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THE CHANGING FACE OF FARMING

Number of Hispanic farm operators continues to grow across the nation

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — From humble beginnings in Mexico, Jesus Limon has spent a lifetime working hard for his slice of the American dream.

As a young man, he picked celery and oranges in California and tree fruit in Washington state. Twenty years ago he became one of the few Hispanic orchard owners in the Wenatchee area.

He and his wife of 40 years, Maria Luisa Limon, helped put their four sons through college and today see retirement in their not-too-distant future.

They now own 150 acres of apple trees and lease 35 acres of cherry and apple trees.

Growing number

Limon — pronounced “Lee-moan” — is one of about 100,000 Hispanic farm operators in the United States. Operators are defined by the U.S. Census of Agriculture as those managing daily operations. They may or may not own a farm.

The growth rate of Hispanic farm operators was still accelerating nationally in the last Ag Census in 2012.

Those numbers include up to three operators per farm, said Christopher Mertz, Northwest regional director of the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service in Olympia, Wash. Nationwide there were approximately 67,000 Hispanic-owned farms in 2012 and 99,732 Hispanic farm operators.

Not easy being small

Depending on the type of farm, breaking into the field can be difficult, Limon said.

“I’m not sure what the deal is in California, but here in Wenatchee packing houses that are not (grower-owned) co-ops don’t accept you if you don’t produce a certain amount of fruit,” Limon, 58, said.

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Photos by Dan Wheat/Capital Press
Jesus and Marie Limon sit with one of their sons, Jose, and grandchildren, from left, Christopher, 7, Jose Jr., 9; and Damian, 2, in the Limons’ East Wenatchee, Wash., home on June 27.

Jesus Limon, 58, is among a growing number of Hispanic farm and orchard operators in the U.S.

Oregon county’s GMO ban ruling appealed

Decision expected to establish statewide precedent

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A ruling striking down the ban on genetically engineered crops in Josephine County, Ore., is being appealed by supporters of the ordinance.

The prohibition was passed by voters in 2014 but overturned in May by Josephine County Circuit Court Judge Pat Wolke, who held that

state law clearly pre-empted local regulation of genetically modified organisms, or GMOs.

Oregonians for Safe Farms and Families, a nonprofit, and Sisikou Seeds, an organic farm, defended the GMO ban in court and have filed a notice informing the judge that they will appeal his decision.

Mary Middleton, executive director of OSFF, said the group continues to believe in local control and wants to vindicate the will of voters who created the GMO-free zone.

“Winning sets a precedent for the rest of the state,” Middleton said.

Middleton and other supporters of the GMO ban feared that biotech crops will cross-pollinate with organic and conventional ones, ruining their marketability.

Farmers Robert and Shelley Anne White filed a lawsuit against the ordinance last year because they wanted to plant ge-



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File
The Josephine County, Ore., Courthouse is seen in this photo. Two parties say they will appeal a judge’s ruling against the county’s ban of genetically modified crop.

netically engineered sugar beets.

Wolke agreed with them that state lawmakers disallowed such local restrictions in 2013, rejecting arguments that the pre-emption law was unconstitutional.

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Ag’s reaction to Supreme Court’s immigration ruling mixed

Lower court’s reversal of Obama order stands

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

The U.S. Supreme Court’s deadlock on President Barack Obama’s executive order on immigration doesn’t alter the labor situation for agriculture and drew predictable reactions from various quarters.

The 4-4 court deadlock announced June 23 lets lower court rulings stand striking down Obama’s order of November 2014 granting deportation deferrals and temporary legal work status to about 5 million illegal immigrants.

Twenty-six states, led by Texas, brought suit saying the president’s order is unconstitutional.

Conservative groups such



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Workers train Kanzi apple tree limbs by stringing them to trellis wire in Mountain View Orchard, East Wenatchee, Wash., April 30. Like pruning, thinning and picking, requires a lot of workers.

as FreedomWorks heralded the court split as a victory for the Constitution. United Farm Workers President Arturo S. Rodriguez issued a statement calling the ruling a “setback for hardworking immigrant families.”

The decision “reflects the

separation of powers principle in our Constitution that Congress writes the laws and the president enforces those laws,” said Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., whose Fourth Congressional

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