

Thanksgiving meal tab increases 70 cents

Farmer's share of food dollar pegged at 19.4 cents

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Americans enjoying the iconic Thanksgiving meal this week found only the slightest increase in the cost of a traditional turkey dinner, despite significant challenges to production agriculture.

That speaks highly to the resiliency of farmers and ranchers and the country's agricultural production system, said John Anderson, American Farm Bureau Federation deputy chief economist.

Major challenges included the highly pathogenic avian flu outbreak and flooding in the Midwest and drought in California, he said.

Agriculture faces many challenges each year, but the system continues to roll along providing available, high-quality, safe food on grocery store shelves, he said.

The system is so resilient and stable, most consumers aren't even aware of the obstacles, he said.

Farm Bureau's annual informal price survey of classic items found on the Thanksgiving Day table indicates the average cost of this year's meal for 10 is \$50.11, a 70-cent increase from last year's average of \$49.41. That's about \$5 per



Matthew Mead/Associated Press

This Oct. 12, 2015, photo shows a roasted Thanksgiving turkey in Concord, N.H. The American Farm Bureau Federation says the average cost of a no-frills feast for 10 is \$50.11, up 70 cents from last year. The National Farmers Union says the average farmer's take of the food dollar is 19.4 cents.

person, Johnson said.

The annual survey has consistently shown the affordability of food and the stability of the production system for the past 30 years, Anderson said.

Consumer food prices have been this year, with the latest food price index up only 0.5 percent year over year, he said.

"The main point (of the survey) is to show that food is incredibly affordable, and Thanksgiving is a good time to reflect on that," he said.

Most people probably do a more elaborate meal, but the survey is a benchmark cost

comparison with the basic classic items without a lot of flash, he said.

He jokingly adds that a \$50 meal for 10 people also doesn't consider that most people don't exercise portion control for the iconic feast.

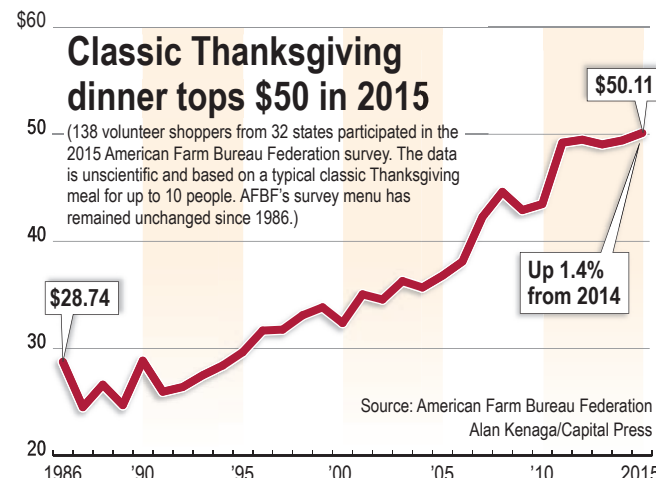
National Farmers Union, which does a monthly report on the farmer's share of the food dollar, did a special focus this year on the Thanksgiving meal and found that farmers received an average of 19.4 cents of the food dollar spent on the typical festive meal.

The report is meant to raise public awareness on how little

farmers receive and the need for good public policy that assists farmers, such as in times of natural disaster or unsustainable prices, which are particularly difficult for beginning farmers and those with limited resources, said NFU President Roger Johnson.

"Over time, the farmer's share of the consumer dollar has consistently shrunk," he said.

One hundred years ago, the farmer's share was about 50 percent. But as food travels further distances, is more processed and handled by more sectors, that share has gotten



less and less, he said.

People assume the farmer get most of the food dollar. The farmer's share varies by commodity, but overall, it is now less than 20 percent, and it gets a little less every year, he said.

The 80 percent take of the food dollar is divided between processing, transportation, packaging, wholesale, retail, food service, energy, finance and insurance, and advertising, according to USDA Economic Research Service.

Johns said the typical consumer is amazed that farmers are able to produce food for the amount of money they receive.

Producers have consistently gotten more efficient, but they are also challenged with an inelastic product and prices that often times do not cover cost of production, Johnson said.

It's important that consumers understand how little farmers receive of the food dollar to help make the case for public policy that provides a safety net, he said.

Thanksgiving is the perfect time to raise awareness, he said.

"It's easy to forget the true value of our farmers and ranchers, who in some cases are only making pennies to the dollar on the goods we buy at our local supermarket, he said.

Farm Bureau's Anderson agreed, saying Thanksgiving is a time to toast the blessings of living in a great country where many of the challenges that plagued earlier generations are greatly diminished.

"The availability and quality of food is one of those things and certainly something to raise a toast to," he said.

Oregon landowner finds 'Catch 22' in federal conservation program

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

MONMOUTH, Ore. — When Bob Lamb talks about the conservation program he implemented on his property, he does so with reverence. The work, he said — planting 25,000 trees, improving water quality in the Little Luckiamute River, seeing lamprey return to spawn, learning of the complicated relationship of plant and soil — was about more than himself and his time.

It wasn't about the money, either, although he welcomed the \$220 per acre paid him annually under the Oregon Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) administered by the state and the USDA's Farm Service Agency.

That's why it's so demoralizing to learn, as Lamb renewed the CREP agreement for another 15 years, that he will be paid a lower rate per acre. The problem involves state and federal interpretation of the program contract and, as he described it, "A Catch 22 that said you cannot get there from here."

He estimated the reduced payments will cost him about \$100,000 over the life of the renewed agreement. He didn't have much choice: "You either take what they give you or you get nothing," he said. Lamb wants to alert other landowners to the situation, and hopes the FSA will work to solve the problem. The local FSA conservation program specialist working with Lamb said she shares his frustration but isn't sure there's any recourse.

Lamb was among the first in the Willamette Valley to sign up when the program began 15 years ago as a joint venture of the state and feds. The program is intended to improve streamside areas in ag land, helping fish, wildlife and water quality. Landowners receive rental payments for carrying out conservation measures.

In his case, Lamb essentially was paid to lease FSA 48 acres of his land flanking the Little Luckiamute. He agreed not to cultivate within 180 feet of either bank. He agreed to plant thousands of Douglas fir, western red cedar and Willamette Valley ponderosa pine.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Oregon landowner Bob Lamb faces reduced conservation enhancement payments due to a "Catch 22" in contract language.

He also agreed not to exercise his full state water right, leaving in the stream the amount that would have been used to irrigate the land involved in the CREP agreement. In return, Lamb and his wife, Jane, were paid a higher CREP rate for giving up production on irrigated land. They had to show they'd irrigated in at least two of the past five years.

The Lambs considered the program carefully.

"We talked at length with the FSA people," Bob Lamb said. "We said, all right, we believe this is a program in our best interests in terms of improving water quality and fish habitat, and it would not be an economic burden for us to do so."

They fully embraced the work, planting trees in a precise 10-foot by 10-foot grid on both sides of the river and thrilling over the years to see wildlife return, including spawning lamprey.

"You notice this is a program that is kind of attached to you; it's not something you lightly do or don't do," Bob Lamb said. "You have a serious interest in the resource that is there on the ground. I'm talking blood, sweat and tears."

Then it came time to renew this fall. The national FSA office, reviewing Lamb's original contract, noted the requirement that he had to show he'd irrigated in at least two of the previous five years in order to get the higher rate.

But during the 15 years of the first contract, of course, he'd given up a portion of his state water right and hadn't irrigated the land contained in the CREP. By definition, it was no longer irrigated land and didn't warrant the higher rate, the national FSA office decided.

Under the renewed contract, Lamb will be paid \$123 an acre. He said the rate paid for irrigated land was scheduled to increase to about \$265 an acre. Over the 15-year contract, the difference amounts to about \$100,000, he said.

He isn't interested in a lawsuit to resolve the issue. "I don't have enough energy in my soul," he said.

Lamb was a federal man himself, working over the years as a meteorologist, fire weather forecaster and power planner with the National Weather Service, U.S. Forest Service and Bonneville Power Administration before retiring to raise registered cattle along the Luckiamute. He knows the inertia that stalls bureaucracies.

"In order to fix that, someone has to take some action," he said.

Phil Ward, executive director of the Oregon FSA office, said his office is working on the problem.

"We are very much aware of Mr. Lamb's concerns and are actively working with our National Office to reach a positive resolution to this situation," he said.

UW study: Climate change good for grapes, not so hot for berries

Report projects Western Washington ag at mid-century

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Climate change may flood coastal farms, spark water fights and proliferate pests, but it could also make Western Washington more suitable for warm-weather crops such as wine grapes, according to a new University of Washington study.

"The warmer climate projected west of the Cascades would make it easier to grow grapes in areas that are currently unsuitable due to low growing-season temperatures," according to the university's Climate Impacts Group.

The study, co-authored by 10 UW scientists and educators, bills itself as the most comprehensive look yet at the environmental impacts on the Puget Sound region if average temperatures rose by 3 to 7 degrees by 2050. The region's average temperatures have increased by 1.3 degrees since 1895, according to the study.

Although the report focuses on the Olympic Peninsula and between Olympia and the Skagit Valley, the rest of Western Washington as well as Western Oregon can expect much of the same effects, according to the study.

A section on agriculture notes that farmers and ranchers are flexible and in some cases could make adjustments that more than offset potential drawbacks to higher temperatures, smaller snowpacks and rising seas. "Agriculture production already involves adapting to changing weather and climate conditions," the report states.

Here are some study findings:

- While wine grapes could benefit by a warmer climate, berries in dormancy could be hurt by having too few days of chilling winter weather. Washington is a major producer of raspberries, blueberries, strawberries and cranberries. Only California produces more raspberries than Washington, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- Greenhouse gases could spur crop growth through carbon dioxide fertilization. "In the near term, if sufficient water is available, these ben-



Courtesy of Washington State University Extension

A report by the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group says climate change may make Western Washington more suitable to growing wine grapes. Other crops, such as berries, however, may suffer, according to the study.

efits can outweigh the negative effects of warming," the study states.

- Rising sea levels could inundate farmland in the Skagit River delta. "Flower (tulips) and vegetable crops (including seed crops) are especially vulnerable to floods, as they may still be in the ground during fall floods, or may need to be planted ... before spring floods have receded," the report warns.

- The geographic range of pests may shift as temperatures warm. More pests will survive winters, and longer growing seasons will give pests more time to reproduce. More encouragingly, pests' life-cycles may fall out of sync with host plants, reducing economic damage.

- Improved irrigation and farm practices could outpace climate-related effects. "Although increased competition for water is likely to become a key challenge, shifts from dryland (non-irrigated) to irrigation could reduce the impact of declining summer water availability," according to the report.

The study did not suggest

where irrigation water could come from. Last summer, Western Washington irrigators faced unprecedented water cutbacks to preserve stream flows for fish, wildlife and recreation. Seattle, Tacoma and Everett water managers initially thought their cities were immune from the drought, but eventually asked residents to conserve.

- Government action could interfere with adjusting to climate change. "Some policies and regulations — including crop subsidies, disaster assistance, conservation programs, environmental regulations and certain tax policies — may reduce the incentive for adaptation."

The study was sponsored by the Puget Sound Institute at UW Tacoma. The institute supporters include the Puget Sound Partnership, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Washington Department of Ecology and The Nature Conservancy.

A link to the report is available online at environment.uw.edu.

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