

Washington fines farm for irrigating too many acres

Inspectors see healthy blueberry plants

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A northwestern Washington blueberry farm has been fined \$16,000 for illegally irrigating 200 acres during the 2015 growing season, according to the Washington Department of Ecology.

DOE repeatedly warned U.S. Golden Eagle Farms in Skagit County about irrigating land not covered by its water right, agency spokesman Larry Altose said. "At some point, we had to take action."

Efforts to reach Golden Eagle's representative were unsuccessful.

Golden Eagle, a Canada-based company, owns

about 700 acres on Cockreham Island along the Skagit River between Lyman and Hamilton, according to DOE.

The farm has rights to irrigate 250 of those acres with 470 acre-feet of groundwater and river water.

According to DOE, the agency sent Golden Eagle a letter in 2011 warning it to irrigate only the 250 acres and followed up with a cease-and-desist order in 2012.

DOE continued talking with Golden Eagle, and the farm applied late last May to revise its water right to allow the same amount of water spread over a larger area.



This photo taken by the Washington Department of Ecology on June 9 shows blueberry plants that were illegally irrigated in Skagit County, according to the agency. DOE has fined U.S. Golden Eagle Farms \$16,000.

The application came the 2015 growing season, too late to be approved by Altose said.

Courtesy of Washington Dept. of Ecology

DOE inspectors drove past the farm four times in June and July and saw that blueberry plants on fields not covered by the water right had been irrigated.

The inspectors reported that the 1- to 2-year-old blueberry plants looked healthy despite the heat.

DOE estimates the 200 acres would have taken 210 to 267 acre-feet of water to sufficiently irrigate, Altose said.

Without metering records, DOE can't verify how much water the farm used, he said.

DOE opted to fine Golden Eagle \$4,000 for each of the four times it inspected the fields. The department could have levied up to \$5,000 per violation.

Altose said DOE expects to make a decision on Golden Eagle's application by the 2016 irrigation season.

"This is something we believe should have been taken care of a long time ago," Altose said.

Because of the drought, the Skagit River dropped low enough last summer for DOE to cut off some irrigators. Golden Eagle's violations were not related to that action.

Golden Eagle can appeal the penalty to the state's Pollution Control Hearings Board.

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Meridian, Idaho FFA Holds 7th Annual Alumni Scholarship Auction




Attendees bid during the live auction at the Meridian, Idaho, FFA chapter's seventh Annual Alumni Scholarship Auction. Photo by Laura Wilder

From the left, Paul Spirk is awarded the Meridian FFA Honorary Degree by Vice President Andrew Heikkila and President Kristen Nesbitt. Paul donates many beautiful, hand-crafted wood items to the auction every year. Photo by Laura Wilder

MERIDIAN, Idaho — On Nov. 9 from 6 to 9 p.m., the Meridian, Idaho FFA chapter held the seventh annual Alumni Scholarship Auction in the Meridian Professional Technical Center shop.

This event serves as our main fundraiser for senior FFA member scholarships and to lower the cost of state and national trips for the members of the chapter. Our event had both live and silent auctions, with a tri-tip dinner donated by Agri Beef Co. and prepared by Cross Country Catering & Events. The auction was open to the community.

About 212 items were donated for both the live and silent auction. Approximately 340 people attended to support us this year. Our chapter made a profit of \$26,433.58 on this night, an 18 percent increase from last year's auction. The money raised from this auction will provide \$6,500 in scholarships to our senior members, \$5,000 to students attending the Washington Leadership Conference, \$3,500 to students competing at the National FFA Convention and \$4,200 to State Leadership Conference attendees and State Career Development Event (CDEs) competitors.

The profits from this event have increased 50 percent since the first auction seven years ago, and we have many people to thank for that, including those who supported the chapter by attending this year, as well as the businesses and families who donated items for the live and silent auctions.

Agri Beef Co. has our gratitude for donating the main course of the auction dinner, as do Jessie Miller and Becky Miller-Tester of Cross Country Catering for preparing the meal. Jessie and Becky also generously donated half of their tips and income from the Alumni back to our chapter. Last, we owe a huge thank you to our Alumni Chapter for helping us put on this fundraiser and making it a great success.

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