

Couple succeeds with lavender

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

ST. ANTHONY, Idaho — Raising lavender outside of the flowering, perennial bush's ideal climate has required a bit of ingenuity and a lot of extra labor for Tom and Linda Howell.

In addition to developing a specialized agronomic system, running Eastern Idaho's only lavender farm has tested the owners' marketing and craft-making skills.

They produce about 75 handmade products with their lavender, including culinary spices, infused honey, flavored sugar and salt, essential oil, lotions, body spray, soap, scented pillows and tea. They sell their Teton View Lavender products from their own farm store, at farmers' markets and online. They also supply about two dozen florists.

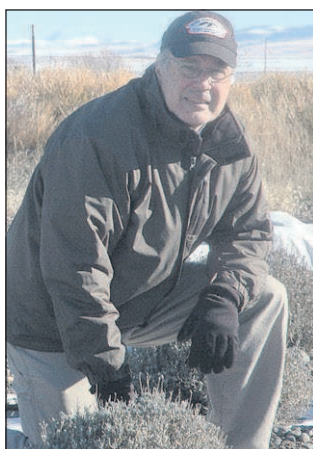
The Howells were raised in Idaho Falls but discovered an affinity for lavender while living in Paris. Upon their retirement, they moved back to Eastern Idaho, bought a small farm with a greenhouse and barn and set out to pioneer raising a new crop for the region.

"We're doing something no one else has done, so we wondered if we were pushing the limit, which we are," Tom Howell said. "If you're familiar with growing zones, lavender is typically grown in zones five to seven, and we're growing in zone four."

The Howells planted 48 different lavender varieties in a home garden to find a good winter-hardy selection. They now specialize in a dozen varieties — raising 2,500 bushes



Linda Howell, owner of Teton View Lavender Farm in St. Anthony, Idaho, shows a lavender variety used in floral arrangements.



Tom Howell, owner of Teton View Lavender Farm in St. Anthony, Idaho.

covering 3 acres — originating from Colorado State University, Oregon and Washington breeding programs. They've been in business for six years. During the first three years, they had substantial losses to winter kill, especially among

their delicate, French hybrids, which have long stems, produce a lot of oil and are used in floral arrangements.

"With the French hybrids, we had as much as 50 percent winter kill," Tom Howell said.

Their problems with winter kill ended three years ago, when they followed the advice of retired CSU Extension educator Curtis Swift and began covering their plants with cloth before winter.

In his research, Swift, who now operates his own lavender business, discovered a cloth weighing 2.5 ounces per square yard offered sufficient protection for his area without blocking too much light. Though the cloth protects exposed plants prior to the first snowfall, Swift said the major benefit is that it stops them from coming out of dormancy too early in the spring, follow-

ing unseasonably warm spells. Swift acknowledges covering plants is expensive and time consuming.

"At the same time, losing plants is expensive," Swift said.

The Howells say lavender needs sandy soils and requires little water or fertilizer. They use drip irrigation and hand harvest their crop with a sickle. They have old-fashioned equipment for cleaning seed and a moonshine still for producing essential oil — popular in aromatherapy and the main ingredient in lotions and other products. Water used in distillation is saved and bottled as a body spray.

The couple attends industry conventions, where Linda goes to workshops to learn how to make new products and Tom focuses on seminars into agronomy and distillation.



Courtesy of ODFW

OR-3, a three-year-old male wolf from the Imnaha pack, is shown in this image captured from video taken by an ODFW employee on May 10, 2011, in Wallowa County, Ore. A wolf researcher says Oregon's wolf management plan will one day include hunting.

Wolf researcher says Oregon management eventually will include hunting

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon, which removed gray wolves from the state endangered species list Nov. 9, most likely will eventually allow hunting or trapping of wolves in order to manage their recovery, a Minnesota expert said.

David Mech, a University of Minnesota researcher who studies wolves and their prey, said wolf recovery and management tends to play out the same in every region, and probably will in Oregon as well.

Wolves are prolific and quickly disperse "far and wide" to new territory, he said.

"When the states get their (management) jurisdiction back, most states conclude they need to control the population in some way," Mech said.

In Minnesota, the government authorizes hunters and trappers to kill 100 to 200 wolves annually to control depredation on livestock and pets, he said. Wolves in Minnesota are listed as "threatened" under the federal ESA rather than endangered.

Mech, pronounced "Meech," was among 26 scientists who recently signed a letter asking U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to take gray wolves off the federal endangered species list in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin.

The states have a combined population of more than 3,700 wolves and their numbers are "robust, stable and self-sustaining," the scientists said in the letter.

"The integrity and effectiveness of the ESA is undercut if delisting does not happen once science-based recovery has been achieved," the scientists continued. Failure to do so creates public resentment toward the species and the Endangered Species Act, they said.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has four times moved to delist gray wolves in the western Great Lakes states but has been "foiled or reversed by litigation typically based on legal technicalities rather than biology," the scientists said.

"It is ironic and discouraging that wolf delisting has not occurred in the portions

of the Midwest where biological success has been achieved as a consequence of four decades of dedicated science-based work by wildlife management professionals," they said in the letter.

Mech said he's familiar with Pacific Northwest wolf issues, including Oregon's action to take wolves off the state endangered species list.

He said Oregon's wolf management plan — drawn up and approved by a group that included cattle ranchers and wildlife activists — clearly called for taking wolves off the state ESA when the population hit a certain level.

"They agreed to those delisting criteria," Mech said. "When it was met it was sort of automatic; that's really all that happened."

To oppose state delisting now is "changing the rules in the middle of the game," Mech said.

Gray wolves in the eastern third of Oregon and Washington were removed from federal ESA listing some time ago, but remain on the federal list in the western two-thirds of the states. Washington retains a state ESA listing statewide, as Oregon did before Nov. 9.

Idaho wolves were federally delisted in 2011, and the state allows hunters and trappers to kill them in season. In 2014-15, hunters and trappers killed 250 wolves in Idaho. They've killed 102 so far in 2015-16.

Mech agreed healthy deer and elk populations are a buffer between wolves and increased attacks on livestock. In the letter to Jewell asking for federal delisting in the Great Lakes states, he and the other scientists said an uncontrolled wolf population could upset the balance.

"There are few, if any, areas in these or surrounding states where wolves could live on natural prey without exceeding socially tolerable levels of depredation on livestock and pets," the scientists said.

"There's no reason to think wolves in Wisconsin, Michigan or Minnesota, or in those states combined, are threatened or in danger of extinction," Mech said.

H-2A provider increases bus inspections

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The largest provider of H-2A-visa foreign agricultural guestworkers in the West, Olympia-based wafa, is reviewing its transportation procedures after a bus load of Mexican H-2A workers heading from Michigan to Mexico crashed in Arkansas, killing six and injuring another six onboard.

The site of the Nov. 6 crash was in an area of unusual lane changes on Interstate 40 in North Little Rock. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the cause. The charter bus carrying 22 people struck a bridge abutment. The bus was headed for Laredo, Texas.

In June, a charter bus carrying H-2A workers from Mexico to North Carolina slammed into the rear of an 18-wheel truck on a freeway west of Houston, killing two



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

One of several buses wafa — the organization formally known as the Washington Farm Labor Association — hires to bring H-2A visa guestworkers from Mexico to work on Washington orchards and farms. This one was displayed at wafa's annual labor conference at the Wenatchee Convention Center, Feb. 11.

people and injuring almost a dozen others.

In light of those accidents, wafa — formerly the Washington Farm Labor Association — is stepping up its inspections of charter bus services it uses and has met with the Federal Motor Carrier

Safety Administration to map out a plan of self audits, said Dan Fazio, wafa director.

Wafa is looking at vehicle and driver fitness using FMC-SA statistics, he said.

Wafa transported close to 9,000 workers from Mexico to Washington state and back

again in 2015 in more than 200 roundtrips. It used two Mexican and one U.S. company in 2015 and occasionally used Greyhound.

"Wafa is responsible and liable for arranging transportation, so we have to walk the walk, so to speak," said Montse Walker, wafa's H-2A program manager.

Most agents who assist employers in using the H-2A program make sure the employer is responsible for transportation mishaps so wafa taking responsibility in that regard is rather unique, she said.

Last year, wafa made a substantial interest-free loan to Fronteras Del Norte, a California bus company with regularly scheduled and charter services to Eastern Washington, for the purchase of two new buses. In exchange, Fronteras Del Norte allowed wafa to display its "boots on the ground" advertising logo on the buses.

Willamette River gets a passing grade from researchers

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

A river health "report card" compiled by representatives from 20 entities gives Oregon's Willamette River a "B" grade in its upper and middle sections and a C+ as it passes through Portland on its way to the Columbia.

The report made public Wednesday grades the river on five factors: Water quality, fish and wildlife presence, habitat such as streambank vegetation, flow and the impact of people.

Scientists measured the river's health as determined by multiple indicators. Among them were fecal bacteria levels, the presence of native fish and bald eagles, water temperature, channel structure and levels of toxics.

Overall, it was a surprisingly good show for a river that is the nation's 19th largest by volume, courses 187 miles through Oregon's largest cities and highly productive farmland, and is often written off as polluted.

"The river is clean enough to swim in," said Allison Hensey, deputy director of the Willamette River Initiative, an effort funded by the non-profit Meyer Memorial Trust.

Fecal bacteria counts are

low throughout the river's reach, toxics are relatively low except in the Portland harbor "superfund" contamination cleanup site, and there were no harmful algal blooms in the upper and middle reaches. Algal blooms are rare enough in the lower Portland stretch that the river earned an A+ from the study group.

Water quality in the Willamette is very good from Eugene to Albany, good from

Albany to Newberg, and acceptable from Newberg to Portland, the group reported. Native fish and bald eagles, two of the indicators considered, are found in good numbers throughout most of the river.

But problems remain, Hensey said. The river is too warm, channel complexity is diminished, the flow volume is well below ideal level and native resident fish such as bass and carp — as opposed

to ocean migrating salmon and steelhead — aren't safe to eat in large quantities. Flood plain vegetation, the trees and bushes that hold, filter and cool the river, has been disrupted.

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