

Capital Press

The West's Ag Weekly

FRIDAY, MARCH 18, 2016

★★ VOLUME 89, NUMBER 12

WWW.CAPITALPRESS.COM

\$2.00

Feds divvying up Willamette Valley dam water

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers faces 2017 deadline to allocate water

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Federal regulators are again delving into the process of dividing up roughly 1.6 million acre-feet of water stored behind 13 dams in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Those dams perform flood control during the rainy winter months but also hold water during the spring and summer that's designated for joint use by irrigators, municipalities, industries, recreationists and fish.

Exactly how much water is allocated for each use is currently undefined, but the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — which operates the dams — is under an internal deadline to ration it out by mid-2017.

The agency recently restarted the earliest "scoping" phase of the allocation process, which involves collecting information from the public on water needs.

Future irrigation demands calculated by the Oregon Water Resources Department and Oregon Department of Agriculture will be considered by the Corps.

The process of allocating the water was previously undertaken in the 1990s but was postponed by a "biological opinion" that analyzed the impact of dams on several fish protected under the Endangered Species Act, said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

"It halted the process while they did that work," she said.

Under a biological opinion completed in 2008, the amount of water slated for irrigation is capped at 95,000 acre-feet, but the Oregon Farm Bureau and other irrigator groups hope to increase agriculture's share under the Army Corps' allocation process.

Currently, irrigators in the Willamette Valley have contracted with the federal government to use 74,000 acre-feet of the water available.

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FOODIE FOOTHOLD

In a city serious about food, OSU innovation center is at home

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PORTLAND — An agricultural experiment station might seem an unlikely resident of this city's upscale Pearl District, which has gone from gritty warehouses and railyards to gain a self-described "worldwide reputation for urban renaissance."

But Oregon State University's Food Innovation Center has been perched along Naito Parkway since 2000. And in hindsight, the decision to open the FIC in what became arguably the foodie capital of the U.S. seems an inspired choice.

"Lucky, maybe," laughs Thayne Dutson, who was dean of OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences at the time.

Nonetheless, the FIC was OSU's first foothold in Portland, where OSU and the University of Oregon increasingly scrap for attention, money and students. The FIC may have been the first agricultural experiment station — still its technical designation — to open in an urban area. It marked a major and continuing collaboration with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, which leases space in the FIC for its marketing, trade and laboratory services.

Staff at the FIC help Northwest food entrepreneurs with product development, manufacturing, safety, packaging, labeling, shelf-life and more. Its sensory science specialist can measure consumer acceptance of new products, and another researcher is working on the use of radio frequency identification technology (RFID) to track products as they move from processor to plate.

Clients range from hundreds of small entrepreneurs learning how to take their idea to market, to giant, unnamed food corporations that pay to test products with sophisticated Portland consumers.

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Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Sarah Masoni, product development manager at the Food Innovation Center, checks ingredients assembled for test batches of a granola bar.



Annual budget: \$900,000 from OSU, \$550,000 from client fees, grants and lease payments.

Employees: 10, increasing to 11 this fall. Oregon Dept. of Agriculture leases roughly half the building, staffed with 11 marketing and 18 laboratory services personnel.

Mission: Provide startup food entrepreneurs and corporate clients help with product development, marketing, packaging, shelf-life, recipe formulation, consumer acceptance and food safety.

Location: 1207 N.W. Naito Parkway, Portland, Ore.

Website: fic.oregonstate.edu

USDA won't regulate biotech wheat variety

Cultivar modified to 'knock out' mildew-susceptible gene

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A wheat variety rendered mildew-resistant through the targeted "knockout" of a gene can be commercialized without clearing USDA regulatory hurdles for biotech crops.

The agency's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has found that the cultivar doesn't fall under its jurisdiction for regulating genetically engineered crops, which is limited to possible plant pests and pathogens.

While the wheat was developed with genetic elements from disease-causing bacteria, they aren't



Capital Press file

Wheat is shown in this file photo. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has found that a new mildew-resistant wheat cultivar doesn't fall under its jurisdiction for regulating genetically engineered crops.

contained in the crop and thus it's not subject to USDA's deregulatory process, which includes environmental analysis and public comment,

according to APHIS.

Most biotech crops commonly grown in the U.S. have undergone deregulation, and in some cases, lawsuits over the adequacy of this process have delayed their commercialization.

Calyxt, a subsidiary of the pharmaceutical company Collectis, developed "MLO_KO" wheat with genetic sequences from bacteria and corn that remove a gene that suppresses the plant's defenses against powdery mildew.

The wheat's DNA is repaired during natural cellular processes and no foreign genetic material remains.

"It does not change the wheat's basic biology or produce a plant that would directly feed on, infect, parasitize, or contaminate plants, or adversely affect other organisms that are beneficial to plants," Calyxt said in a letter to APHIS.

The gene eliminated by Calyxt is involved in the plant's biological processes but the mildew fungus also relies on it to "trick" and penetrate the wheat crop, said Luc Mathis, the company's CEO.

Even without the gene, the wheat's biology remains unaffected due to other genes that perform duplicative roles, he said. "When you remove this function, the plant behaves normally."

Though the USDA has decided the wheat cultivar can be commercialized, Mathis said he doesn't expect the crop to be sold to farmers until 2022.

Calyxt must first conduct trials to ensure the trait is reliable in the field while simultaneously incorporating the mildew resistance into geographically suitable wheat varieties, he said.

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