

# Levy considered to fund Ada conservation easements

## Backers say money could save farmland in Idaho's Treasure Valley

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — People interested in staving off the rapid loss of farm ground in parts of Idaho's Treasure Valley are mulling the idea of asking local voters to approve a farmland preservation levy.

The money would be used to offer farmers money in exchange for placing an easement on their property that preserves it as farmland.

This would give growers who are being offered significant money from developers an option to voluntarily save their farmland for future generations, said Boise farmer Josie Erskine, who manages the Ada Soil and Water Conservation District.

The idea is in its infancy and the district's board has not committed to it, Erskine said.

"But we are committed to creating solutions and we think this is one of the best solutions," she said.

Erskine said the money could make it so "farmers would not have to sell their land to developers for their retirement. They could put an easement on it and get paid for that easement" while renting it out to other farmers.

er farmers.

Some areas of the country have created agricultural zones where no development is allowed but that likely won't fly in Idaho, where private property rights are a major issue, Erskine said.

"Zoning might not be an option for us right now but a voluntary (easement) program might be an option," she said.

Erskine said she and other district board members are alarmed at the rapid loss of farmland in Ada County. According to the SWCD, Ada County had 244,218 acres of farmland in 1974 but only 144,000 now.

Ada County farmer Glen Edwards, chairman of the SWCD's

board of supervisors, said he faces the same dilemma as a lot of other growers in the valley. He's been offered good money for his farm ground.

"We have people trying to buy some of our ground here all of the time," he said. "It's a hard choice. A guy can't farm forever. But if we were to get some kind of levy going and it paid me enough to retire on ... I can sure rent it out. That's where I would go if I had that option."

County voters recently passed a clean water levy as well as an open space levy. How much more important is saving farmland, asks Susan Medlin, treasurer of the Treasure Valley Food Coalition, which next

month begins a year-long effort to explore options for preserving farmland in southwestern Idaho.

"It's wonderful to bike but it's cooler to eat," she said.

County Farm Bureau President Don Sonke said the issue of balancing the need to preserve farmland with a farmers' right to sell his land to whomever he chooses is a tough one and he's yet to hear a reasonable solution.

"I'd be interested in hearing what they have to say," Sonke said about any proposals to preserve farmland. "But the conversation has been going on and on for years (and) I've never seen what I think is a good solution."

# Executive: Portland container shipping faces broad challenges

## Turmoil among ocean carriers is disruptive beyond labor disputes

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

SALEM — Labor disputes are often blamed for discontinued ocean container shipping at Port of Portland's "Terminal 6," but the facility faces broader problems, a port executive said.

Even if conflicts between the port, the terminal operator and the longshoremen's union were resolved, turmoil in the global shipping industry would affect the facility, said Keith Leavitt, the port's chief commercial officer.

"There's no one silver bullet here," Leavitt said during a Sept. 22 hearing before the Oregon House Interim Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Ocean carriers ordered gigantic "megaships" nearly a decade ago that can carry a huge number of containers with the idea of improving efficiency, he said.

Now that the vessels have come online, though, there's not enough cargo to justify the investment, Leavitt said.

"They are not filling those vessels because the demand for space on those vessels is not keeping up with capacity," he said.

As a result, the price of freight on those ships has dropped so low that shipping companies aren't able to cover their debts, which recently caused the bankruptcy of Hanjin, a South Korean company that long serviced the Port of Portland before stopping service last year, he said.

Because ports are afraid of not getting paid for loading and unloading containers from Hanjin ships, that's left a lot of cargo stranded across the globe, including Northwest farm goods, Leavitt said.

Leavitt said he expects the shipping industry's problems will be sorted out over the next several years, but even then, Port of Portland's Terminal 6 will face some headwinds.

The new "megaships" carry up to 25,000, 20-foot-long containers, but the Port of Portland can only handle ships that carry 7,000 containers, he said.

"The megaships are just not going to be calling on the Columbia River," Leavitt told



Capital Press File

A container ship is loaded at the Port of Portland in this file photo. Ocean carrier service at the Terminal 6 facility has since stopped. The port's ocean container terminal faces broader problems than a labor dispute that effectively discontinued container shipping at the facility last year, according to a port official.

the committee.

However, it's difficult to imagine that Pacific Ocean shipping will be reduced to megaships traveling between large ports in Hong Kong and Los Angeles, he said.

Terminal 6 should be able to attract some vessels, but the facility's niche is likely to be more "surgical" than it was in the past, he said.

"We're a niche port, we always have been," Leavitt said.

Shelly Boshart Davis, whose family owns farming and trucking operations, agreed that the resumption of activity at Terminal 6 "wouldn't fix everything," but it would help Oregon agriculture remain competitive.

Baled straw was, by volume, the largest Oregon export commodity to depend on containerized shipping from the port, said Boshart Davis. Even so, less than 40 percent of the state's straw volume passed through that facility.

When productivity at West Coast ports severely declined during labor contract negotiations between longshoremen and port operators in late 2014, straw that would have been exported to Asia backed up in Oregon, she said.

That higher inventory, in turn, depressed prices for growers, Boshart Davis said.

Shipping complications have also affected the Christmas tree industry, particularly in export destinations like the Philippines, where retailers expect to display trees by mid-November, said Gayla Hansen of Kirk International, which exports trees.

The more time Christmas trees spend on the dock, the

less profit there is for exporters, she said. "There is no one to call to help you. You're on your own. There's no hotline."

The lack of container shipping at the port indirectly affects the nursery industry, because fewer trucks are available, said Leigh Geschwill, president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

"Not having a fully functional port reduces the number of trucks willing to come," she said.

# USDA approves genetically modified Fuji apple

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

SUMMERLAND, B.C. — A third non-browning, genetically modified apple has been approved by the USDA.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of USDA has granted deregulated status to the Arctic Fuji developed by Okanagan Specialty Fruits of Summerland, B.C.

The Fuji joins the Arctic Golden and Arctic Granny Smith varieties as deregulated and deemed as safe and nutritious as conventional apples by APHIS.

"The response to Arctic Fuji apples and our overall platform to deliver direct benefits to consumers has been encouraging," said Neal Carter, Okanagan Specialty Fruits founder and president.

"We are confident the positive feedback we have received will translate to the marketplace," he said.

The company's Arctic apples have been changed through a reduction of the enzyme polyphenol oxidase, the primary cause of browning in fruit. It reduces browning when the apples are sliced, bitten or bruised without using flavor-altering chemical additives that the fresh-sliced apple industry uses.

In August, Carter said about 1,000 to 1,200, 40-pound boxes of Arctic Golden will be sliced and sold in test marketing in grocery



Courtesy of Okanagan Specialty Fruits

The non-browning genetically modified Arctic Fuji, developed by Okanagan Specialty Fruits of Summerland, B.C., has been approved for production and sales in the U.S. by the USDA.

stores in the western U.S. this fall.

Retailers, food service and quick-serve restaurants all have expressed interest in the apples and Okanagan Specialty Fruits will grow, process and market the apples, focusing on packaging and sales of sliced apples, he said.

This fall's test marketing will help determine packaging and pricing, he said. The

apples will be labeled as genetically modified in the nutritional information area of packaging when regulations require it, he said.

The company is counting on a mix of its own orchards and contract growers to grow the fruit in the Northwest, along the East Coast and in Canada.

The company will seek approval of an Arctic Gala next year, hoping for approval in 2017 or 2018.

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