



Courtesy of NAWG
Chandler Goule is the new CEO of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

Wheat growers organization names new CEO

The National Association of Wheat Growers has chosen a new chief executive officer.

Chandler Goule, currently senior vice president of programs for the National Farmers Union, will take over as the new CEO for NAWG on July 5, the organization announced.

Goule will also become executive director of the National Wheat Foundation.

“The U.S. wheat industry is poised to reach new heights in both production and quality,” Goule said in a NAWG press release. “I am thrilled and honored to have this opportunity to work alongside our national wheat grower leaders in positioning NAWG and NWF as pre-eminent wheat advocacy and educational organizations as we begin to develop strategy for making wheat a major player in the drafting of the next farm bill.”

NAWG conducted a nationwide search for a new CEO to fill the vacancy left by Jim Palmer, who announced in April his intention to step down to spend more time with family and on his Missouri farm.

“With our industry at a critical juncture, we know that with Chandler’s guidance, NAWG will be in a great position to advocate on behalf of all wheat farmers,” NAWG president Gordon Stoner said in the press release.

Goule holds degrees from Texas A&M and George Washington University, and was a subcommittee staff director for the House Agriculture Committee before moving to the National Farmers Union in 2009 as vice president of government relations, according to the NAWG press release. He was appointed senior vice president of NFU programs in 2014.

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N. Calif. rice growers wrap up near-normal planting season

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

WILLIAMS, Calif. — Rice growers in Northern California are wrapping up what turned out to be a near-normal planting season, as spring rains enabled them to boost acreage.

After the big storms in March, the state’s rice acreage will likely end up near 500,000, said Charley Mathews, a Marysville, Calif., grower and USA Rice Federation executive committee member.

That’s up significantly from the National Agricultural Statistics Service’s prediction in early March that growers would seed rice on 427,000 acres, only 1 percent more than the acreage seeded last year.

“Everything changed in about a two-week period,” Mathews said.

The early estimate was based on a survey of growers before the March rains materialized, Mathews said.

Though many Northern California growers are getting their full allocations of surface water this year, re-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press
A rice field near Williams, Calif., is prepared for planting in late April. Spring rains have given most growers in the Sacramento Valley the water they needed for a near-normal planting season.

duced prices and lingering uncertainty among water suppliers caused farmers to initially be conservative in their planting plans.

However, thanks to the

advent of improved rainfall and recovering reservoirs across the region, farmers now say they’re back to planting more of a normal crop this season, the Califor-

nia Farm Bureau Federation reports.

The plantings come even though a global surplus in rice is still weighing down prices and California farm-

ers are facing more competition from farmers in other parts of the world growing medium-grain rice, the Farm Bureau notes.

Rice averaged \$376.05 per metric ton in April, up slightly from \$370.48 in March but down significantly from a peak of more than \$600 per metric ton in 2011 and 2012, according to the Index Mundi online data portal.

The near-normal plantings follow drought-diminished seasons in 2014 and 2015, when growers in the Golden State planted 431,000 acres and about 370,000 acres, respectively, according to NASS.

Growers encountered occasional showers during this year’s planting, but they didn’t put the season significantly behind schedule.

“Rain during the springtime is spotty as some areas get more than others,” Mathews said. “I think we’ll harvest on time. We’re a little later than last year planting-wise, but depending on what the summer does I think we’ll be fine.”



Courtesy of Idaho Power Co.
Idaho Power Co. crews maintain a cloud seeding generator in the mountains above Garden Valley, Idaho. The Idaho Water Resource Board and the state’s irrigators are stepping up their contributions to the utility’s program.

Irrigators step up cloud seeding support

By **JOHN O’CONNELL**
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho water managers have stepped up funding to help Idaho Power Co. continue building a cloud seeding program that’s already been credited with making sizable contributions to the state’s mountain snowpack.

The program releases silver iodide into the atmosphere, either from 53 remotely operated ground-based generators or from three leased aircraft, to serve as additional ice nuclei in the clouds and enhance precipitation. Idaho Power estimates additional snowpack resulting from the program, which

it started in 2003, yields an average of 800,000 acre-feet of water — which is roughly half the volume of the American Falls Reservoir and generates enough hydro-power to supply 17,000 homes.

Idaho Power engineering leader Jon Bowling said heading forward, irrigation organizations, the Idaho Water Resource Board and Idaho Power will each shoulder roughly a third of the program’s cost.

“We wouldn’t want our customers to bear the full cost of a program other stakeholders benefit from,” Bowling said. “I think we’ve had a pretty good reception to the collaborative funding mechanism.”

The board contributed

\$500,000 two years ago to help the program add infrastructure and followed with \$200,000 last year toward adding an airplane on a pilot-project basis for cloud seeding in the Upper Snake River Basin, said Brain Patton, Planning Bureau manager with the Idaho Department of Water Resources. Patton said the board voted May 20

to increase its Fiscal Year 2017 cloud seeding funding to \$600,000, to be spread across the Eastern Snake, Boise and Wood River and Payette basins.

Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc. made its first commitment to the program this season, totaling \$45,000. Water District 1, which encompasses the Upper Snake system, contributed \$200,000. It will continue to contribute to a county-supported program in Eastern Idaho using manual generators, run by High Country Resource, Conservation and Development. Water District 63, which includes the Boise River system, and Wood River water users each contributed \$125,000.

Lyle Swank, watermaster with Water District 1, said his

district’s contribution toward Idaho Power’s cloud seeding program represents 20 percent of its total budget, but members voted to assess themselves and contribute, nonetheless.

“When we can extract a little extra moisture from the atmosphere, that can be really helpful,” Swank said.

Bowling said Idaho Power is working with the National Center for Atmospheric Research to develop a model guiding operations and providing a cloud seeding benefit analysis.

Shawn Parkinson, Idaho Power’s water resources leader, estimates this winter’s program added 11.5 percent extra snow-water equivalent in the Payette Basin and 9.4 percent more moisture in the Boise Basin as of April 15, plus 4 to 5.4 percent more moisture in the Upper Snake as of April 1. He anticipates adding about three more generators to the program next winter, and eventually expects to include a fourth plane.

“It’s a new era in terms of collaboration and it remains to be seen who all will come to the table and join in,” Parkinson said.

Workers paid in blueberry wage case

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The U.S. Department of Labor has begun handing out checks to workers in Kennewick covered in a court settlement in a dispute over wages with Washington blueberry growers.

The first of more than 1,000 workers received checks May 23 from \$385,318 paid by Blue Mountain Farms LLC in Walla Walla and its affiliates.

Earlier this year, a federal judge ordered the defendants to pay that amount in a consent judgment in favor of DOL on all counts. DOL is trying to find all the workers.

DOL filed a lawsuit against Blue Mountain Farms in 2013 and later expanded it to include affiliates Great Columbia Berry Farm and Applegate Orchards that DOL said supply Blue Mountain’s packing shed with fruit and are owned or managed by the same individuals: Ryan Brock, Shirley Lott and Brandon Lott.

The suit claimed Blue Mountain unlawfully shipped “hot goods” into interstate commerce in 2013 because its blueberries were picked and packed in violation of minimum wage and overtime laws.

The complaint also accused the farm of failing to properly keep records and of retaliating against workers by laying off those who were interviewed by labor inspectors. Blue Mountain was accused of blocking DOL inspectors from entering its property.

DOL threatened to use its “hot goods” authority to block shipment of blueberries but didn’t.

Blue Mountain denied the allegations against it and said it tried to cooperate with DOL but that inspectors reneged on an agreement to minimize the disruption of harvest operations.

In the consent judgment, Blue Mountain admitted it systematically violated workers’ rights by not paying minimum wage and overtime and allowing multiple workers to pick on a single ticket.

“I know the growers involved. I find it hard to believe that everything DOL was saying about them was true,” said Alan Schreiber, administrator of the Washington State Blueberry Commission in Pasco.

“The family involved are reputable, good growers. It’s hard for me to believe any Washington blueberry grower is not doing their best to take care of their workers because workers are in short supply,” he said.

“I don’t know the details or merits, but we’re talking back wages of about \$100 per worker per year over three years,” he said.

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