

Idea could lead to deal on Idaho field burning changes

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — An EPA official has floated an idea he believes could solve the disagreement between Idaho farm and environmental groups over proposed changes to the state's crop residue burning program.

The idea was immediately supported by environmental groups and public health advocates involved in negotiations over the proposed changes, which state regulators say are needed to avoid a large reduction in the number of allowable burn days for Idaho farmers.

"It's a perfect idea because it really meets the needs of both groups," said Patti Gora-McRavin, who represents safe air advocates on Idaho's crop residue burning program advisory committee. "This idea absolutely works. It brings a common-sense solution. It's fair, it's balanced and it's simple."

Idaho farmers burn between 40,000 and 50,000 acres most years.

Farmers can get permission to burn their fields from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality only if small particulate matter and ozone levels aren't expected to exceed 75 percent of the national standard for those pollutants during the burn day.

Because the federal ozone standard was tightened Oct. 1, the number of allowable burn days in some parts of Idaho could be reduced by a third to half unless the state's crop residue burning program is changed.

To avoid a large reduction in allowable burn days because of the new ozone standard, DEQ has proposed loosening Idaho's ozone standard to 90 percent of the federal standard while leaving the state's standard for small particulate matter, known as PM 2.5, at 75 percent of the federal standard.

Environmental and air advocacy groups objected.

Mike McGown, EPA's regional smoke management coordinator and a member of the advisory committee, sent an email to Idaho Department of Environmental Quality officials July 13 proposing leaving the current PM 2.5 standard in place for all pollutants, unless ozone levels are expected to exceed that level. In that case, DEQ would reconsider the burn decision based on the criteria of the ozone standard being 90 percent of the federal standard and the PM 2.5 standard being 60 percent.

Bailey named grass-roots coordinator for ag, timber group

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Nursery owner Angela Bailey began work July 18 as the new grass-roots coordinator for Oregonians for Food and Shelter, the ag and timber lobbying group.

Executive Director Katie Fast said the OFS board went through a planning process with stakeholders to review the group's work and focus, especially since the 2015 retirement of Paulette Pyle, the organization's revered and well-known connection to legislators and regulatory agencies.

The review process made it clear there was a gap in working with producers who need to be telling their story at the local level, Fast said.

"We're challenged around GE (genetically engineered) crops, aerial spraying and pesticides in general," she said. "We want to focus on working

with people on a community level, and give them the tools to engage around the issues," Bailey, owner of Verna Jean Nursery near Gresham, Ore., has the experience to do that, Fast said.

Bailey, known to friends as "Angi," served as the Oregon Farm Bureau's second vice president in 2015 and won the Outstanding Farm Bureau Woman Award during its 2014 annual meeting. She's also a graduate of the Amer-

ican Farm Bureau's communications "boot camp." She's been active with the Oregon Association of Nurseries and other groups.

She and her husband, Larry, have two daughters. Bailey hadn't planned a career in the nursery business but took over the nursery in 2005 after her mother died unexpectedly. The nursery specializes in ornamental trees, including Japanese maples and monkey puzzle trees.



Angela "Angi" Bailey

PNW cherry harvest enters final stretch

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Pacific Northwest cherry growers have harvested more fruit this season than they predicted last spring.

A total of 19.2 million, 20-pound boxes of cherries had been shipped as of July 17, surpassing a May 25 five-state forecast of 18.3 million.

Harvest is done in Idaho and Utah and will wrap up in Washington, Oregon and Montana by Aug. 10 at probably just less than 20 million boxes, making it the fourth largest in history, said B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers, the industry promotional arm in Yakima.

Washington typically produces 80 to 85 percent of the crop. High-elevation cherries on Stemilt Hill, south of Wenatchee, and above Hood River, Ore., are usually the last to be picked.

Hot weather in early June and several rains reduced the crop by about 1 million boxes, but overall the season has been relatively good weather-wise, Thurlby said. Late Bing had great quality and Skeena were "possibly the best I've ever eaten," he said.

There were some "pretty severe losses" to rain, said Roger Pepperl, marketing director of Stemilt Growers LLC in Wenatchee, the nation's largest sweet cherry grower.

It was one of the better years on fruit size, quality and flavor with quality being real nice if "fruit was let ripen as we did at Stemilt," Pepperl said.

The greatest difficulties were from heat in April causing a flash bloom, which compressed the harvest of different varieties and kept prices low in the middle of the season, hurting grower returns, he said.

A lot of volume was shipped in late June through middle July from varieties that were two to three weeks earlier than normal, he said.

"We did the best to hold prices up for our grow-



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Guadalupe Gonzalez packs cherries at Blue Bird Inc.'s new Wenatchee, Wash., plant on July 13. The Pacific Northwest cherry harvest will close out a good season in a few weeks at nearly 20 million boxes.

ers, but it's hard when people (competitors) lower their prices," Pepperl said.

Labor is more expensive, which puts a lot of pressure on price, he said. It's tough for growers to make money on \$1.99 per pound retail prices, he said.

Domestic promotions reached more than 20,000 stores the week ending July 16 and prices averaged \$2.60 per pound, Thurlby said.

Labor was tight in orchards and packing sheds, Pepperl said.

Labor was shortest early in the season and some growers in Prosser didn't pick because they had no pickers, Thurlby said.

Some fruit that would have gone fresh market was late and went to processors for ice cream and yogurt for less return, he said.

Labor was "painfully tight" in the first half of the season through June 25 but improved when school was

out in California, freeing pickers to come north, he said. Packing sheds needed more workers when they added night shifts, he said.

Records were set of 700,000 boxes harvested in May and 12.3 million in June. The season tied last year for 14 million boxes shipped by the Fourth of July.

The holiday typically brings high volume sales. From start to finish, the season is seeing the best demand in the past five years, he said.

Peak harvest was 651,000 boxes on June 27. There were a total of seven days of more than 500,000 boxes per day spread over a window of 19 days. Daily volume is now dropping below 200,000.

Exports are running a little better than normal at 32 percent, Thurlby said. The big ones are China at 1.4 million boxes, South Korea at 980,000 and Taiwan at 450,000.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The packaging side of Blue Bird Inc.'s new 42-lane cherry line in Wenatchee, Wash., July 13. It replaces lines destroyed by wildfire a year ago.

Biochar conference explores its use in forestry, agriculture

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

The status and future of biochar is the subject of a four-day conference in August.

The conference, titled "The Synergy of Science and Industry: Biochar's Connection to Ecology, Soil, Food and Energy," happens Aug. 22-25 at Oregon State University in Corvallis. Registration costs \$375 for the full conference; \$250 for students and nonprofits; \$150 for one-day attendance.

Biochar is essentially charcoal produced by a pyrolysis process of heating biomass in a low-oxygen environment. The biomass fuel can include such things as logging slash or field straw, which is why it draws interest from the timber and ag industries.

Researchers and industry advocates say biochar has multiple uses in agriculture and forestry. It can provide a quick fix to depleted soil by reducing acidity, retaining moisture and storing carbon. Conference Chair Tom Miles, founder of T.R. Miles Technical Consultants Inc., in Portland, said it's already used by vineyards in drought-stricken California.

In Japan, biochar develops the strong root systems needed to transplant rice. Commer-

Online
 More conference information, including schedule and registration details: <http://usbi2016.org>
 Additional information is available through the Northwest Biochar Working Group: <http://nwbiochar.org>



Biochar made from bluegrass screenings is shown in this photo. An upcoming conference will focus on research involving the substance.

cial cannabis growers favor biochar for the same reason, Miles said.

In Eastern Oregon, OSU dryland cropping agronomist Stephen Machado is in the third year of researching biochar's use on Columbia Basin wheat and pea crops.

One application of biochar continues to produce a "nice response" in test plots, Machado said.

Wheat yields increased 20 to 33 percent and pea yields increased at a similar rate, Machado said. Soil pH also improved.

"I'm a true believer," Machado said.

He cautioned that not all biochar products are the same, however. The chemistry of the biomass material used to make biochar and the chemistry of the soil on which it will be applied must be considered, he said.

Miles, the conference chair, said biochar increasingly is used in bioswales to filter stormwater or to capture pollutants, and has been shown to remove phospho-

rous from dairy manure.

Research is progressing on multiple fronts, and entrepreneurs are jumping into biochar production.

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