

Washington

Breaching dams would 'devastate' wheat industry, growers say

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

With the federal government seeking public comment on the Columbia-Snake river system, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers has reaffirmed its opposition to breaching dams on the Snake River.

"It would be devastating to the industry," said executive director Michelle Hennings.

Removing the dams would mean the river would not be useful for transporting wheat, Hennings said.

"It is vital that we keep our transportation system intact," she said.

According to WAWG, the river system is the top wheat export gateway in the United States and the third-largest grain export gateway in the world.

To move the same amount of wheat by road or rail would require 137,000 semi-trucks or 23,900 railcars, increasing fuel consumption, emissions and wear-and-tear on roads and railways.

"Do we really want to put more trucks on the road?" Hennings said. "We don't want to do that. This is one way to alleviate that, if we want to have clean air."

Roughly \$3 billion of commercial cargo moves on the river system, giving growers in the Midwest access to international markets.

Zirkle buying Wanapum Village

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

BEVERLY, Wash. — One of the largest tree fruit companies in Washington state, Zirkle Fruit Co., of Selah, is buying Wanapum Village from Grant County Public Utility District for \$4 million.

PUD commissioners approved the sale Oct. 25, pending approval of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which is likely by the end of November, said Chuck Allen, PUD spokesman.

Mark Zirkle, president of Zirkle Fruit Co., declined comment on the company's plans for the village, but Mattawa-area orchardists believe



Wanapum Village, north of Beverly, Wash., is being sold by the Grant County Public Utility District to Zirkle Fruit Co., possibly for use as farmworker housing.

it will be used for farmworker housing. Wanapum Village consisted of a school and em-

ployee housing built in 1960 when the Wanapum and Priest Rapids dams were under construction, Allen said.

It is north of the town of Beverly, about a mile south of the Wanapum Dam and consists of 75 acres, 30 vacant single-family homes and a 17,600-square-foot former school that was used as an office building, Allen said. It includes a water system but the sewer system is not on the property so the new owner will have to build a new one, he said.

The office housed engineers for the dam but the PUD built a new office for them closer to the dam and decided

to sell the village last January, Allen said.

The property was listed for sale in June, and four offers were received. After negotiations the PUD accepted Zirkle's offer, an Oct. 5 PUD memorandum states.

Zirkle Fruit Co. owns orchards around much of Central Washington.

The company hired 2,889 H-2A visa foreign guestworkers in 2015, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Employers who hire H-2A workers are required to provide housing.

Zirkle said he expects to hire about the same number of H-2A workers next year or slightly more.

Farm bill safety net a top priority for new WAWG president

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Improving the next farm bill in Congress is a top priority for the new leader of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

Congressional farm bill discussions are expected to begin with hearings as early as March, and farmers want to relay what's working and what's not, Ben Adams said.

"Obviously, at \$4 (per bushel) wheat, there's big holes in the safety net," Adams said. "It is well below the cost of production."

During the last sign-up for crop insurance, farmers concerned about crop losses bought the Agriculture Risk Coverage, while farmers worried about price — then above \$5 per bushel — chose Price Loss Coverage.

"I always thought there should be a third option:



Ben Adams, new Washington Association of Wheat Growers president, says the organization's focus will be on the new farm bill.

Whatever results in the highest payment, because as a farmer you're worried about both crop loss and price," Adams said.

Adams said farmers would like to see an option that al-

lows them to switch between coverages.

As president Adams will serve a one-year term. He re-

places Kevin Klein of Edwall.

In the state, the organization will seek legislative support for Washington State University's plant science and animal health buildings and for maintaining tax preferences for farmers.

Adams farms roughly 11,000 acres near Coulee City in Douglas County. He has 70 acres of irrigated ground, he said.

Adams is a fourth-generation farmer and a certified public accountant. He said he's made a point of serving in various leadership positions on local grower groups off and on since the early 1990s.

The idea is "to serve something greater than oneself, whether church or farm groups," he said.

WSDA seeks money to help small farms

Program popular, but not always funded

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes to roughly double state spending on helping small farms succeed, a program that's been popular with lawmakers but has received uneven funding.

WSDA has submitted the two-year, \$500,000 funding request to the governor's budget office. If approved by Gov. Jay Inslee and the 2017 Legislature, the expenditure would fortify WSDA's efforts to help fledgling farms leap through regulatory hoops to reach their potential customers.

"We help farmers get ready for the markets they already know they want to get into," said Laura Raymond, head of WSDA's Regional Markets, a combination of farm-to-school and small farm marketing programs.

"It is possible for a farm to be successful by selling to their local markets," she said.

Lawmakers created the small farm marketing program in 2001 to promote "localized food production systems."

The program's goals included providing consumers with opportunities to support local farmers and "understand farm operations."

The state farm-to-school program was created in 2008 to feed schoolchildren more fresh fruits and vegetables.

The programs are based on popular ideas: local food, healthy kids, saving farmland and helping new farmers.

"I don't think you'll find opposition to those kind of ideas," WSDA policy assistant Steve Fuller said. "These programs really focus on helping developing farmers get to the next level of success."

Faced with a budget hole in 2013, however, lawmakers eliminated funding. Some funding, about \$130,000 a year, was restored in 2015.



Pe Ell School District assistant cook Holly Woodward cuts carrots from Boistfort Valley Farm in Lewis County, Wash. The southwest Washington school district buys vegetables and fruits from area farmers.

All along, WSDA has relied heavily on grants, including from the USDA, to keep the programs going.

The proposed two-year, \$500,000 expenditure would be the state's biggest investment in the program yet. It is WSDA's largest request this year for new funding from general taxes.

If state spending on the program increased, WSDA would still seek grants, Raymond said. But more state money would stabilize funding and give WSDA more flexibility in helping farmers, she said. For example, the program has received USDA grants to promote specialty crops. That leaves

out livestock and dairy, she said.

To help farmers, WSDA holds training sessions, organizes farm tours and introduces farmers to potential customers, such as schools, restaurants, colleges and hospitals.

The program also publishes a handbook for small-scale farmers on business strategies and government regulations. The bulk of the book is about complying with food-handling rules and licensing requirements.

"All kinds of people want to get into farming," Raymond said. "There is a lot of information to learn."



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