

# Local-food push fuels egg production boom in Nevada

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SPARKS, Nev. — As California egg producers continue to adapt to new cage size rules, their industry in neighboring Nevada is experiencing a boom.

Poultry and egg production cash receipts in the Silver State have risen 200 percent since 2010 — from \$5.32 million that year to \$15.96 million in 2014, according to USDA statistics.

The jump comes as the state's overall agriculture production value rose by 50 percent during the same period, from \$636 million to \$952 million, the Nevada Department of Agriculture reported. Driving the growth were cow-calf, milk and hay production, according to the agency.

Tatjana Vukovic, an education and information officer for the department, chalks up Nevada's egg and poultry production increases to rising demand, although she didn't rule out that California's Proposition 2 may have enticed a few producers to move operations here.

"It could play a certain part in it," Vukovic said. "I could not tell you 100 percent if it's directly related to the increase."

Rob Holley, whose Holley Family Farms in Dayton, Nev., produces beef, eggs and other products, doubts that California's cage size minimums have had anything to do with Nevada's boom.

Any gains in moving from California's stricter regulations would be offset by Ne-



Chickens are released onto pasture at Holley Family Farms in Dayton, Nev. Producer Rob Holley says Nevada's growth in egg production in recent years has been mostly driven by consumer demand for fresh, local eggs.

vada's harsher winters and the fact that it is geographically isolated, requiring more diesel and other costs, Holley said.

"I think a lot of the increase in demand for local pastured eggs come ... at least in part from consumer concerns about the life of warehouse chickens," said Holley, who raises his chickens free-range as part of a pasture management program.

"More than that, it comes from a desire among local farmers to support agricultural practices that are more along the traditional lines of a multi-species system where we integrate plants and animals into soil management," he said. "In this area, people want to support that. They believe the quality of eggs is far superior to what you get out of a commercial (operation)."

California voters passed

Proposition 2 in 2008, requiring that each egg-laying hen have at least 116 square inches to spread its wings. The new rules have been blamed for a drop in egg production in California, as many farmers are simply raising fewer birds in their existing structures to comply.

But both egg production and the number of layers in California have been rebounding since early 2015. The state's egg production in March totaled 297 million, up 21 million from February and up 23 million from March 2015, while the state's 12.3 million layers in March 2016 were up 9 percent more from a year earlier, according to the USDA's Pacific Region Poultry Report.

Nevada has no regulations related to hen houses for egg-laying chickens, although egg producers are required to

Courtesy of Nevada Dept. of Agriculture

register their operations and undergo inspections by the Nevada agriculture department, noted Marlea Stout, the agency's producer certification program manager.

However, major chain stores such as Costco, Safeway and Walmart as well as food manufacturers such as General Mills and Nestle have made a big impact on the industry nationwide by announcing plans to source exclusively cage-free eggs.

Any new large-scale egg-laying facilities built in the last three or four years have been compliant, Randy Pesciotta of the commodity reporting service Umer Barry said last month.

Holley said most egg production in Nevada consists of smaller operations in the Reno-Sparks and Las Vegas areas that are filling a niche for local consumers.

# U.S. investigating Chinese fertilizer 'dumping'

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Federal trade authorities are investigating whether Chinese companies are "dumping" ammonium sulfate fertilizer at below-market prices in the U.S.

The U.S. International Trade Commission's investigation is based on a complaint from PCI Nitrogen of Pasadena, Texas, which claims that domestic manufacturers are suffering from soaring imports of the nitrogen product.

"Low priced Chinese imports of granular product routinely undersell prices of granular product sold by U.S. producers, exerting tremendous downward pressure on U.S. prices for both granular and standard ammonium sulfate," the complaint said.

In agriculture, the product is applied on a variety of crops and is also used to improve the efficiency of herbicides.

Imports of ammonium sulfate from China increased nearly eightfold between 2013 and 2015 — from about 47,000 short tons to 370,000 short tons — and are on track to rise 60 percent in 2016 over last year, PCI alleges.

China now controls about 12 percent of the U.S. market for the fertilizer, up from less than 2 percent in 2013.

Meanwhile, the wholesale price of Chinese ammonium sulfate has plunged roughly 25 percent, from \$218 per short ton to \$164 per short ton, forcing U.S. manufacturers to reduce their prices to remain competitive, the complaint said.

PCI Nitrogen fears this trend will only strengthen in the future.

China is continuing to "add capacity at an alarming rate"

Stacked bags of ammonium sulfate fertilizer. Chinese manufacturers are accused of dumping ammonium sulfate in the U.S. at below-market prices to the detriment of U.S. manufacturers.

even though it already produces much more of the fertilizer than it consumes, the company said.

"Producers in China are expanding capacity to produce ammonium sulfate well beyond any forecasted increase in global demand," the complaint alleges. "Much of this new capacity will be targeted at export markets and the U.S. market, in particular."

China is able to generate such large quantities of the fertilizer because it's a byproduct of other industries that are favored by its government, PCI claims. About 80 percent of the ammonium sulfate in China comes from the steel and nylon manufacturing processes.

Not only has China's government encouraged the growth of these industries, but it's also emphasized adding value to byproducts, the complaint said. Government policies that benefit production of the fertilizer include the elimination of export tariffs, preferential loan programs, reduced taxes and better rates for freight.

# New farmworker housing project proposed in Morrow County

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
EO Media Group

BOARDMAN, Ore. — Threemile Canyon Farms is looking to add a new housing development west of Boardman for 200 to 800 seasonal workers who are needed to grow more organic crops.

But first, Morrow County must approve a zoning change for the property on Tower Road south of Interstate 84. The land is currently zoned Space Age Industrial, which does not allow seasonal farmworker housing as a permitted use. Instead, Threemile

Canyon Farms wants the land zoned for Exclusive Farm Use, which would allow the project to move forward.

The Morrow County Planning Commission met May 24 to review the zoning request, and continued that hearing for its next meeting on June 28. Planning director Carla McLane said the commission will make its recommendation to the county court, which has the final say on the matter. The commission will meet at 7 p.m. at the Bartholomew Building in Heppner.

Threemile Canyon Farms is owned and operated by

R.D. Offutt Co., which is working through its real estate branch — PROffutt Limited Partnership — on a deal to buy 66 acres from the city of Boardman to build farmworker housing along the east side of Tower Road. The property is outside the city's urban growth boundary, across from the Boardman Airport.

Organic farming has become more of an emphasis at the farm in recent years, with 7,800 acres now in organic peas, corn, onions, carrots and other vegetables. General manager Marty Myers has said they hope to expand to

over 12,000 organic acres in the next two years.

To do that, the farm will need to bring on a larger seasonal workforce. In a previous interview, Myers compared organic farming to going back 20 years in terms of farm practices, to the point of pulling weeds by hand. It takes more labor to grow organic, and those workers will all need somewhere to live.

In its application, the limited partnership said it initially plans to build one housing complex with 36 units, each with three bedrooms.

Ted Sanders, the compa-

ny's real estate development manager, declined to talk more about the project when contacted.

McLane, the county planning director, said the first step is to get the land rezoned. Space Age Industrial, or SAI, is something of a throwback, she said, created by the Oregon Legislature in the 1960s around the time of the Space Race.

The housing site has been zoned SAI since the early 1980s in hopes of luring aerospace industries to Morrow County. Those companies never came, and since then

McLane said they've been discussing what to do with the property.

"It kind of has marginal value as industrial land," she said. "It really is a 1960s space race holdover here in Morrow County."

The Planning Department has recommended approving a zoning change to Exclusive Farm Use.

McLane said the location is preferable for farmworker housing, since they'll be closer to the farm and avoid straining sewer and water services within Boardman's city limits.

# WSU dryland field day features potential new crops, climate predictions

## New study examines Russian thistle appearance

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Dryland wheat farmers in Eastern Washington will get a closer look at potential alternative crops and strategies for stopping a problem weed.

Washington State University's annual field day begins at 8:30 a.m. June 16 at the dryland research station in Lind, Wash.

Precipitation throughout the region has been well above average, said Bill Schillinger, director of the station.

Timely rains in mid- to late May were "a bushel maker," boosting winter wheat yield in the region, Schillinger said.

"We're sort of past that critical flowering stage where it's susceptible to frost," he said. "These crops are looking very good all over. We're not in the ballpark yet, but after two very tough drought years in a row ... I think everyone is looking at (them) going, 'These are some pretty nice looking crops.'"

The agenda includes information about WSU's winter and spring wheat breeding programs, as well as up and coming crops.

"Winter triticale is looked upon as a coming potential alternative crop," Schillinger said. "We've had triticale out there before, but I think this year it could really have an impact. I feel it has a place in

a lot of niches in the low rainfall region."

A private crop insurance package for winter triticale is slated to begin this fall, with federal crop insurance expected to follow, Schillinger said.

Winter pea trials also look good this year, Schillinger said.

"We've got some entries that are chest-high," he said. "That's another crop that's showing a lot of potential. The interest and the acres that are going in seem to be growing quite quickly. It's got a lot of pros, and things you've got to watch for, too."

Representatives from RE-ACCH, a team of regional researchers led by the University of Idaho, offer an overview of their findings as they enter the fifth and final year of the project.

The presentation is specific to the low-precipitation, wheat-fallow production zone, including climate predictions and impacts on crop yields, Schillinger said.

Researchers will discuss the appearance, of the weed Russian thistle, and how it affects their potential to be killed by herbicide. Some Russian thistles die completely, while others don't die at all, Schillinger said. A WSU graduate student is studying the genetic traits.

"This is new research that nobody in the world has done before," Schillinger said. "It is by far the biggest broadleaf weed crop in the low-precipitation zone and it has been for more than 100 years. It's a real tough weed with a real survival instinct."

The noon lunch program includes updates from Sen. Mark Schoesler, College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences acting dean Kim Kidwell and associate dean Rich Koenig. For more information, contact Schillinger at 509-235-1933.

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