

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Starting as a teen, Efren Loeza has grown into a mainstay of Oregon's Willamette Valley Vineyards' operation

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

GASTON, Ore. — Efren Loeza takes his time with this first one, the first grape vine in the new vineyard. He lowers it into the hole his crew augured into the sloping hillside.

Squatting in the red dirt, brow furrowed in concentration, he steadies the slender vine with his left hand and brushes the soil back into the planting hole with his right, careful to pack around the bare roots so they will take hold and grow.

"I don't have words to explain how I feel, and my family feels, to have a vineyard with our name."

— Efren Loeza

ning to thin and a voice from Mexico.

He hesitates to describe his emotions on this day. This is a new planting for Willamette Valley Vineyards, 45 acres of Pinot gris and 10 of Pinot noir. The company decided to name it Loeza Vineyard, to honor him and his extended family for their decades of hard work and competence.

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Because if anything, Efren Loeza knows about putting down roots and growing.

He stands and allows himself a slight smile. He's a compact, courteous man, 54, with pale eyes, black hair that is beginning to retain the soft accent of

Efren Loeza, vineyard manager for Oregon's Willamette Valley Vineyards, crossed the border from Mexico illegally when he was 17. He later became a U.S. citizen and advanced up the career ladder. To honor his 37-year career, the company named its newest vineyard after him.

Photo by Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Illustration by EO Media Group



Weak La Nina may help ease drought

Climatologist: Even normal winter seems cold now

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Federal climatologists predict that dry conditions will generally recede over the winter in Oregon, Idaho, Washington and parts of Northern California, providing an early and upbeat outlook on next year's water supply.

The Climate Prediction Center forecast a 70 percent chance of a weak La Nina, a cooling of the ocean around the equator.

La Nina generally tilts the odds in favor of wetter and cooler winters in the northern U.S., according to the center.

It's not a sure bet, though. La Nina's influence will vary by region. The odds it stays through the winter are 55 percent.

Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond said he expects the La Nina to be too feeble to dictate the weather.

Higher ocean temperatures in the northeast Pacific Ocean and a trend toward warmer winters also may influence the weather, he said.

Still, even a normal winter would seem cold after the past several years, Bond said.

"There's no indication that we'll have a snowpack like

the disaster we had two years ago," he said. "There's no reason to be pessimistic about next summer's water supply."

Idaho State Climatologist Russell Qualls also said La Nina's influence may be blunted by unusually high inland temperatures. Still, most of the state is expected to have above-average precipitation, and snow may accumulate at high elevations, he said.

"The signals are a bit confusing in terms of the water supply outlook," he said. "From what it looks like, the drought at least is likely not going to be getting any worse."

The center issued the forecast for November, December and January.

It also projected that drought conditions likely will be erased by the end of

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Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A cow grazes in a wet field Oct. 21 in southwestern Washington. A year ago, the entire state was in drought. Now only 8 percent of Washington is even "abnormally dry." The Climate Prediction Center issued a seasonal outlook Oct. 20 that says the odds favor a wet winter in most of the state.

Deal possible in Oregon Clean Water Act lawsuit

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A settlement appears possible in a federal lawsuit against an Oregon farmer accused of violating the Clean Water Act by stabilizing a riverbank.

Earlier this year, the federal government filed a complaint alleging that farmer Bill Case of Albany, Ore., discharged pollutants by placing large rocks within the high water mark of the North Santiam River.

Case claims the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers allowed him to stabilize the bank with riprap rock to prevent floods from washing out roughly 50 acres of his field.

The bank stabilization has actually reduced pollution in the river by preventing erosion, according to Case.

While the corps said a Clean Water Act permit wasn't needed, the U.S.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Farmer Bill Case of Albany, Ore., speaks about riverbank stabilization work he's conducted on the North Santiam River, which he claims prevents erosion. The federal government is suing him for alleged Clean Water Act violations.

Environmental Protection Agency believes such a permit was required, he said.

The EPA's lawsuit seeks up to \$37,500 in fines per day for the alleged violations — which it claims stretch back to 2009 — as well as returning the riverbank to its original condition.

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