

Idaho defends flood control accounting

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Department of Water Resources says the counting of flood control releases from Boise River system reservoirs against stored water rights is not a new practice but dates to 1986.

The Treasure Valley irrigation community, which opposes that practice and has clashed with IDWR in court over it, disputes that claim.

Irrigators who get water from the reservoirs claim IDWR has recently decided to count flood control releases

against the rights of water stored in the reservoirs.

They have challenged the practice in a special district water court, and in an IDWR administrative hearing, and have vowed to seek a legislative fix if necessary.

IDWR Deputy Director Mathew Weaver said the department has counted flood control releases in Basin 63 — the Boise Valley basin — as satisfied water rights since 1986, when the basin switched to a computerized accounting program.

Despite claims this is a new practice, "That's simply not

the case," Weaver said. "The basin has been administering (water rights) this way for 30 years."

Weaver said claims that the practice could lead to water being shut off to farmers and other irrigators in early summer, resulting in an economic catastrophe, are also incorrect.

Since 1986, there has only been one year — 1989 — when the practice had a detrimental effect on water right holders, he said. That year, they were impacted by about 65,000 acre-feet.

"A catastrophe is not imminent" and 30 years of data

show that, he said.

But those who represent Treasure Valley irrigators opposed to the department's practice dispute that the IDWR has administered stored water rights in the basin this way since 1986.

Dan Steenson, a Boise water attorney who represents irrigators on the issue, said water users submitted plenty of evidence during the court case, including from the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, to prove that flood control releases from Boise reservoirs were never counted against stored water rights.

"This has been an integral concept in the operation of our reservoirs and the administration of water rights in our valley for ... as long as these reservoirs have been in existence," he said.

A special court master of the Snake River Basin Adjudication Court agreed with the arguments of Treasure Valley water users and recommended the presiding court judge rule in their favor. IDWR has challenged that recommendation.

Lee Sisco, who was Basin 63 watermaster from 1986 to 2008 and worked for IDWR for 19 years before that, tes-

tified during the recent legal proceedings that flood control releases from the system's reservoirs have never been counted against stored water rights.

The switch to the computerized water rights accounting system in 1986 changed nothing, he told the Capital Press.

"All we did was go from doing it by hand with a spread sheet to ... going to a new computer system program," he said. "The basic premise of how water rights are accounted for never changed. We've been doing this for the last 60-plus years."

'Farm hall' addresses outside influences on ag

Industry reps emphasize impact on viability, economy

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — Washington Sen. Judy Warnick plans to introduce legislation early next year that will protect farmers from outside influences.

Industries seek to locate in areas where ground is open and affordable, said Warnick, a Republican from Moses Lake, Wash. She wants to see the Washington State Department of Agriculture more involved in development in agricultural areas.

"Sometimes the industries that come in have effects on farmland (and) farm crops that are not foreseen," Warnick said. "I'm trying to protect the farmers from those effects."

Warnick and Sen. Sharon Brown, R-Kennewick, held a "Farm Hall" meeting Dec. 8 in Richland, Wash., to discuss the impacts outside factors can have on farmers and food processors.

Warnick, Brown and Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, shared a table with representatives from the Washington Cattlemen's Association, Washington State Dairy Federation, Washington State Farm Bureau, Washington State Potato Commission,



Photos by Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington State Cattlemen's Association executive vice president Jack Field listens as Washington State Dairy Federation executive director Dan Wood makes a point Dec. 8 during the "Farm Hall" meeting in Richland, Wash. Franklin County hay farmer Steve Cooper, second vice president of the Washington State Farm Bureau, listens at right.



Washington Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, center, addresses the "Farm Hall" meeting Dec. 8 in Richland. Sen. Sharon Brown, R-Kennewick, and Chris Voigt, executive director of the Washington State Potato Commission, listen at Schoesler's side.

Washington Association of Wheat Growers and Northwest Processors Association.

The event was designed to serve as a town hall-type meeting for the farming community, Brown said.

The speakers talked about

the effects of regulations, possible removal of tax exemptions, labor slowdowns at ports, wolves and concerns about drought, water availability and water quality, among other issues.

Franklin County hay farm-



er Steve Cooper, second vice president of the Washington State Farm Bureau, said he reduced his hay acreage from 1,000 to 300 due to low prices

and the labor slowdown at the Port of Portland, switching into other crops. He still has 500 tons of hay from the 2014 crop, sold and partially paid for, on his farm.

"Markets are less, prices are lower and it's really not a time to regulate and tax farmers more," Cooper said.

Each year, new bills or regulations are introduced that chip away at conventional agriculture, based on bad information, said Chris Voigt, executive director of the Washington State Potato Commission.

"As our Legislature becomes even more urbanized, they don't understand agriculture, the practices why and repercussions if you don't control weeds or insects," Voigt said. "They don't recognize the full spectrum of possibilities when you eliminate some of these technologies."

Dan Wood, executive director of the Washington State Dairy Federation, said the issues all tie into whether the state will enhance its efforts to protect the viability of agriculture and its ability to compete with other states and countries.

"If we raise taxes, have more agencies developing regulations, if we don't control the predators, if we bring back a larger death tax — all of these things make it a less friendly place to do the business of agriculture and food processing in Washington state," Wood said. "That hurts our farms, food processors, exports and state economy."

Strategist: U.S., ag positioned to weather recession

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — The world is due for another recession and when it happens the U.S. and its agriculture will be positioned to come through it better than many countries, a geopolitical strategist told Washington tree fruit growers.

The future of Washington tree fruit is bright, Peter Zeihan, of Austin, Texas, told attendees at the annual meeting of the Washington State Tree Fruit Association at the Yakima Convention Center, Dec. 7.

The prolonged strength of the U.S. dollar working against exports and an end to cheap migrant labor from Central America in 15 years are the two biggest challenges the apple industry faces, he said.

Zeihan began his career with the U.S. State Department and started his own firm in 2012 helping businesses and industries prepare for the future. He studies international relations, particularly as influenced by geography.

The U.S. became a superpower partly because it has 13,000 miles of navigable water with the Mississippi River as a great transportation system to carry grain to New Orleans for export to the rest of the world, Zeihan said. The U.S. is protected by oceans and by lakes and timber to the north and deserts to the south, he said.

"We have the single most securable piece of real estate in the world. We can't mess this up. So even if we have a third term of Obama or Trump or years of bouncing back and forth between Bush and Clinton dynasties, we will be fine," he said.

The U.S. has led in creating and protecting global free trade since World War II, but commitment to it is fading on the American political right and left, Zeihan said. Hillary Clinton negotiated the Trans Pacific Partnership as secretary of state but is walking away from it as a presidential candidate, he said.

The U.S. is the only country in the world with the monetary capacity to fight the next recession, it has an uptick in population as other countries contract in population and the U.S. will be strongly positioned with an abundance of shale oil and natural gas that will make it energy independent in a year or two and for years to come, he said.

South Africa as a modern economy is "dead" because it can't train up skilled labor, he said. Japan, Korea and Brazil have aging populations incapable of consumption growth, he said.

China's economic stimulus is "not stable and sustainable," and China is within three years of collapse that will take down its agricultural production, leaving it more dependent on ag imports, he said.

Company recalls celery-and-onion mixes

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A California company is trying to rebound from a public-relations crisis as its celery-and-onion salad blend was suspected of having sickened 19 people in seven states.

Taylor Farms Pacific Inc. of Tracy, Calif., recently recalled 71 products citing "an abundance of caution" after a celery-and-onion mix tested positive for a strain of E. coli in a sample taken by the Montana Department of Public Health, federal regulators say.

The mix was sold for use in Costco's rotisserie chicken salad, which had been linked to an outbreak of E.

coli illnesses in California, Washington, Colorado, Montana, Missouri, Utah and Virginia and removed from Costco stores, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reports.

Federal officials said Tuesday further testing was unable to confirm the presence of E. coli in the onions and celery used to make the Costco salads. But the Montana public health officials who did the initial testing said Tuesday that doesn't mean their earlier findings were invalid, The Associated Press reported.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the onion and celery mix from Taylor Farms Pacific has not been ruled out as the source of the E. coli outbreak

that made 19 people sick in seven states and sent five people to the hospital.

The CDC and the Food and Drug Administration continue searching for a definitive cause of the E. coli outbreak. But that becomes more difficult the further they get from the outbreak, which started in late October, Jim Murphy, the Montana health agency's communicable disease division chief, told the AP.

Taylor Farms on Nov. 26 recalled several products containing celery from Costco as well as snacking trays, salad mixes and other products sold at 7-Eleven, King Soopers, Pantry, Raley's, Savemart, Safeway, Albertsons, Vons, Tony's Finer FoodTs, Starbucks, Target, Walmart and

Sam's Club, according to the FDA.

Taylor Farms officials did not return several phone calls from the Capital Press. A recorded message on its food-safety hotline said the products that were recalled contain "celery sourced from one ranch in California" but does not name the ranch.

Bruce Taylor, chairman and chief executive officer of Taylor Farms in Salinas, told the Monterey Herald that federal and state officials jumped the gun in linking the E. coli that caused the illnesses to celery processed by Taylor Farms.

Taylor told the Herald that Montana health officials generated a "presumptive posi-

tive," meaning they identified the strain of E. coli 0157 H7 from samples taken from ill consumers as the same strain found on his company's celery products.

However, it hasn't been determined yet that it is actually the same bacteria — a match that can only be made when DNA testing is complete, Taylor told the Herald. Further, the bag that Montana health officials tested was manufactured Nov. 13, well after the end of the outbreak from the Costco salads, Taylor told the newspaper.

Murphy said his scientists definitely found bits and pieces of the DNA from the E. coli 157 bacteria in the vegetable mix sample they took from a Montana Costco.

Public-private partnerships bolster U.S. wheat breeding

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

NAMPA, Idaho — World wheat production is increasing while U.S. production is declining and the domestic industry needs a new model to reverse that trend.

That's what Frank Curtis, executive vice president of Limagrain Cereal Seeds, the world's fourth largest seed company, told Idaho-Eastern Oregon Seed Association members Dec. 2 during the group's annual meeting.

Federal and state funding for wheat research is declining and fewer wheat variety royalties are going back into breeding programs because farmers are growing less wheat, he said.

U.S. wheat production to-

taled 65 million metric tons in 1980 but only 55 million metric tons now, while world wheat production has increased from 440 million to 725 million metric tons during that time, he said.

According to USDA projections, he said, the U.S. share of world wheat exports will fall from about 22 percent now to 15.6 percent in 2021.

"Wheat production is declining in the United States because it's less profitable than" other crops such as corn and soybeans and that's a symptom of decreased wheat research, Curtis said.

According to Curtis, about 34 percent of royalties from the sale of wheat varieties goes back into wheat breeding programs in the U.S. That's compared with 93 percent in the

United Kingdom, 92 percent in France and 85 percent in Australia.

The declining wheat production in this country is a result of a "lack of investment in one of the world's biggest crops," Curtis said.

To reverse that trend, he said, the industry needs to develop more public-private partnerships, such as the one developed four years ago between Limagrain, the University of Idaho and the Idaho Wheat Commission.

Such partnerships allow each party to take advantage of the strengths of the others, he said, and ultimately will direct more money toward breeding programs by producing superior varieties that farmers will want to purchase.

"The university can do

things Limagrain can't do and Limagrain has access to things that the university doesn't," said Cathy Wilson, director of research collaboration for the commission. "That synergy is the thing that makes this really powerful."

Curtis believes such partnerships will result in the U.S. wheat seed market increasing from 750,000 metric tons in 2015 to 1.5 million metric tons in 2020.

"That is an achievable potential for the industry given that the public-private partnerships will facilitate the (development of new varieties) that will offer agronomic benefits for growers," he said.

Limagrain has access to a huge genomics data base and has billions of genetic marker data points, Curtis said.

But that information on its own is of little value without the agronomic scores, yield and disease resistance, plant maturity, respiration rates and other information that universities possess through their extension programs.

Limagrain's partnership with UI and the wheat commission is already producing results. The company will release four new wheat varieties next year that work well in the Pacific Northwest, Curtis said.

Wilson said the partnership sped up the development of those varieties by about two years. Royalties from the sale of those varieties will go back into UI's breeding program.

"This idea of public-private partnerships is not a pipe dream," Curtis said. "It is happening now."