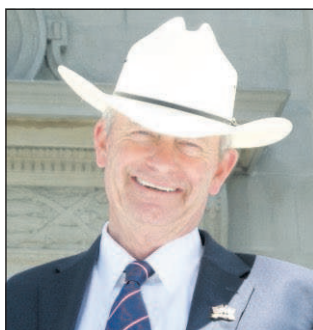


Idaho ag welcomes Little's run for governor

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

BOISE — News that Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little will run for governor was welcomed by the state's farm and ranch industry.

Little, 62, is a rancher and farmer from Emmett who has been active in the state's agricultural industry his entire life.

"We have an excellent relationship with Brad," said Leadore rancher Carl Lufkin. "He's been an ally of our industry. I certainly am going to support him."

Gov. Butch Otter, who has been Idaho's governor since 2007 and is also a rancher, has said he will not seek re-election.

Little filed the paperwork necessary to run for governor June 29.

Idaho's next gubernatorial election is in 2018. Little said he filed now because a lot of people around the state have

believe he is an ally for agriculture," said Meridian farmer Drew Eggers. "I'm pleased personally that he is running."

A third-generation Idaho rancher, Little owns a ranching and farming operation in Emmett and the family of his wife, Teresa Soulen, has farmed and ranched in Idaho for almost 150 years.

He is a former chairman of the Idaho Wool Growers Association.

"Brad Little is Idaho agriculture," Food Producers of Idaho Executive Director Rick Waitley told Capital Press in an email. "Being a product of a strong Idaho farm and ranch family, the lieutenant governor understands the important value the industry adds to the state."

Waitley said Little as a senator and lieutenant governor has interacted frequently with FPI, which represents most of the state's farm groups. As past president of the Idaho

Association of Commerce and Industry, Little also sees "the value of the industry when our commodities leave the farm," he said.

Little said one of his main priorities as governor would be to seek to lighten the burden of federal regulations on Idaho farmers and ranchers.

"Federal regulations are a continual challenge to agriculture," he said. "We have to make those as painless as possible and push back on a lot of them."

Little said another top goal would be to ensure the state creates the type of economic climate that allows Idahoans from farm as well as non-farm families to remain in or come back to rural communities that depend on agriculture's economic contribution.

"I would love to have my legacy be that families in Idaho were able to have their kids stay and come back and thrive here in Idaho," he said.

Study: Plastic crates no safer than old wooden boxes for storing onions

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — Plastic crates are no more sanitary for storing onions than the old wooden boxes packers in this area have used for decades, according to a study by Oregon State University researchers.

The study results could prove extremely valuable to dry bulb onion growers if new Food and Drug Administration food safety regulations require the use of plastic crates, as some onion growers fear.

There are an estimated 1 million wooden boxes used for storing onions in Southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon, the largest bulb onion producing region in the country by volume.

Replacing them with more expensive plastic crates would be an enormous expense for the region's onion industry, said Kay Riley, manager of Snake River Produce in Nyssa.

If onions were required to be stored in plastic crates instead of wooden boxes, "We'd just quit, I think," said Riley, the marketing order chairman for the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee, "We'd just throw in the towel."

Riley said the wooden crates cost a little more than \$60 apiece, while the plastic bins available on the market now cost about \$150 apiece.

The wooden boxes hold almost 1,600 pounds of onions, while the smaller plastic bins would hold 900 pounds.

"It would be a substantial cost" to switch to plastic containers, said OSU cropping systems extension agent Stuart Reitz, who conducted the container

tests with Clint Shock, director of OSU's Malheur County research station.

Because the plastic crates are a different size, some onion packers would have to retrofit their storage facilities to use them, Reitz said.

The Food Safety Modernization Act mandates that produce storage containers be sanitary for their intended purpose, and Reitz said the onion industry is concerned that could lead to an effort to replace the wooden boxes with plastic crates under the assumption the plastic containers are more sanitary.

To test that theory, Reitz and Shock conducted a trial in 2015 using onions grown under both furrow and drip irrigation systems.

Onions harvested under both systems were packed into 10 wooden crates and 10 plastic containers, stored for six weeks and then tested for generic E. coli and other potentially harmful bacteria.

"We haven't seen any difference in contamination of the onions from the container type," Reitz said. "There doesn't seem to be any need to change container types."

A big reason for that is simply that the onions themselves are not contaminated, Reitz said, something OSU researchers have shown in previous trials.

"The containers are not spreading any pathogens to begin with because they simply weren't there from the onions in the first place," he said.

The plastic crates used in the trial were sterilized with a bleach solution and rinsed with distilled water, then dried in the sun.



Courtesy of Almond Board of Calif.

An Iron Wolf grinds up a whole almond tree and puts the woody biomass materials back into the soil during a University of California Cooperative Extension-hosted demonstration in Chowchilla, Calif., earlier this year. The UC is researching use of the device as a way to help growers improve their soil quality.

Almond board funds UC orchard recycling research

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — The Almond Board of California is buying into the concept of grinding up whole orchards and putting the biomass material back into the ground to improve soil quality.

The board has given \$145,000 to a University of California research team that's been testing the feasibility of "recycling" old orchards on a test plot in Chowchilla, Calif., near Fresno.

With the grant, UC Cooperative Extension advisor Brent Holtz and others will join USDA researchers in assessing the costs and benefits of such projects at several test sites in the Central Valley, said Carissa Sauer, of Modesto. She is the board's manager of industry communications.

"Should this research provide evidence to support a change in almond farming practices, these recycling efforts could have major impacts on air quality, soil health and overall production efficiency, contributing to the greater sustainability of

California almonds," Sauer told the Capital Press in an email.

She said the approach seems to mimic nature "by following the lead of forests across the globe which are fueled by fallen logs and their decomposing tree biomass," she said.

Holtz held a field day for growers earlier this year to demonstrate a device called the Iron Wolf, which uproots and grinds whole orchard trees and incorporates the woody biomass into the soil.

Holtz, who is based in Stockton, Calif., told the gathering that studies he's been doing since 2003 have shown that whole-orchard chip incorporation treatments increased organic matter, soil carbon, nutrients and microbial diversity — all to the benefit of new plantings.

Recycling old orchards that are being taken out to make room for new ones could come in handy for growers who've been looking for alternative ways to dispose of biomass after some Central Valley cogeneration plants have closed in

recent years.

In addition, growers in recent years have reported an increase in problems with salinity in groundwater, which the orchard grinding experiments have been shown to alleviate.

Among the researchers' goals is to assess the costs

and benefits of different methods of grinding up orchard biomass and incorporating it into the soil and to determine whether whole-orchard recycling could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by further sequestering the carbon stored by almond trees, Sauer said.

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