and enjoys some grain while the giant robotic arm does its business.

Robotics 'take off'

To many, this scenario represents the future of farming. As labor costs increase and the labor pool shrinks, farmers such as the Averills are turning to robotics and other technology to provide better care for their animals and increase efficiency.

Adoption of robotic systems has been growing at about 25 percent a year, and has particularly "taken off" during the past decade, said Larry Tranel, an extension dairy specialist at Iowa State University who has studied the economics of automation.

"We don't see it slowing down," he said.

At the Averills' dairy, the robot first sprays the entire udder with an iodine formula, then washes and dries each teat before attaching suction cups to harvest the milk. Each robot can handle 60 cows.

Once the task is complete, the cow is again set loose among its peers, free to enjoy a comforting session with the robotic touch-activated spinning brushes that clean off manure and remove loose hair.

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Mateusz Perkowski/Capitol Press

Dairyman Don Averill of Tillamook, Ore., explains the functioning of automated equipment at his operation. Behind him, cows line up to enter robotic milking machines.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capitol Press

A cow at the Averill family's dairy in Tillamook, Ore., is milked with a robotic system that measures her yields.

Red meat industry disputes WHO cancer finding

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The U.S. meat industry is seeing red over a World Health Organization agency's decision to add processed meat to its list of carcinogens and to link red meat to cancer.

The industry contends the decision, by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, is not supported by science and defies common sense, and numerous studies show no correlation between meat and cancer.

The North American Meat Institute called the vote "dramatic and alarmist overreach."

"I'm not sure how helpful this (listing) is to consumers," National Cattlemen's Beef Association President Philip Ellis said.

Cancer is complex, and contributing factors include such things as the total diet, lifestyle, geographic location and socio-economic status, he said.

The IARC this month voted to classify processed meat as carcinogenic to humans, and red meat as probably carcinogenic to humans.

Processed meat refers to meat that had been transformed through salting, curing, fermenting, smoking or other processes to enhance flavor or improve preservation. Examples include hot dogs, ham, sausages, corned beef, jerky and canned meat.

The IARC classifies substances on a scale of 1 to 4. Substances such as processed meat in Group 1 are classified "carcinogenic to humans" because there's enough evidence to conclude that they cause cancer.

Group 2(a), the classification of red meat, includes substances for which IARC has found "limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans and sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals."

In reaching its findings, IARC did not conduct original research. It instead evaluated available literature, in this case 800 cancer studies.

The agency stated classification describes the strength of scientific evidence as a cause of cancer rather than the level of risk and an association between red meat and cancer was observed mainly for colorectal cancer but was also seen for pancreatic and prostate cancer.

The cancer risk, which it described as "small," is primarily tied to chemicals that form during the cooking or processing of red meat, and the risk increases with the amount of meat consumed —

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Irrigators, state square off over flood control releases

Water rights issue likely to end up in Supreme Court, both sides say

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Treasure Valley irrigators believe the state is trying to steal their senior water rights by counting flood control releases against their rights to water stored in Boise River system reservoirs.

The state argues it is actually trying to protect the storage water rights of all water right holders, senior and junior, and ensure the water is used for the maximum benefit.

The fight appears likely to end up in the Idaho Supreme Court, and Treasure Valley water users say they are prepared to fight the battle all the way to the top.

"I know our irrigators are willing to go the distance to defend and protect their water rights, and they should because the long-standing history of water rights and water right delivery in this area is being ... wrongfully challenged by the state of Idaho," said Treasure Valley Water Users Association Executive Director Roger Batt.

The association's members represent 284,000 of the 350,000 acres in the Treasure Valley that is irrigated by water from the Boise River system's three reservoirs.

'Catastrophic failure'

Under the way the state wants to account for flood

control releases, irrigation water could be shut off to hundreds of thousands of acres in the middle of summer, said Daren Coon, secretary-treasurer of the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District, the valley's largest.

"That would be an absolutely catastrophic failure,"

he said. "Could you imagine hundreds of thousands of acres of ag lands being out of production? I just don't get it that the state doesn't get it."

The issue affects water district 63, which spans from

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