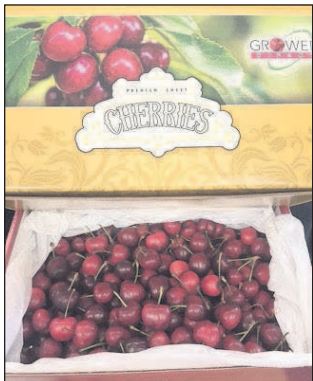


California starts cherry harvest early



By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

California growers have begun what may be a record early cherry harvest.

They also expect a large crop that might be sold out about the time the Washington harvest starts.

Packing of fruit picked in Arvin near Bakersfield began April 9, which may be an early record, said Daniel Moznnett, director of marketing at Grower Direct Marketing in Stockton.

Arvin harvest began last year on April 11, which was 10 days ahead of the norm of late April and beating the

most recent early record of April 14, 2005, Chris Zanobini, executive director of the California Cherry Advisory Board in Sacramento, said last April.

California's 2015 cherry crop ended up at 5.9 million, 18-pound boxes, short of its 8.5-million-box norm due to lack of winter chill and too much heat during pollination.

This year, trees had the best winter chill they've had in three years, Moznnett said.

"And we welcomed back another stranger this winter, which was rain," he said.

Moisture and chill have set up what should be a more

normal crop, he said.

OG Packing in Stockton, the parent company of Grower Direct, began packing hot house cherries for local farmers' markets and export to Asia in late March, Moznnett said.

Harvest of the outdoor crop always begins at Arvin and spreads north to Stockton. This year's peak volume should be around April 30 and volume should be strong through Memorial Day, Moznnett said.

The crop will wrap up the first week of June, he said, which should dovetail nicely with a much larger crop anticipated in Washington.

"We will need domestic retail partners involved early with two ad periods between Mother's Day and Memorial Day to help move this volume," he said.

B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers in Yakima, said California's early crop is lining up nicely for growers in California and Washington.

"They went years missing Memorial Day. The last two years they hit it and it's a help because it avoids an overlap," Thurlby said. "Then it's important for us to hit the Fourth of July."

The California crop apparently had good fruit set on

the front end because of better winter chill but is lighter on the back end because of rain during pollination, he said. But that should make for good fruit size, he said.

Washington's crop is blooming and should be good at around 20 million boxes, he said. The question growers have is whether there will be any residual effect on trees from last June's heat.

Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Utah packed 19.3 million, 20-pound boxes of cherries in 2015 and a record 23.2 million in 2014. Washington is traditionally 80 to 85 percent of the Pacific Northwest crop.

Vegetable oils remain in Washington's rail safety rule

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A new railroad safety rule, which stems from a boom in the use of crude oil tankers, would apply to railroads hauling vegetable oils, though the two substances would be regulated differently under a state Department of Ecology proposal released April 6.

The rule, expected to be finalized by late summer, will require nine railroads to plan for oil spills. Lawmakers directed DOE to write the rule in response to thousands of tankers hauling crude oil from North Dakota to Washington oil refineries.

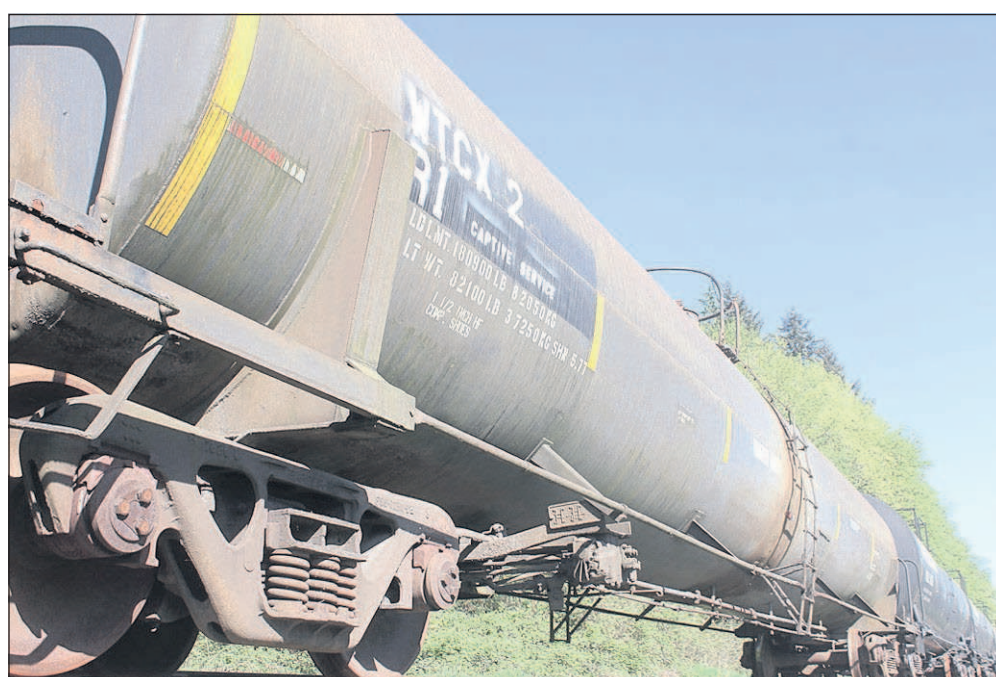
DOE indicated early this year it would apply the "crude by rail" legislation to small railroads that carry vegetable oils and animal fats and serve seed and food processors in Eastern Washington.

The application puzzled some lawmakers, but the Legislature declined to intervene.

While interstate crude-oil haulers will have extensive planning requirements, DOE proposes to let railroads that carry only "biological oils" to submit an "easy-to-use boilerplate plan."

DOE made the concession after an economic analysis determined that planning for spills will have a disproportionately heavy economic burden on small railroads, DOE spill preparedness manager Linda Jarvis-Pilkey said.

DOE has not developed the boilerplate plan, preferring to wait until after the public comments on the pro-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Rail tankers park on a railroad spur April 8 in southwestern Washington. The state Department of Ecology wants railroads that haul all types of oils, including vegetable oils, to develop and submit plans for cleaning up spills.

posed rule, she said.

Patrick Boss, a lobbyist for short-line railroads, said the proposed rule doesn't provide enough details about the "boilerplate approach."

"That sounds good, but until we have a better idea of what that means, it's hard to know what to say about it," he said.

Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, who introduced a bill this year to exclude vegetable oils from the rule, said Friday she wants DOE to meet with railroad officials to flesh out what the agency has in mind.

She called the proposed rule "a very small start."

"It's disappointing they

weren't able to get more done," Warnick said. "It sounds like there's a willingness to work with the railroads. I'm happy about that part, but I wish they had done a little more."

Even railroads that carry just vegetable oils will have to meet higher planning standards than currently required by federal rail safety rules, Jarvis-Pilkey said.

"Everyone is going to have to participate in drills," she said.

The railroads covered by the rule are BNSF Railway, Union Pacific Railroad, Central Washington Railroad, Columbia Basin Railroad, Great Northwest Railroad, Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad, Puget Sound & Pacific Railroad, Tacoma Rail and the Western Washington Railroad.

The per-employee cost for small railroads to comply with

the proposed rule would be \$6,848 to \$11,562, depending on whether the rail line needs outside help to develop a spill-response plan, according to the DOE analysis.

DOE has defended including non-petroleum oils in the rule by noting that vegetable oil spills damage the environment. The department points to a warehouse fire in Winlock last summer that released vegetable oil into a creek, killing thousands of fish.

Jarvis-Pilkey said that if railroads are better prepared to clean up spills, it might spare them liability costs.

"This is really an upfront investment to reduce your damages if there is a spill," he said.

Boss criticized DOE for citing a warehouse fire to justify a railroad rule. "I'm just amazed this is even happening," he said.



Courtesy of USDA

Phil Morrissey and Ivan Geroy, with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, take measurements at the Elk Butte SNO-TEL site on March 31. Following a wet March, measurements from the site were well above the median level, and the moisture outlook is favorable for most of Idaho.

Wet March means favorable Idaho irrigation outlook

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Irrigators in most of Idaho should have ample water this season following a cool and wet March, according to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

As canal company managers prepare to start deliveries, they say exceptional soil moisture at the start of the irrigation season should also help seeds germinate.

March precipitation ranged from 120 to 170 percent of normal throughout the state, with the exception of Owyhee Basin, which received 106 percent of average precipitation for the month. Precipitation for the water year, which began Oct. 1, also ranges from about average in the Henry's Fork and the Upper Snake and Bear River basins to 130 percent of average in the Bruneau and Salmon Falls basins.

NRCS water supply specialist Ron Abramovich said streamflow forecasts range from 90 to 115 percent of average in most drainages. The outliers are the Oakley and Salmon Falls drainages, which are forecast at 135 percent of normal streamflow, and the Bear River at Stewart

Dam, forecast at 69 percent of normal.

"March precipitation was great across the state, and that bumped our streamflow forecast back up," Abramovich said. "It was just what we needed to put the icing on the cake for this year's water supply."

Abramovich said the wet March also helped ease possible irrigation shortages in the Big Wood Basin, and the water outlook has improved to "marginally adequate" for the Big Lost and Little Lost basins.

Reservoir storage should also be ample this season. Henry's Lake, Grassy Lake and Island Park Reservoir will fill this season, and in the Upper Snake, Jackson Lake and Palisades Reservoir are expected to nearly fill, according to the report.

American Falls Reservoir is expected to fill and should have more storage later into the season than last year. In Northern Idaho, Priest Lake has 123 percent of its average storage for the date, and Lake Coeur d'Alene is at 110 percent of average.

The Payette reservoir system contains 103 percent of its average storage to date, and the Boise system is at 125 percent of average.

LEGAL

NOTICE OF FINE FESCUE COMMISSION PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

TO: ALL OREGON FINE FESCUE GROWERS
Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held pursuant to ORS 576.416 (5), on Monday, May 9, 2016, at 7:00 a.m., at Elmer's Restaurant, 3950 Market Street NE, Salem, Oregon, upon a proposed budget for operation of the Fine Fescue Commission during the fiscal year July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. At this hearing any producer of Oregon-grown Fine Fescue seed has a right to be heard with respect to the proposed budget, a copy of which is available for public inspection, under reasonable circumstances, in the office of each County Extension Agent in Oregon. For further information, contact the Fine Fescue Commission business office, P.O. Box 3366, Salem, Oregon 97302, telephone 503-364-2944. The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. Please make any requests for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodation for persons with disabilities at least 48 hours before the meeting by contacting the Commission office at 503-364-2944. 16-1/#4

NGFA chairman calls for TPP, voluntary federal GMO labeling standard

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Approval of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal is one of the biggest needs for all sectors of agriculture, an industry leader says.

"From producers through grain handling and feed companies to food companies, we think that trade bill would be very critical and contribute a big economic impact in the future," said John Heck, who was recently elected chairman of the National Grain and Feed Association.

Heck is senior vice president of the Scoular Co., based in Omaha, Neb. The NGFA chairman position is a two-year term.



John Heck

The association was among 220 U.S. food and agriculture groups to send a letter urging Congress to approve TPP this year.

Heck also said the organization is "very interested" in seeing Congress pass a voluntary GMO labeling law that would pre-empt a Vermont law scheduled to

go into effect July 1. That law would require a label if a product contains genetically modified ingredients.

"We would like to not see a patchwork of state laws that would require nightmares for the distribution, packaging and supply chain of food companies," Heck said. "We would like to see one federal standard."

Heck called the labeling law "worrying."

"We just think it would raise the price of food to all consumers unnecessarily," he said.

The Scoular Co. has expanded its operations in the Pacific Northwest in recent years, purchasing five grain-handling facilities in Idaho and Oregon and acquiring the Legumex Walker special crop division, devoted to pulses, sunflower seeds and kernels, flax and canaryseed.

Heck said Scoular is happy with its footprint in the West, and will continue to invest in facilities to improve efficiency and better serve farmers in Idaho, Western Oregon and Washington.

Further expansion may "give producers a bigger menu of products, see if returns from those might be an opportunity for them to grow some new crops," he said.

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