Capital Press
The West's Ag Weekly

KEEPING THE PEACE

How neighbors can avoid costly legal battles to resolve their differences

Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Marti Dane, executive director of the Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center in Hood River., Ore., which administers the USDA's Certified Agricultural Mediation Program in Oregon.

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Neighbors in the rural West find plenty of things to disagree about.

Differing views on appropriate land uses are a common source of clashes, whether the conflicts pertain to straw-compressing facilities or the use of inflatable bouncy castles to entertain youthful visitors.

Trespass is another common source of friction, be it roaming cattle or floodwaters.

Even high-profile legal and legislative battles that impact farm policy and grab headlines often begin as simple disputes between neighbors. In some cases, conflicts reach the highest levels of the court system, setting important legal precedents for others but saddling both parties involved with massive legal bills.

Less visibly, disagreements can fester for years at the local level, with neighbors engaged in a prolonged battle that poisons their relationship.

Biggest problem

"I think it's the biggest problem for rural property owners," said Dave Hunnicutt, executive director of the Oregonians in Action property rights nonprofit group.

Hunnicutt said most of the phone calls he receives about property right disputes relate to neighbors butting heads.

Turn to DISPUTES, Page 12

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Gary Linkous, an attorney and mediator in Welches, Ore., who works with the USDA's Certified Agricultural Mediation Program.

AG FINANCE
Loans, accountants, financial planners
PAGES 15-16

U.S. farm income continues to shrink

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

This year's net income for U.S. farms is expected to be down 17.2 percent compared to 2015, driven by a sizable decline in cash receipts for livestock and animal products.

It's shaping up to be the third straight year of decline in the value of the ag sector, said USDA economist James Williamson during a webinar on the latest farm financial forecast on Wednesday.

At $66.9 billion, net farm income is expected to fall to its lowest level since 2009, he said.

While cash crop receipts are up marginally, due largely to an increase in soybean receipts, livestock overall is down 12 percent, he said.

"All the major livestock categories are seeing declines, led by cattle and calves," he said.

U.S. farm financial indicators, 2016

(Billions of dollars, 2016 forecasted)

Item	2015	2016	% change 2015-16
Crop receipts	$186.5	$186.5	—
Animals/products receipts	189.8	166.4	-12.3%
Government program payments	10.8	12.9	19.1
Farm-related income*	34.4	31.8	-7.6
Non-money income**	17.8	18.7	5.5
Total gross income	439.7	416.5	-5.3
Total expenses	358.8	349.6	-2.6
Net farm income	80.9	66.9	-17.2

*Custom work, machine hire, forest product sales, other.
**Value of home consumption of farm products and imputed rental value of dwellings.

Source: USDA ERS Capital Press graphic

Livestock receipts are expected to fall $23.4 billion, with cattle and calf receipts declining $11.6 billion — almost 15 percent compared to last year and down more than 18 percent from 2014.

Dairy receipts are forecast to be down $1.8 billion, a 3.6 percent decline from last year and a decline of more than 31 percent from 2014.

Production expenses are forecast to be down $9.2 billion, or 2.6 percent, following an 8.1 percent decline in 2015, partly offsetting the decline in cash receipts.

The reduction in 2016 is the second largest year-over-year decline since 2009, behind the $31.7 billion reduction in 2015.

Turn to INCOME, Page 12

Adoption of biotech alfalfa lags other GMO crops

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Capital Press file photo

A USDA study has found that farmers have been slower to adopt genetically engineered alfalfa than other GMO crops.

Adoption of genetically engineered alfalfa among farmers has lagged behind other biotech crops, with the vast majority of U.S. acreage remaining conventional, according to USDA.

Only about 13.5 percent of harvested U.S. alfalfa acreage is genetically modified, compared to more than 90 percent of corn, soybeans, cotton, canola and sugar beets acres, according to a new USDA report that cites 2013 farmer surveys.

It appears likely the percentage of genetically engineered alfalfa will continue rising, though: Roughly one-third of newly seeded acreage planted that year was of a biotech variety resistant to glyphosate herbicides, USDA said.

Farmers have been slower to adopt genetically engineered alfalfa partly because it's a perennial crop that stays in the ground for roughly five years, said Dan Putnam, an alfalfa extension specialist at the University of California-Davis.

Turn to GMO, Page 12

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