

Washington

Auvil Fruit adds more tree netting

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ORONDO, Wash. — Seemingly endless rolls of white cloth netting stretch over acres and acres of young Gala apple trees in an orchard along Highway 97 about 16 miles north of Orondo.

It's a new sight for travelers on the highway. Workers have been busy for several weeks assembling the cloth into sausage-like tubes, which they spread over trellises. The intent is to protect apples from sunburn and wind.

More than 25 acres have been covered, another 10 soon will be and eventually, in another year or two, all 130 acres of Auvil Fruit Co.'s Ranch 5 will have the netting, says John Baile, assistant orchard manager at Auvil Fruit Co. in Orondo.

"Sunburn is probably the biggest cullage factor we have. Some blocks probably range up to 30 percent damage from sunburn," said Brett Drescher, the company safety officer and former orchard manager.

Next to sunburn, wind causing fruit to rub limbs is the second greatest factor damaging fruit, Drescher said.

Auvil Fruit has used netting, in a more limited fashion, for years to protect cherries from birds but it's been expanding its use in apples for wind and sunburn protection. About two-thirds of the company's 1,200 acres of apple orchards on the west bank of the Columbia River south of Vantage are covered now, Baile said. That effort began more than 10 years ago.

At Ranch 5, new Gala trees were planted a year ago on V-trellises. Full fruit production is another year or so away. One reason to cover the trees now is to protect new growth from wind, Baile said.

It's a pedestrian orchard. That means trees will be kept about 6 feet tall and the pruning, picking and other work will be done by workers on the ground without ladders.

The cloth is unfurled in 32-foot-wide strips, each covering four rows and 8.5 feet high. Toward the highway the netting slopes upward to 13 feet high to keep pesticide spray drift from reaching passing vehicles.

Ecology committee addresses anonymous complaints

Department to outline process to members

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Agriculture representatives and Washington Department of Ecology officials are examining how the agency responds to anonymous complaints against landowners.

From agriculture's perspective, someone could easily take advantage of the department's current process, said Aaron Golladay, first vice president of the Washington State Farm Bureau and co-chairman of Ecology's agriculture and water quality advisory committee.

He gave an example of a community "selectively using" the complaint process to call in "frivolous" complaints against producers. The department has to investigate and the producer has to explain the situation, which is time-consuming if a producer is not at fault, Golladay said.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington Department of Ecology agriculture and water quality advisory committee co-chairs Aaron Golladay, first vice president of the Washington State Farm Bureau, and Maia Bellon, Ecology director, touch base during a break in the committee meeting March 30 in Spokane. The committee was looking at Ecology's process for handling complaints after several people expressed concern over those made anonymously.

Ecology director Maia Bellon said the department will provide more information to committee members about responding to complaints, whether they are anonymous or not. She also hopes to determine the percentage of anonymous complaints.

"Our staff are very thoughtful when they see that

they're getting complaints that appear to be of a nature that are not showing us there is a water quality problem," she said. "I don't want people taking advantage of the complaint process, I want us to spend our time trying to help out and finding solutions to the big issues that we see."

Bellon is worried about the

possible chilling effect that could come from cracking down on anonymous complaints. Washington Senate Bill 6551 was introduced in January to require Ecology to provide the name of a third party providing notice of a violation. The bill did not pass out of the Senate.

"I don't think that's good public policy," Bellon said, "especially when we do have a lot of smaller communities where people know each other, and it might be awkward if someone identifies a problem in their neighborhood and they don't want to be treated poorly for raising that issue."

"I think you should be able to face your accusers," said committee member Scott Nielsen, Cattle Producers of Washington vice president. "I think (anonymous complaints) are less troubling if you trust the agency. To me, it's how that anonymous complaint is handled."

During the meeting, committee members talked about educating the public about proper water quality and farming techniques.

That's fine, Nielsen said,

as long the message says it's OK for cows to have access to water.

"I think some people look at that and think, 'Oh my god, there's a cow down there at the creek — call the cops!'" he said. "I think some (complaints) are vindictive. The ones I'm thinking of had very little to do with water quality and had to do with wolf management."

Nielsen wants to make sure Ecology officials investigating complaints are objective.

Department special assistant to the director Kelly Susewind will outline the process to the committee, Golladay said. Golladay said the committee has also recommended the department notify landowners when the problem has been resolved.

"Ag's not out here to destroy the universe, regardless of what a lot of people think," he said. "My goal is to have a fair and transparent complaint process. We have guilty parties, we know we do, we want them caught and taken care of. We don't want the good guys getting beat up in the process."

TPP 'not close' to passing, McMorris Rodgers says

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

COLFAX, Wash. — The Trans-Pacific Partnership has a long road ahead of it before it is approved, an Eastern Washington member of Congress says.

"TPP needs a lot of work," Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers said. "We're not close to being at a place to pass TPP."

McMorris Rodgers, a Republican, said lawmakers are still determining whether the trade deal meets 150 criteria laid out in the trade promotion authority that Congress passed.

The U.S. negotiated the TPP with major trade partners such as Japan, Mexico, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and developing nations such as Malaysia, Peru, Vietnam, Chile, Brunei and Singapore.

Supporters say it creates a level playing field for regional trade, but critics say it doesn't deal with the potential for other nations to manipulate the value of their currencies.

McMorris Rodgers said a lot of work remains to be done on trade in general, educating



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., talks with farmers and ranchers April 6 during an agricultural roundtable in Colfax, Wash. Farmer David Lang looks on.

people about its importance for Washington agriculture and the economy.

McMorris Rodgers met with representatives of wheat, cattle, sheep, hay and other interests to hear their concerns during a roundtable discussion April 6 at the McGregor Co. headquarters in Colfax.

Other topics covered included increased regulatory burdens, changes in veterinary feed requirements and the impact of labor slowdowns at the ports.

Of particular interest was

Agency's funding of a group that campaigned against agriculture through social media and advertising. Billboards and other advertising claimed agriculture is largely "unregulated" and putting rivers and streams at risk.

"We face many challenges in agriculture, but being underregulated is most assuredly not one of those challenges," said Alex McGregor, president of the McGregor Co.

"It takes a lot of money to keep telling that lie ... and they're using federal money to do it," Palouse, Wash., wheat farmer Ben Barstow said. He suggested that EPA could split its advertising

budget to spend equal time promoting agriculture to the public.

The EPA last week stopped funding for the advertising and website after two Midwestern senators questioned its legality and called for an investigation.

Among the other issues discussed was:

- Crop insurance. Barstow also stressed the importance of having crop insurance for food production. As many acres need to be insured as possible to ensure a big pool for farmers, he said.

"It's all set up to ensure that the American people get fed," farmer David Lang said.

Walla Walla meat processor honored

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Walla Walla, Wash., meat processor Jerry Haun recently received top honors for a tried-and-true recipe.

Haun received the best-in-show award for his bone-in ham at the Northwest Meat Processors Association's convention and trade show in Moscow, Idaho, in March. It was his 10th grand championship for the recipe, but his first best-in-show honor, he said.

Bone-in ham is one of 14 categories in the competition. A full leg of ham is cured and smoked, and cut by the judges. It is judged on appearance, aroma and the characteristics upon cutting. Best-in-show is selected from the winner in all 14 categories.

"Forty or 50 percent of the score is on the flavor. Flavor kind of rules percentagewise over some of the criteria," Haun said.

Haun said he attended workshops through the association and helped in smoked meats rooms at national and regional competitions, although never in contests where his meat was competing.

"You learn a lot of the intricacies of it," he said. "A lot of the thing with the ham is getting the right balance of salt, sugar and seasonings. My hams sit four or five days after I cure them."

Haun usually cooks four to five hams and picks the one that looks the best.

"You only can tell what's on the outside, obviously," he



Courtesy Northwest Meat Processors Association

Bone-in ham award winners at the Northwest Meat Processors Association convention in March included, from left, Adam Olson of Olson Meats in Enumclaw, Wash., who received second place; grand champion and best-in-show winner Jerry Haun of Walla Walla, Wash., center; and Nathan Sultemier of Sweet and Smokey Diner in Bremerton, Wash., who received third place.

Haun has owned Haun's Meat and Sausage for nearly 21 years, primarily offering custom pork cuts. He plans to continue competing.

"It's nice to get the accolades, it makes you feel good

and kind of affirms what you're doing," he said. "Cutting meat and slaughtering, there's a lot of pride and skill in your work, but it gets to be a lot of hard work. The curing and smoking meat is kind of an outlet for me."

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