

Washington

Study: Potatoes net state \$7.42B annually

Commission to decision-makers: Keep good business atmosphere alive for industry

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The Washington potato industry contributes \$7.42 billion to the state's economy, a recent study from the Washington State Potato Commission finds.

The study, conducted for the commission by Washington State University's IMPACT Center, also reports:

- The industry creates 35,860 jobs throughout the state.
- Every job directly created supports an additional 5.1 jobs in the state's economy.
- The industry contributes \$1.83 billion in labor income.
- For every dollar of raw potato production and pro-

cessing, \$2.40 is generated in the local economy.

The study examined the economic output from the state's potato farming, frozen potato processing, fresh packed potatoes, dehydrated potato products and potato chip manufacturing sectors.

"I knew potatoes were a big thing in Washington state — we grow them big and they have a big economic impact," said Chris Voigt, executive director of the commission.

But Voigt said the figures were higher than he expected.

"It really emphasizes the point that all of agriculture in Washington is big, a lot bigger than I think people normally think of," he said.

Voigt attributed the high numbers to potato processing and export markets. Roughly 90 percent of the state crop is processed, and roughly 50 to 60 percent is exported, he said.

The study used figures from 2014, said Matt Harris, director of government af-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington State Potato Commission Executive Director Chris Voigt emcees the annual potato peeling contest during the Washington-Oregon Potato Conference Jan. 26 in Kennewick, Wash. The commission recently released a study that finds potatoes have a \$7.42 billion impact on the state's economy.

airs for the commission. The data collection occurred prior to last year's port slowdown. The commission estimates a

loss of more than \$50 million in frozen products from the four-month labor dispute.

A forthcoming study examines the total economic loss to the state as a result of the port labor issues, Harris said. He expects a figure of roughly \$750 million.

"It's shocking what that four-month period cost Washington state," Harris said. "That's something that has to be talked about."

The number of jobs impacted by the potato industry grew from roughly 25,000 in the last study, conducted in 2008, Harris said.

"There is a significant amount of revenue being earned on an annual basis from people directly and indirectly touching a potato," Harris said.

Having the study will help when speaking with decision makers and legislators, Harris said.

"People like to see the positive impact that an ag group has in its local community," he said. "We want to make sure people understand that

we have to have the right business atmosphere for our farms to keep this economic model growing."

Voigt said the commission used a draft of the figures during a recent visit to legislators in Olympia, and will take the study to a meeting in Washington, D.C.

"These numbers really reinforce that agriculture is important to the state, and we really have to be good stewards of agriculture, make sure it's a good business environment for our farmers to operate," he said. "Once we start turning the tide against farmers, we potentially could lose a lot of economic opportunities for the state."

Potatoes are the fourth-largest crop in the state, behind apples, wheat and dairy. Roughly 300 potato growers plant more than 160,000 acres annually, harvesting 30 tons per acre on average. The state produces 20 percent of all U.S. potatoes, according to the commission.

Nagel posthumously joins Wine Hall of Fame

PROSSER, Wash. — The late Charles Nagel, a Washington State University food scientist, has been selected as the 2016 inductee into the Legends of Washington Wine Hall of Fame.

The Walter Clore Wine & Culinary Center will honor Nagel with the posthumous award during the Legends of Washington wine gala at the center on Aug. 12.

Nagel was born in California and received his bachelor's degree in bacteriology from University of California-Berkeley, in 1950, followed by his doctorate in microbiology from UC-Davis in 1960. He joined WSU as an assistant professor of horticulture.

His early work was a study of the effect of sugar on the perception of acidity in wines and juices. He joined United Vintners in California and then returned to WSU in 1974 as a professor and food scientist and retired in 1993.

He died in 2007. Nagel was an important figure in the earliest days of Washington's wine industry, working closely with Walter Clore and George Carter, making and testing wines from experimental vineyards.

Starting in 1964, Nagel coordinated consumer tasting panels, comprised of WSU faculty and spouses in Pullman, to evaluate the experimental wines. This early feedback helped shape the foundation of the industry. Many of the exercises used today originated from Nagel's pioneering research, laboratory work and instruction.

In his later career, Nagel touched many early winemakers as he became "the undisputed voice of authority on matters related to wine science and technical issues," said Rob Griffin of Barnard Griffin Winery in Richland.

Nagel was a "present and active source of information and support at a time when Washington wine was generally unknown and only grudgingly accepted," Griffin said.

Rick Small, of Woodward Canyon Winery in Lowden, and Kay Simon, of Chinook Wines in Prosser, also praised Nagel's service.

Nagel is the 12th recipient of the award. A bronze likeness of each is displayed at the Walter Clore Wine & Culinary Center in Prosser.

— Dan Wheat

Premium wines hold opportunity, grape growers told

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The world wine market is basically in balance but it is slightly oversupplied with generic value wines and a bit short of premium wines, a global wine broker says.

"The opportunity is at the premium end,"

Greg Livengood, a partner in Ciatti Co., a global wine and grape broker, told the Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers annual meeting Feb. 10.

That seems a good fit for Washington vintners, who produce a lot of premium quality wine.

The strong U.S. dollar is attracting more imported wine, which is becoming a bigger threat, Livengood said.

The U.S. has become the world's top wine consumer followed in order by France, Italy, Germany, China, the United Kingdom, Russia, Argentina, Spain and Australia, he said.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Marivel Cruz is bundled up to stay warm as she prunes grape vines in a Zirkle Fruit Co. vineyard at Mattawa, Wash., on Feb. 10. Growers held their annual meeting the same day 65 miles to the south in Kennewick.

"Everyone wants to sell here. We represent 5 percent of the world population so there is opportunity for an awful lot of wine consumers as the middle class grows in other countries," said Brett Scallan, vice president of marketing at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Woodinville, Washington's largest winery.

In spite of economic ups

and downs in the world, Ste. Michelle increased exports 30 percent last year, Scallan said. Canada, Europe and Asia all offer opportunities, he said.

Livengood said consumption is dropping in Europe because of an aging population.

Many of the same countries that consume wine produce 80 percent of the world's wine: France, 17 percent; Italy, 16 percent; Spain, 15 percent; U.S., 8 percent; Argentina 6 percent; and Chile,

China, South Africa and Australia at 4 percent each, Livengood said.

Total acreage in production declined from 2000 through 2011 and new plantings are better grape producers, he said.

Italy produced 8.2 million crush tons in 2013 and 7.5 million in 2015 with France and Spain a little less and the U.S. less yet at 4.5 million crush tons in 2013 and 3.9 million in 2015.

There isn't a lot of excess

inventory in Italy and there's concern about the 2016 crop because of a warm winter and lack of rain, Livengood said.

France has more inventory, but a warm winter is causing fears of early bud break, frost and disease. Spain also is concerned about crop size due to a warm winter, he said.

Australia has an oversupply and desperately wants back into the U.S., he said.

Washington, second only to California in wine and wine grape production in the U.S., produced 222,000 tons of wine grapes in 2015, the National Agricultural Statistics Service reported Feb. 9. That was down 2 percent from 2014. Red varieties were up 5 percent and whites were down 8 percent.

Of the top four producing varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon showed the largest increase, up 12 percent from 2014. Growers received an average of \$1,145 per ton for all varieties in 2015, up \$35 from the previous year.

Washington has 350-plus growers, approximately 50,000 wine grape acres and more than 850 wineries producing about 16 million cases of wine a year. Winery revenue is estimated at \$1 billion annually by the state wine commission.

Revised hemp bill moves toward Senate vote

Ag department to control crop's introduction

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Department of Agriculture would license hemp farmers under a bill that's ready for a vote by the full Senate.

After several years of frustration, hemp lobbyist Joy Beckerman said Wednesday that she thinks lawmakers and WSDA

have found the right way to nurture the cannabis crop.

"This is the responsible route to take," she said. "Our department of agriculture has gotten impressively sophisticated year by year."

Although Washington is only one of four states that allows recreational marijuana, it has not been among the two dozen states that have le-

galized cultivating hemp. The Drug Enforcement Agency argues hemp and marijuana are the same plant, distinguishable only by chemical tests for psychoactive traits that easily change over time.

The Legislature has considered and ultimately rejected bills that would simply declare hemp a legal crop or require WSDA to provide extensive oversight. The proposals have been criticized for being too expensive or too simplistic.

Senate Bill 6206 would line up closely with the 2014 Farm Bill, which loosened the federal stance toward hemp and authorized state-supervised hemp "research."

Under SB 6206, WSDA would license hemp farmers, control the seed supply and check whether cultivated plants retained very low levels of THC, the psychoactive substance in marijuana.

Washington State University, meanwhile, would study the commercial potential for hemp and whether hemp could spread diseases harmful to related species, such as hops.

WSDA estimates it will need \$145,000 from lawmakers to set up the program, which could be in place by the 2017 growing season. The rule-making will include setting fees, grower qualifications and limits on acres.

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