

# ODA won't conduct on-farm food safety inspections

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has decided against seeking federal funds to conduct on-farm food safety inspections.

The agency will instead wait to see what role the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will play in on-farm enforcement of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

ODA doesn't have the authority to perform on-farm inspections, though it's considering asking state lawmakers

for that power in 2017, said Stephanie Page, the agency's food safety director.

"We need to have a conversation with the Legislature before we commit to a grant application to do that work," said Page.

Farmers are giving the agency "diverse feedback" about whether they'd prefer for ODA to conduct inspections, rather than FDA, she said.

While some farmers would feel more comfortable with ODA, it's not clear that the agency's involvement would

preclude FDA from doing its own inspections.

For example, FDA concurrently inspects food manufacturers even though ODA also inspects these facilities.

For that reason, some farmers wonder whether there's any purpose in ODA conducting on-farm inspections, Page said.

"It's not a done deal we will do inspections. We need to continue to have those conversations with the industry," she said.

The Oregon Board of Agriculture has affirmed

the agency's decision not to pursue inspection funding, voting unanimously at its June 8 meeting in John Day, Ore., to wait until more information is available.

While Oregon is only one of a handful of states not to seek FDA funds for on-farm inspections, the agency is asking for about \$3.5 million over five years to educate farmers about FSMA.

"I think we need more time to do some more outreach," said Katy Coba, ODA's director.

To obtain those funds, ODA

must commit to developing a database of farms for the FDA.

If farmers were required to submit information to the database, that would become a public record, which makes some growers uncomfortable, Coba said.

The agency has decided not to pursue a mandatory database and will instead seek voluntary submissions.

The FDA is unlikely to object to the voluntary inventory idea, since the agency recognizes "all states are struggling with how to do that," said Page.

If the ODA wins grant approval for education and outreach, it plans to create three new staff positions located in major produce-growing areas of the state, she said.

The FSMA rules for farmers only apply to fruits and vegetables that are consumed raw.

If the ODA changes its mind about on-farm inspections, it can apply for that grant in a separate application next spring, Page said.

"That's a small price to pay to have more time to talk to our stakeholders," she said.

# Mexico drops temporary tariffs against U.S. apples

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Mexico has ended its temporary tariffs on U.S. apples after determining that imports from Washington's 2013 crop did not damage that nation's industry.

It's good news for Washington growers since Mexico is their No. 1 export market and becomes even more important with larger crops, said Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission in Wenatchee.

Mexico normally buys 10 million, 40-pound boxes of Washington apples or more per season and bought a record 15.5 million in the 2014-2015 sales season. More than 11 million boxes, valued at \$230 million, were sold to Mexico in the 2013-2014 season that was investigated.

As of May 31 this season, 6.5 million boxes have been sold compared to 10.4 million a year ago. That's a drop of 37 percent.

However, Rebecca Lyons, Apple Commission export marketing director, has said a 12 percent reduction in the value of the peso versus the dollar, a smaller 2015 Washington apple crop and higher prices have all contributed more to the decline



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Eleodoro Rameriz, foreground, packs a tray of Fuji apples into a 40-pound box at Washington Fruit & Produce Co.'s new packing plant in Yakima, Wash., in December. The company is one of a few apple packers in the state that enjoyed no tariffs on their sales to Mexico this season. Mexico has now ended its temporary tariffs.

in exports to Mexico than the tariffs.

That's true, Fryhover said, while noting removal of the tariff levels the playing field among shippers since some had a 20 percent tariff and some had none.

Fred Scarlett, manager of Northwest Fruit Exporters in

Yakima, said industry efforts to fully comply with all requests for information from the Mexico Ministry of Economia "proved there was no injury to Chihuahua growers by our exports."

NFE is a nonprofit corporation managing export procedures of apples and cherries.

The Mexico government

opened an investigation in December 2014 at the request of the Regional Fruit Producers Association (UNIFRUT) of the state of Chihuahua. UNIFRUT alleged U.S. shippers, mostly from Washington, sold apples in Mexico in 2013 at less than fair value, damaging Chihuahua growers.

NFE said that was unlikely because 2013 was a profitable year, giving shippers little incentive to sell into Mexico at low prices.

More than 40 Washington apple packers responded to a Ministry of Economia questionnaire by the Feb. 13, 2015,

deadline and 12 were chosen for further review to determine if they would be assessed a duty.

On Jan. 7, 2016, Economia imposed temporary tariffs ranging from 2.44 to 20.82 percent on some Washington exporters while it continued its investigation. Economia said there was "sufficient evidence" that U.S. apples had been sold into Mexico at discriminatory prices damaging Mexican producers, a USDA report stated.

Washington Fruit & Produce, Yakima; Monson Fruit Co., Selah; and CPC International Apple Co., Tieton, were all allowed by the Mexican government to keep shipping into Mexico at no tariff.

On March 17, attorneys for several Washington fruit companies, and Cass Gebbers, co-owner of Gebbers Farms in Brewster, spoke at an Economia public hearing on the case in Mexico City.

On June 7, Economia released a final determination in the case saying U.S. sales did not damage Mexico's industry, ending its investigation and revoking the tariffs as of June 8.

The U.S. is the primary supplier of imported apples in Mexico, with Washington accounting for about 90 percent of those shipments.

# Reward offered in stock dog poisoning case

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — A \$5,000 reward has been offered for information that leads to the conviction of the person responsible for poisoning 14 stock dogs near Parma since early April.

A local veterinarian who examined the dogs, which are used to guard and shepherd sheep and goats, said they were intentionally poisoned with large amounts of strychnine.

Twelve of them have died.

The reward is being offered by the Humane Society of the United States, which contacted the dogs' owner, Casey Echevarria, after the Capital Press broke this story June 1.

HSUS State Director Lisa Kauffman said the reward is double the standard amount the group offers in animal cruelty cases.

HSUS usually stays out of issues involving agriculture — the stock dogs are considered ag animals under Idaho law — but the large number of dogs poisoned and the use of strychnine made it a particularly heinous crime in HSUS' view, Kauffman said.

"We need to publicize this and keep this going," she said. "Hopefully, somebody is going to turn this person in."

Joe Decker, public information officer for the Canyon County Sheriff's Department, said the department is in the early stages of investigating the poisonings and isn't releasing any information yet.

Echevarria said his phone has been ringing off the hook since the story broke and he has already done several TV interviews.

He said he has used the resulting media interest to educate people about how important stock dogs are to farmers and ranchers.

"It needed to come out," he said. "The public outcry is going to stop (whoever is responsible) and there is going to be good coming out of



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Ramrod, an Anatolian shepherding dog, guards sheep in southwestern Idaho May 16. Ramrod is owned by Casey Echevarria, who has had 14 of his stock dogs poisoned near Parma in southwestern Idaho since early April.

the bad. These guard dogs are more valuable to us farmers and ranchers than the public knows."

Strychnine, which is used to kill rodents, is a restricted use pesticide and people have to obtain a license from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture before using it in bait, said George Robinson, administrator of ISDA's Agriculture Resources Division.

To obtain the license, a person needs to pass an exam. There are about 3,000 such licenses statewide, Robinson said.

Dr. Brent Varriale, a veterinarian who examined several of Echevarria's poisoned dogs, said strychnine is a horrible way to die because it paralyzes a dog and causes it to suffocate to death.

He said the strychnine bait was mixed with raw ground meat to encourage the dogs to eat as much as they did and the large amount of bait he found in the dogs' stomachs, coupled with the large amount of dogs affected, convinces him they were intentionally poisoned.

The incidents bothered him such that he froze stomach content samples from the dogs and contacted the sheriff's department.

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