

Idaho contract ag labor licenses up

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — As unemployment rates have dropped, the Idaho Department of Labor has issued more licenses to agricultural contract labor providers, according to agency records.

Linda Castaneda, IDOL's state farm labor contractor coordinator, said the state has issued 66 farm labor contractor licenses this year, compared with 45 licenses in 2012.

The cost to apply for a license is \$250, and it must be renewed annually. Furthermore, operations with more than 21 employees must carry a \$30,000 bond, and the smaller providers must be bonded at \$10,000.

Castaneda explained the bonds protect farmers from having to pay contract workers if a provider were to flee the area without paying.

"It takes the monkey off the back of the farmer or the employer and puts it on the farm labor contractor," Castaneda said, adding the farm labor contractor bears the burden of carrying workman's compensation insurance and cutting individual checks to workers, upon receiving a single payment from a grower.

Contract crews also save growers time in finding seasonal labor, with workers now in great demand. Idaho's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for July was 3.8 percent, up a tenth of a percent from the prior month. The national unemployment rate was 4.9 percent.

"It's tight to come across harvest workers," Castaneda said.

Agricultural contract labor has grown in Idaho despite the loss of one of the industry's primary in-state niches — hoeing sugar beets. American Falls grower Kamren Koopman said his farm used to hire contract labor crews during beet season, but modern beet varieties have been genetically engineered to withstand applications of glyphosate herbicide. Though Koopman still finds his own labor, more contract providers have been stopping by the farm lately to offer their services.

Robert Corral, owner of Corral Ag Labor in Nampa, provides services to about 20 farms ranging in size from 400 acres to larger than 5,000 acres. His crews provide services such as picking fruit and detasseling corn, and often they furnish a farmer's entire labor force.

Corral said his business, started by his father, has experienced steady growth. Though a tight labor market has increased demand for his services, Corral said it has also made his own recruiting more challenging, particularly given that he's now competing for labor with a healthier construction sector and with Oregon, which has a higher minimum wage.

Ann McGregor, owner of ProPeople Staffing in Boise, has a pool of about 40 agricultural laborers, who mostly work in agricultural warehouses or fields for Nampa-area seed companies.

"The supply of employees is difficult right now, and to get people to go into the field is difficult now," McGregor said. "They keep telling us the economy is not as robust and doing as well as it should be, but here in Idaho, there appears to be quite a few jobs and less people."

McGregor said it's especially hard to fill agricultural jobs because the work is unpleasant.

"The reason (agricultural employers) are asking us for more people is because they can't find them on their own," McGregor said.

Newhouse may join Trump ag committee

Representative would be only PNW member of panel

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse may become the lone Pacific Northwest voice on the agricultural advisory committee of Republican Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

Three Californians are already on it.

The Trump campaign on Aug. 16 released a list of more than 60 people on its ag committee chaired by Charles W. Herbster, owner of Herbster Angus Farms near Falls City, Neb., and owner of an agriculture and animal health products company.

The committee includes 10 former and current governors,



Rep. Dan Newhouse

members of Congress, farmers, ranchers and heads of agricultural trade associations.

The identities of everyone on the committee were not readily clear, but it appeared there was no one on the list from the PNW.

Washington state Sen. Don Benton, R-Vancouver, director of Trump's Washing-

ton campaign and coordinator for the campaign in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska and Hawaii, said there was no intention to slight the Northwest.

Advisory committees are added to as they go, he said, adding he's gained campaign approval to add Newhouse and just needs approval from the Republican congressman, who serves Washington's 4th District and is a Sunnyside farmer. Newhouse is on the House Agriculture Committee and is former director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

"The folks on the committee are top notch but it wouldn't hurt to have someone from the PNW on grain exports and other issues somewhat unique to us," Benton said.

Newhouse campaign manager, Sean O'Brien, said Newhouse hasn't heard anything

from the Trump campaign and that the congressman supports "the Republican nominee."

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., was on Mitt Romney's committee in 2012 but is not on Trump's. Her campaign manager, Jeff McCrea, said the congresswoman supports "the Republican nominee" and would consider serving if asked.

State Sen. Mark Schoesler, a Ritzville, Wash., wheat farmer and majority leader of the state Senate, said he's voting for Trump and would serve on the committee if asked.

People may have reservations about Trump, "but there are not many Hillary fans out there," he said, speaking of Eastern Washington.

Heather Hansen, executive director of Washington Friends of Farms & Forests, said the farm labor shortage and trade are important to Washing-

ton and it would be good for Trump to hear a PNW perspective on those issues.

Barry Bushue, president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, had no comment when asked why no one from the PNW is on the committee and if he supports Trump. Bushue said he's had no contact with the Trump campaign and that his time is taken up with other things.

Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, did not respond to a call for comment.

Tom Nassif, president and CEO of Western Growers in Irvine, Calif.; A.G. Kawamura, former California agriculture secretary; and John Kautz, CEO of Ironstone Vineyards north of Sonora, Calif., are on the committee. Nassif and Kawamura served on Romney's agriculture committee.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington House Agriculture Committee members and staff walk through a field during a tour June 14 of Whatcom County farms. The Army Corps of Engineers proposes to convert 800 acres of prime farmland in the county into fish habitat, a loss of cropland the agency calls "insignificant," but one that farm groups say the county can ill afford.

Army Corps downplays value of prime farmland in Washington

Farm groups fret losing land base

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Army Corps of Engineers proposes to convert about 800 acres of prime farmland in Whatcom County to fish habitat, a loss of cropland the agency calls "insignificant," but that farm groups say could threaten agriculture's long-term survival in the state's northwestern corner.

"We just can't continue to see farmland erode," Whatcom Conservation District Executive Director George Boggs said.

"Agriculture needs a land base and also the supporting industries. If there aren't enough farms, those services won't be available," he said. "Things will start to fall like dominoes."

Government agencies have spent years reviewing

hundreds of sites for the state-federal Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project. The corps has narrowed the project to converting 2,100 acres in Jefferson, Skagit and Whatcom counties into fish habitat, mainly by removing dikes.

The largest project would breach dikes along the Nooksack and Lummi rivers in Whatcom County. The \$260 million project would expose 1,800 acres to tides and rivers, including the 800 acres characterized by the corps as prime farmland.

According to a recently released report by the corps, "impacts would be minor and insignificant ... the loss of crop production would likely be absorbed by other nearby farms."

Boggs said the corps' dismissal of the land's importance to agriculture was "callous."

"You can't just pack up and go somewhere else.

That's wrong," he said. "This why people get angry at government, because they don't consider the real impact."

The conservation district and the now-disbanded Whatcom Farm Friends urged the corps in 2014 to offset the loss of farmland by purchasing land rights elsewhere to ensure the county maintains at least 100,000 acres in farm production.

The county had 115,000 agricultural acres, according to the 2012 federal farm census. Many of those acres are eligible to be developed, Boggs said.

The corps' report acknowledged that some local governments have adopted ordinances to stop the loss of farmland, but concluded those policies aren't intended to stop fish projects.

"The spirit of 'no net loss of farmlands' is to prevent development," the corps asserted. "This loss (of farmland) is often a necessity of ecosystem restoration."

Drought, labor costs concern table olive growers in down year

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Drought is still a concern for California table olive growers, whose production in 2016 is expected to come in about 17 percent lower than last year's bumper crop.

This year's table olive crop statewide is expected to come in at 65,000 tons, about 57,000 of which are the Manzanillo variety and 7,000 of which are Sevillanos, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Such a crop would be below the 78,000 tons produced in 2015, which was an "on" year for the alternate-bearing trees.

The winter rains that eased drought conditions throughout the state were only a marginal help to olive



grows, who are also experiencing varying crop yields as well as labor shortages, NASS reported.

"We're down a little bit from last year, but it's not a short crop per se," said Adin Hester, president of the Visa-

lia-based Olive Growers Council of California. "It'll be pretty close to fulfilling the needs of the processors, I think."

The harvest of table olives is expected to begin just after Labor Day and continue through October, Hester said.

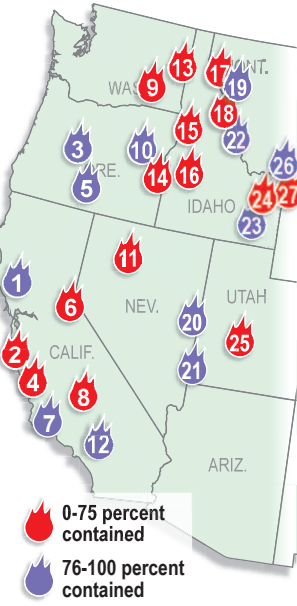
Though they naturally fluctuate somewhat, table olive yields have seen wild ups and downs in the last decade, peaking at a record 170,000 tons in 2010 but coming in below 40,000 tons four times since 2006, according to NASS.

Last year's crop was more than double the size of the 2014 yield of 37,120 tons as freezes and a lack of water diminished production two years ago, the agency reported.

Large Western U.S. wildfires*

(As of Aug. 23)

Fire	Size (Acres)	Percent contained
1. Clayton	3,929	96
2. Soberanes	86,294	60
3. 0501NW Sheridan	191	80
4. Chimney	33,173	35
5. Withers	3,424	90
6. Mokelumne	147	0
7. Rey	27,096	30
8. Cedar	20,148	5
9. Kahlolus	20,000	19
10. Rail	31,127	40
11. Rock Hill	1,766	72
12. Blue Cut	36,274	96
13. Spokane Com.	3,750	0
14. Cherry Rd.	32,000	60
15. Gun Club	2,084	63
16. Pioneer	96,469	47
17. Copper King	12,500	30
18. Moose	3,000	0
19. R. Horse Gulch	4,580	96
20. Strawberry	4,657	100
21. Motoqua	307	100
22. Stein	104	100
23. Toponce Ck.	265	90
24. Henry's Ck.	10,000	15
25. Sand Ledges	3,022	0
26. Boundary	192	85
27. Berry	5,300	0



Fire	Size (Acres)	Percent contained
0-75 percent contained		
76-100 percent contained		

*100 acres or more occurring in timber; 300 acres or more in grass/sage.

Sources: activefiremaps.fs.fed.us; incivweb.org

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Changing weather doesn't help firefighters

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Changing weather conditions will likely bring little relief to firefighters as they battle wildfires across the West.

Lower temperatures are a positive sign, said Jeanne Klein, information officer for Northwest Team 7, which is fighting the Hart Road Fire near Davenport, Wash.

"With the cold front, though, does come the wind," she said. "That's more potentially impacting than the cooler temperatures. Higher winds — that could cause fire size to increase."

Ronda Bishop, public information officer for Great Basin Incident Management Team 7, said she expects erratic winds on the Henry's Creek Fire near Idaho Falls, Idaho.

"They are expecting a cold front to come in, which will change the wind direction, but then we're supposed to get back to being hotter and drier by the weekend."

Which doesn't help fight fires, she said. "Especially with the gusty winds."

Wildfires have burned more than 429,000 acres across the West as of Wednesday, including major blazes in Idaho, California, Oregon and Washington state.

The largest single blaze is the Pioneer Fire in the Boise National Forest, burning nearly 102,000 acres. The exact amount of ranch land burned or threatened isn't known, but ranching, commercial timber and public land are impacted.

Following is a regional wildfire update according to the multi-agency InciWeb website:

- The Soberanes Fire in the Los Padres National Forest in Southern California has burned nearly 89,000 acres.
- The Rey Fire has burned more than 31,000 acres in the same national forest.
- The Blue Cut Fire has burned roughly 36,000 acres in the San Bernardino National Forest, also in Southern California.
- The Cedar Fire has burned nearly 23,000 acres in the Se-

quoia National Forest, also in California.

- The Henry's Creek Fire, 7 miles southeast of Idaho Falls, Idaho, has burned more than 43,000 acres. The cause is believed to be human and is under investigation.

Some agriculture and sage grouse habitat are in the affected area, Bishop said.

- The 35,000-acre Cherry Road Fire has burned brush and grass 16 miles west of Homedale, Idaho, near Lake Owyhee in Oregon. It is being fought by the Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management.

- The Rail Fire has burned more than 32,000 acres west of Unity, Ore. Fuels include mixed conifers and insect-killed lodge pole pines. The total burned area includes 26,610 acres on the Wallowa-Whitman Natural Forest, 3,650 acres on Malheur National Forest and 13 acres of private land.

- Total acreage estimates for the Kahlolus Fire in southeastern Washington state dropped from 22,000 acres to nearly 5,500 acres, according to the Washington State Patrol. Field agents estimate it is 95 percent contained.

- The Hart Road Fire, 9 miles north of Davenport, Wash., has burned 4,200 acres. The cause is still under investigation.

"There are some agricultural areas impacted by the fire," Klein said.

- The Yale Road Fire north of Spangle, Wash., has burned roughly 3,500 acres. The cause is under investigation.

- The Maple Fire has burned more than 27,000 acres in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. It was first reported Aug. 8. Lightning caused the fire.

The national park is managing the fire, allowing it to play its natural role in the ecosystem to the greatest extent possible while protecting at-risk values and special locations, such as natural and cultural resources, said Barbara Dougan, public information officer. The fire is part of the 32,000-acre Tatanka Fire Complex burning within the park.