

# Oregon

## Pendleton ag station funding back on chopping block

### President's budget calls for program termination

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
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PENDLETON, Ore. — For the second consecutive year, the Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center is at risk of losing nearly half its annual funding from the federal government.

Once again, the president's 2017 budget calls for terminating one of two research programs at the station, which would cut \$901,000 and eliminate three scientist positions.

The Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center operates under the Agricultural Research Service, the primary research arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The facility is located on Tubbs Ranch Road north of Pendleton, and shares a building



Courtesy U.S. Department of Agriculture  
The Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center near Pendleton, Ore. President Obama's 2017 budget calls for terminating one of two research programs at the station, which would cut \$901,000 and eliminate three scientist positions.

with the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center — though they are two separate programs.

Experiments conducted at the station provide data to improve farming practices for dryland crops, especially winter wheat, which accounts for

more than \$436 million and 2,600 local jobs throughout the Columbia Basin, according to Oregon State University.

Yet the president's budget would ax research programs at Pendleton looking into tillage methods that conserve moisture and reduce soil erosion,

in order to shift money to what have been identified as higher priorities within the Agricultural Research Service. The same cutbacks were proposed in 2016, before growers and Oregon congressional leaders successfully lobbied to keep the station's funding intact.

Dan Long, station director, said there's been no appropriation yet for 2017, though in the meantime the center has been asked to curtail its spending by 50 percent.

"It could very well be a repeat of last year, where we remain intact again," Long said.

If not, significant budget cuts are in line at both Pendleton and the Agricultural Research Station in Corvallis. The president's budget for the ARS calls for diverting more than \$13 million from ongoing research across the country to fund higher priority environmental stewardship projects, such as adapting crops to climate change.

Soil scientists Steward Wuest and Hero Gollany, as well as hydrologist John Williams, would all be affected by cuts at the Pendleton station, though Long said all three would be given different jobs within the agency.

Nathan Rea, of H.T. Rea Farming Corporation in Mil-

ton-Freewater, serves as chairman of the liaison committee for the ARS station. He said the committee is reaching out to Oregon congressional delegates, including Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden, Jeff Merkley and Republican Rep. Greg Walden, all of whom backed fully funding the station a year ago.

In addition, Rea said they are working directly with scientists at the station to promote the work they do, and benefit to area farmers.

"Telling that story is where we need to do a better job at the national level, and with local growers as well," Rea said.

Speaking from experience, Rea said growers have benefited from the station's research into reduced-till farming, with an emphasis on soil water retention and improving efficiency.

"There's a lot more direct seeding, and minimum tillage," Rea said. "We're entering a new world with our precision agriculture."

## PROUD TO SUPPORT Members & Families of 4-H

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From left to right are SciBorgs Team 4061 members Nicole Coyle, McKenzie Perringer, Sara Moore and Elisabeth Fittschen. They were in the winning alliance at a recent F.I.R.S.T. robotics competition.

## WHITMAN COUNTY 4-H EMBRACES STEM EDUCATION

Many people associate 4-H with clean, country living and youths raising animals.

This is true in the Washington State University Extension Whitman County 4-H Youth Development Program; however, this county program also puts an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and math through a partnership with FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology).

Youth ages 9-14 engage in FIRST Lego League using a Lego Mindstorm kit. With this challenge, they design and build a robot to complete themed initiatives on a mat and receive points for successfully negotiating the initiatives.

After aging out of FLL, many youths then advance to FRC, FIRST Robotics Challenge, and build a 120-pound robot to compete in a game built on a teamwork and sports model.

In Whitman County, the 4-H Palouse Area Robotics Team (PART), a.k.a. the SciBorgs, represents five high schools in the Palouse Area: Colfax, Colton, Garfield-Palouse, Moscow and Pullman high schools. The wide variety of school backgrounds and diversity within the team is one of their biggest strengths.

This powerful 4-H science program shapes the future career interests of regional students in areas such as engineering, programming, electronics, agriculture, business, design and marketing.

The team takes part in the FIRST international program every year. In just six weeks, the teams build, program and test robots with the guidance of adult mentors. They also build leadership and encourage professionalism and skills throughout the

competition season and beyond. FIRST has two sayings that the team lives by: "gracious professionalism" and "coopertition."

In mid-November, the SciBorgs Team 4061 participated in the first annual Robot Rewind, hosted by fellow Washington FRC Team CHUCK in Spokane Valley. This off-season event featuring last season's FRC game and robots was a wonderful opportunity to give new members a taste of the excitement of the robotics competitions.

Fortunately, the team brought two robots: their competition robot named K.E.V.I.N. and their practice robot K.E.V.I.N. 2.0. With both robots at the competition, the SciBorgs were able to rotate drive team members so everyone could compete who wanted to try.

Despite software and mechanical challenges along the way, the girls on the team drove K.E.V.I.N. and were able to come out on top in the winning alliance for the day.

Normally the girls are integral parts of the team in different ways. Nicole Coyle is on the business sub-team. McKenzie Perringer is on the electrical and software sub-teams, Sara Moore is on the electrical subteam and is the team's safety captain and pit mom and Elisabeth Fittschen is on the software sub-team.

The 4-H PART is excited to begin its sixth season as a FIRST robotics competition team. They will join more than 3,400 teams of high school students around the world in playing next year's FIRST Steamworks game. The adventure will begin on Saturday, Jan. 7, when the game and rules are revealed and the kits of parts are distributed.

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