

Idaho, Wash. wheat growers seek emergency label for wireworm product

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho and Washington grain growers hope to obtain a special-needs exemption from the Environmental Protection Agency allowing them to use an insecticide labeled for potatoes to protect wheat from wireworms.

Stacey Satterlee, executive director of Idaho Grain Producers Association, said growers in both states hope to have emergency approval to use the insecticide fipronil as a wheat seed treatment before they plant their fall crops in September and October.

Satterlee explained wireworm populations have steadily grown throughout the region since 2005, when the highly effective and long-last-



Courtesy of Arash Rashed

A wireworm is seen in this photo. Wheat growers in Idaho and Washington are pursuing a special-needs exemption to use the insecticide fipronil as a wheat seed treatment against wireworms.

ing wireworm product Lindane was restricted.

Satterlee has emailed ques-

tionnaires to all of her members seeking information on their economic losses to fulfill

an application requirement. Idaho's special-needs permit would cover both irrigated and dryland growers for up to a year, and Satterlee hopes to have the growers' data back by May 6 to promptly submit their request to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. ISDA officials said they would spend a few weeks preparing the application to submit to EPA.

Washington's application, which is farther along in the process, covers only dryland wheat.

"We've been hearing about wireworms for years now, and really they're a problem without a very good solution," Satterlee said.

Ririe grower Clark Hamilton said wireworms have cut grain yields in half in some of his fields, but he's had lit-

tle problem in grain following spuds where he's used fipronil.

"Myself and several neighbors have thousands of acres affected by wireworm, and we're struggling with it big-time," Hamilton said.

Hamilton believes fipronil is also badly needed for barley production. Cathy Wilson, the Idaho Wheat Commission's research collaboration director who developed the grower survey, explained a tolerance for fipronil had already been established for wheat planted in a potato rotation, simplifying the special-needs application process. No such tolerance exists in barley.

Albaugh, LLC, a supplier of post-patent, generic farm chemicals, is supporting the application. If the special-needs permit is approved,

Chad Shelton, the company's Washington-based global proprietary product manager, said Albaugh will pursue a full amendment to the label permanently covering both barley and wheat.

After losing Lindane, which killed wireworms, Shelton explained the region's cereal growers switched to neonicotinoid insecticides that sickened the pest but didn't prevent their propagation. Yield losses have gradually mounted as wireworm populations have grown, and residual Lindane has worm off in fields, he said.

Shelton said fipronil also kills wireworms, and testing showed it enhanced performance by up to 50 percent compared with neonicotinoids alone.

Udderly organic: Cold Springs Dairy fills increasing demand for organic milk

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

From the moment cows arrive at Cold Springs Dairy outside Hermiston, they are given the organic treatment.

That means they eat nothing but organic feed, receive no additional growth hormones or antibiotics and get at least 120 days out of the year to graze on open pasture. Only organically raised animals provide certified organic milk, which racked up more than \$1 billion in sales across the U.S. in 2014.

Driven by rising consumer demand, Threemile Canyon Farms launched its first all-organic dairy at Cold Springs in August. The operation now includes 2,000 cows which produce 120,000 pounds of milk every day, or just shy of 14,000 gallons. The milk is mostly sold to Kroger, which runs Fred Meyer stores in Oregon.

Threemile Canyon Farms is easily the largest dairy producer in Oregon, and one of the largest in the country. The main farm in Boardman supplies a whopping 255,000 gallons of conventional milk every day to Tillamook Cheese. But organic dairies take on a whole different set of regulations, and one slip-up could cause a major setback.

Virtually everything that comes in to Cold Springs is inspected, from the animal feed down to the cleaning supplies. Even the trucks must be cleaned thoroughly to avoid possibly mixing non-organic materials. The Washington State Department of Agriculture certifies the dairy, and is in charge of making sure all requirements are met.

Jeff Wendler, director of livestock operations for Threemile Canyon Farms, said they were afraid of doing something wrong at first, but it's all standard procedure now.

"We've been very happy with how it's gone. It fits well within our system," Wendler said. "We're able to give the customer what they're asking for, what they're paying for and what they expect."

Organic food is experi-



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

Workers attach milking unit to the utters of organic dairy cows in the milking barn at the Cold Springs Dairy on Tuesday east of Hermiston.



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

A line of Holstein dairy cows eat in the feed barn on Tuesday at the Cold Springs Dairy east of Hermiston.

encing a surge in popularity nationwide, with sales increasing 72 percent between 2008 and 2014, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Milk topped the list of organic best-sellers at \$1.08 billion, well ahead of eggs, which came in second at \$420 million. The same survey shows Oregon came in fourth with \$237 million in organic sales, trailing California, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Threemile Canyon Farms has been growing organic vegetables and forage crops for more than 10 years, and Wendler said business has been improving each and every year. Organic veggies are processed at the company's

own plant in Pasco, and some of that byproduct — such as corn husks and other parts of the plants that aren't edible for humans — can be used in organic feed for cows at Cold Springs.

In turn, organic fertilizer from the cows can be used on organic fields back at the farm, completing the circle. Wendler said this setup gave Threemile Canyon an advantage toward starting the dairy, and helps to keep feed costs down which can be two or three times as expensive as conventional feed.

"Everything we do, we want to be a benefit to the whole operation," he said.

Wendler said they've also partnered with nearby JSH

Farms, of Hermiston, to grow organic alfalfa, corn silage and grasses on the dairy's pastures, where cows must spend a minimum of 120 days each year. The cows are brought inside for milking twice per day, which is done by machine. During the heat of summer, Wendler said they will graze the cows at night when it's cooler, and bring them under covered pens for the day.

The organic operation has gone so well the company is already considering expansion, Wendler said. He also defended the farm's conventional dairy, saying Threemile Canyon has one of the strictest animal welfare protocols in the country. That includes full-time veterinarians and nutritionists on staff.

"The healthier (cows) are, and the more comfortable they are, the more milk they're producing," he said.

Ultimately, organic dairies are limited by the amount of land it takes to run them, Wendler said. But he's happy to look out at cows relaxing on the pasture, while filling a consumer need on store shelves.

"People who buy organic have the choice. They feel the milk is healthier, and they like the whole system of organic farming," he said. "It's great that people have that choice."

Fruit packing wastewater permit being updated

UNION GAP, Wash. — A general wastewater permit for the fresh fruit packing industry is being updated for 191 facilities across Washington by the state Department of Ecology.

The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, or NPDES, permit is updated every five years and assures fruit packers are protecting lakes, rivers and groundwater when managing wastewater.

The draft permit outlines uniform treatment and disposal methods and is available for review and comment through June 17. It includes handling measures for discharge of

the new fungicide, difenoconazole.

The draft permit, a fact sheet, and an economic impact analysis comparing compliance costs for small and large businesses are available at www.ecy.wa.gov.

New requirements will be reviewed and training on how to report data online will be offered from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. May 18 at Ecology's Central Regional Office, 1250 Alder St., Union Gap; and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 19 at the Community Fire Hall, 228 Chumstick Highway, Leavenworth.

— Dan Wheat



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Shepherd's Grain General Manager Mike Moran greets tour participants and farmers May 3 during a stop at Jim Nollmeyer's wheat farm in Reardan, Wash.

Shepherd's Grain brings farmers, customers together

Company pays growers for cost of production

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

REARDAN, Wash. — The best way for consumers to understand where their food comes from is by talking with the farmer who grows it, the head of Shepherd's Grain says.

The Portland company sponsored a tour of Eastern Washington farms for customers this week, including visits to operations owned by Jim Nollmeyer in Reardan, Wash., and David Dobbins in Cheney, Wash.

"Relationships are built on communication, and that communication has to be face-to-face," said Mike Moran, general manager of the company.

The company buys from 41 farmers who grow wheat on roughly 115,000 acres. They sell the equivalent of nearly 650,000 bushels of wheat as flour, Moran said.

Moran said the company pays growers based on their cost of production, not commodity prices.

"We actually survey our growers every year about what it cost them to produce, look at a three-year rolling average on yield and then we use that to set the price we pay the grower," he said. "It's a guaranteed profitable endeavor for them. They will make money."

Such an arrangement benefits the farmers in a year when wheat prices are low.

"That's a lesson we try to teach people — our price is stable and sometimes higher than commodity, because you're

actually paying what it cost to grow your food," Moran said.

Most consumers don't know what it costs to produce food, or how the price they pay at the cash register translates into value for the farmer, Moran said.

"We find that the bakers and restaurateurs who are using Shepherd's Grain flour are shopping based on supporting agriculture and having that connection to the farm," he said. "They're willing to pay a cost of production price because they know what they're supporting is the long-term health of the farmer."

Diane LaVonne of Diane's Market Kitchen in Seattle, said all the products she uses in her cooking school come from local farmers.

"To see the farm is really important," she said. "Once you can connect a story about a farmer with what happens on a plate, you can change people's habits."

Kaye Wetli of the Riverview School District in King County, Wash., said they serve products made from Shepherd's Grain, including rolls.

"I like this idea of taking a national commodity type of item like wheat but yet they've made it into a local product we can buy," she said.

Shepherd's Grain will add new farmers only as demand grows, Moran said. The company has a waiting list of farmers.

Shepherd's Grain's annual revenue is roughly \$6 million. The board hopes to reach \$50 million within 10 years, Moran said.

Moran would like to see the company become a model for wheat production and sales. He envisions having Shepherd's Grain set up in other states, such as Kansas and South Dakota.

Lesson plans teach elementary-school students about almonds

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — A growers' group has put together a lesson plan for elementary-school teachers to enlighten youngsters about almonds.

The Almond Board of California's new video and activity book follow similar lessons the organization has worked on over the past six years with the help of the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, the group's representatives say.

The materials provide instructors with a fun way to teach third- to fifth-graders about the importance of almonds in California, which produces 80 percent of the world's supply of the nut, according to Rebecca Bailey, the board's program coordinator for industry relations.

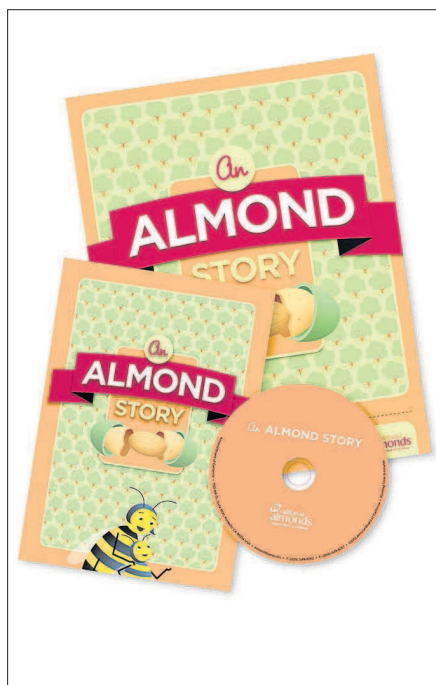
"Members of the almond industry have taken the video and activity books to schools in the Central Valley, and now teachers can use these educational tools in the classroom," spokeswoman Linda Romander said in an email.

The idea for the lessons came from two participants in the board's Almond Leadership Program, a year-long series of seminars during which people work on presentations that they give in their final month.

The lessons instruct children how to be aware of what's being grown around them and to develop a sense of responsibility for the land. The board believes students will be more excited about eating nutrient-rich foods if they feel a personal connection with growers, a news release explains.

The lessons come as the Almond Board has tried harder in recent years to educate the public about the industry amid criticisms of its impacts on water and the environment. Two years ago, the board put out a cartoon bee video to inform consumers as well as growers about its best-management practices for deploying bees during bloom.

The board is trying to get schools to incorporate the new lesson plan before classes let out for the summer.



Courtesy of Almond Board of California

Lessons and workbooks from the Almond Board of California aim to teach elementary-school children about almonds in the Golden State.