

# Judge: Anti-GMO activists illegally concealed donors’ names

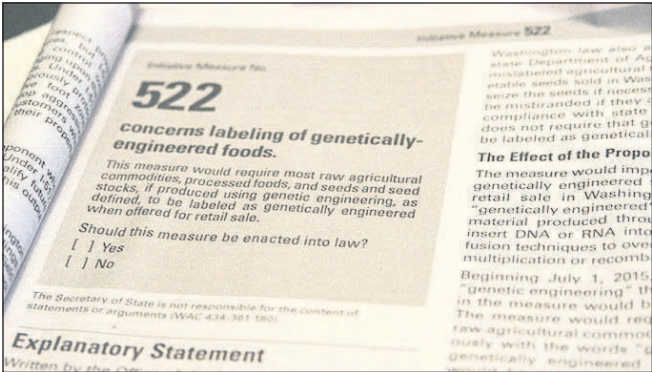
## Food Democracy Now faces penalty

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — An anti-GMO organization violated Washington’s public disclosure law by concealing the names of more than 7,000 donors who contributed in 2013 to an initiative that would have required food makers to label products with genetically engineered ingredients, a judge ruled April 22.

Food Democracy Now, based in Iowa, didn’t register as a political-action committee or report until after the election the sources of the \$200,000 it contributed to the Yes on Initiative 522 campaign.

Thurston County Superior Court Judge Gary Tabor



Capital Press file photo

The fallout over Washington’s most-expensive political battle ever continues. A Thurston County judge ruled April 22 that Food Democracy Now broke the state’s disclosure law by failing to report the names of donors to the “Yes on I-522” campaign. The defeated measure would have required food makers to label products made with genetically engineered ingredients.

rejected arguments that Food Democracy was a short-staffed nonprofit and naive to Washington’s political laws.

“They were able to get huge interest, with 7,000 peo-

ple donating,” he said. “This is not an insubstantial amount of money that was contributed.”

The ruling was a second victory for the state attorney general’s office in cases stem-

ming from the most-expensive political campaign Washington history.

Another Thurston County judge ruled in March that the Grocery Manufacturers Association was guilty of failing to disclose the names of the food and beverage companies that contributed to I-522’s defeat.

Tabor noted the similarities between the two cases, but said he wasn’t influenced by the ruling against GMA.

He said he was swayed by Washington’s one-sentence law prohibiting concealing the sources of contributions.

“I just think it’s clear there was concealment,” Tabor said. “We had 7,000 donors in this election; we didn’t know who the 7,000 donors were.”

Tabor’s ruling came on a motion by the attorney general’s office to find Food Democracy guilty before a trial

based on the case’s facts.

Food Democracy’s fine will be decided at a trial, unless the sides negotiate a settlement. The attorney general’s office has not indicated the penalty it will seek. A trial date has not been set.

The attorney general’s office has argued GMA should be punished with a fine of up to \$42 million, triple the amount \$14 million the trade association raised in 2013 for political activities nationwide.

GMA contributed \$11 million to the “No on I-522” campaign. A trial to decide the penalty is scheduled for August.

Food Democracy raised \$295,661 by soliciting campaign contributions through four electronic newsletters. The group contributed the \$200,000 through its political arm, Food Democracy Action.

Food Democracy’s lawyer,

Greg Wong, acknowledged ignorance is no defense, but he disputed the state’s allegation that the group was guilty of acting to conceal the identities of donors.

“It simply did not know it was suppose to report,” he said.

GMA made a similar argument, with the same result. Tabor ruled after hearing brief oral arguments that lawyers made to supplement their written arguments.

GMO-labeling supporters contributed \$9.87 million to the Yes on I-522 campaign, while opponents spent \$33.3 million against the measure.

The Public Disclosure Commission can levy fines of up to \$10,000 per disclosure violation. The attorney general’s office pursues cases in state court when potential penalties are higher.

# Ram sale a hit with sheep producers

By **CECILIA PARSONS**  
For the Capital Press

PORTERVILLE, Calif. — Range ready rams that will go on to sire a good portion of California’s commercial lamb crop were offered for sale at the 96th annual California Ram Sale held in Porterville.

The sale, by the California Wool Growers Association is held to provide the commercial sheep industry with rams that will improve their lamb and wool production.



Cecilia Parsons/For the Capital Press

Rams are readied for the 96th annual California Ram Sale held in Porterville, Calif. Twenty-five consigners brought a total of 423 rams to the sale from Utah, Idaho, Oregon and California.

were nine fewer whiteface rams sold this year, but they averaged \$600 – up from \$584 in 2015.

This year all rams consigned to the sale were weighed and ultrasounded to provide prospective buyers and sellers with information about the ram’s genetic potential. All rams went through health and quality sifts.

Ram weight, body fat and loin eye area were included in

the sale catalog. The information was used to assign each ram an index value to help buyers make selections that will improve their flocks.

The Range Ram Index estimates the potential carcass merit of the lambs sired by the ram. The index uses heritable carcass measurements including loin eye area, loin depth, fat thickness and weight. The index quantifies those genetic characteristics into a potential

genetic merit. It is a tool, said ram sale chairman Wes Patton, that producers can use to select rams.

The index formulation and ultrasounding were funded partly by grants from the American Sheep Industry’s Let’s Grow Committee.

Modesto-based ultrasound technician John Openshaw said in past years buyers have been skeptical that the carcass values provided by live animal ultrasound would actually make them money. Technological advances in ultrasounding and the increased value in the higher-price muscle cuts are changing that attitude, he said.

Establishing a base line and using animals that have the genetic potential to improve those valuable genetic characteristics is important in the sheep industry and will allow lamb producers to be more competitive, Openshaw added.

Based on U.S. Sheep Experiment Station research, genetic selection for larger loin muscle area should be expected to improve carcass merit and carcass value of market lambs.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

California Secretary of Food and Agriculture Karen Ross speaks April 25 at the state FFA convention in Fresno’s Selland Arena as state FFA Sentinel Tim Truax looks on. Ross told the roughly 5,000 members attending that the state’s agricultural industries need their energy and innovation.

## CDEA’s Ross urges FFA members to think of the future

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

FRESNO, Calif. — State Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross told 5,000 FFA members here that California’s agriculture-related industries will need their energy and innovations in the challenging years to come.

Ross cited water shortages, food safety concerns and global population growth as problems that today’s students in FFA could someday help solve.

“Think about how you use your hand-held technology and your gaming technology,” Ross told a packed audience during the April 25 morning session in Fresno’s Selland Arena. “Those are the very tools you may use for (assisting) the smart farm of the future.”

Ross also praised the FFA chapters for promoting the CDFA’s three-year-old agriculture-themed license plate program, which has generated nearly \$500,000 for education. The department in January handed out \$249,352 in the second round of grants from the CalAgPlate program, including \$212,000 for FFA leadership and development programs.

“It’s going great, but one of the challenges of the special license plates program is they have to keep selling or the interest goes away,” Ross told the Capital Press after her speech. “The students’ energy (in promoting the plates) is really important for these ag programs. ... It’s such an important way for people to know, ‘I’m making a contribution to ag education.’”

Ross’ appearance was among the highlights of the 88th annual California State FFA Leadership Conference,

which continues through April 26. With the theme, “Electrify,” students in high school FFA programs throughout California converged to participate in contests, hear inspiring speakers, attend a career fair and take part in other activities.

Ross’ appearance excited members of the FFA’s state leadership team, including outgoing president Joelle Lewis of San Luis Obispo, who said she’s also met the secretary during visits to schools.

“I think having her come here and talk (about students’ potential for future leadership) makes a big difference in people’s minds,” Lewis said.

Ross has attended several state FFA conventions since becoming food and ag secretary in 2011.

She began her address by praising FFA member McKenzie Brazier of King City, Calif., who sang during one of the session’s talent segments.

“I would recommend her for ‘The Voice.’” Ross said to loud cheers. “Wouldn’t it be great if we had someone on ‘The Voice’ with a blue jacket? And then if somebody standing behind her would hold up a CalAgPlate sign?”

Ross told the students that among them could be sitting a future state lawmaker, water board member, agriculture secretary or even U.S. president. She said it’s important that California agriculture recognize its mission and the ability to feed the world.

“You cannot appreciate what you have until you don’t have it,” Ross said, noting that she missed fresh California produce when she shopped in Washington, D.C., during her stint as chief of staff for U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

# Idaho Power offers safety warning after ag accident

By **JOHN O’CONNELL**  
Capital Press

MOUNTAIN HOME, Idaho — Officials at Idaho Power are reminding farmworkers to use caution while working around overhead power lines in the wake of an April 18 accident that seriously injured a 31-year-old woman.



Courtesy of Idaho Power

Idaho Power has run radio and print advertisements such as the one pictured above to promote safety among those who work near power lines. A recent farming accident involving workers who were shocked while moving irrigation pipe highlights the risk.

Home and was later flown to St. Alphonsus. He would not elaborate on the juvenile’s condition.

Matthew Dodge was evaluated and released from St. Luke’s Elmore shortly after the 5:20 p.m. accident. Griffin said Matthew Dodge administered CPR to his wife at the scene and resuscitated her.

Griffin said the pipes had been piled under the power line and “at some point they brought the irrigation hand-lines vertical and hooked it on

the power line.”

“When Idaho Power got out there and shut off the power, it was hot enough that the end of the pipe had melted and there were glass beads in the sand,” Griffin said.

Griffin said friends set up a GoFundMe account to help the family with bills.

Idaho Power safety director Jim Duke said the utility runs print and radio advertisements in both English and Spanish throughout April warning anyone who works near power

lines to look up and keep a safe distance. State law prohibits people from bringing any conductive object within 10 feet of an overhead line.

“Some objects that people think about as non-conductive are actually conductive. Even a wooden pole can conduct electricity,” Duke said, adding pipes should remain horizontal when workers move them.

Dan Axness, Idaho Power’s irrigation segment coordinator, said the best way to prevent such accidents is for farmworkers to avoid stacking pipe near lines.

Axness said Idaho Power emphasized safe handling of irrigation equipment around power lines in seven irrigation workshops it hosted this year throughout the state. The next workshop will be in the fall in Richland, Ore.

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration advises farm employers who work near power lines to provide adequate safety training to workers, apply decals to equipment that could pose electrical hazards and explain them to workers and train workers to use routes that avoid power lines when they move equipment.

# Fifth-generation rancher says he’s a conservation-easement convert

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — As a fifth-generation rancher in Oregon’s Jordan Valley, Bob Skinner was adamantly opposed to conservation easements.

But the former president of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and a long-time director for the Public Lands Council had a change of philosophy when he was invited to find out more about how conservation easements can protect working landscapes.

His awakening came more than a decade ago and led him

to become a founding member of the Northwest Rangeland Trust, of which he now serves as vice chairman.

As a rancher, Skinner can understand a rancher’s resistance to transferring any rights on his private property and skepticism about “so-called” conservationists.

“If you have reservations, I totally understand. I was there once,” he told ranchers at the Idaho Range Livestock Symposium on April 20.

“Talk about ‘conservation’ makes you wince a bit when so-called conservationists take us to court every day,”

he said.

When you fight those folks over your property rights, the word just doesn’t have a good ring, he said.

But conservation easements can be a valuable tool to protect the future of a ranching operation, and it can help ranchers get out of a financial jam and save the land for agriculture, he said.

Urban encroachment is a big issue in some areas, and everybody knows ranching families that have had to sell the ranch to pay estate taxes, he said.

Putting a conservation

easement on the property can help in both situations, putting ranchers in a better position without really changing what they’re already doing, he said.

“It has helped a lot of people out,” he said.

It protects the property from development while preserving the ranching operation and retaining the property owner’s rights to use the land for such activities as grazing, farming and family residences.

“We are all about working landscapes. We want to keep working landscapes working,” he said.

The property owner can write the easement any way he wants. And if something isn’t working, he can come back and change things if all parties involved agree, he said.

Even after hearing about what an easement can provide, some people still might not want to do it or they might not need to. But it’s there if they do need it, he said.

“These conservation easements aren’t for everybody,” he said.

Skinner doesn’t have an easement on his property because his ranch isn’t in an area

that’s threatened by encroachment and, other than the sage grouse, he doesn’t have any conservation issues. But many ranchers do face such issues or could use an easement in estate planning, he said.

Conservation easements can keep people on the ground and keep land in production, he said.

And whether or not it’s a good fit for individual operations, there’s no denying the money and desire exists to conserve land. So it behooves the cattle industry to care about who is holding those easements, he said.