

Washington



Courtesy of Automated Ag Systems
A Melon Wrangler is used to assist workers picking watermelons. The machine can make the job three times more efficient, the manufacturer says.

Melon Wrangler makes World Ag Expo Top 10

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MOSES LAKE, Wash. — The Melon Wrangler, a harvest assist machine for melons and other vine-grown produce, has been chosen as one of the Top 10 innovations for display at the World Ag Expo in Tulare, Calif., Feb. 14-16.

The machine is built by Automated Ag Systems of Moses Lake, one of the largest manufacturers of mobile agricultural machines in the Pacific Northwest.

“It’s an honor. We’re a little fish in a big pond. This opens doors,” said J.J. Dagorret, company owner. He views California as a good market and said he has sold four there in the past two years and two each in Oregon and Washington for \$100,000 apiece.

The Melon Wrangler doesn’t pick melons but is an adjustable-speed conveyor system that increases harvest efficiencies of melons, pumpkins, tomatoes, cucumbers, egg plant, bell peppers and squash.

It eliminates the toss-and-catch of melons by workers or picking of smaller produce into buckets.

“One machine can do what it takes three hand crews with no assist to do (in watermelons). Capacity is one ton per minute on water-

melon and a little slower on cantaloupe,” he said.

Honda 24-horsepower gasoline engines power 20-foot conveyors that span several rows on either side of a flatbed truck or trailer, towed by tractor, where the main frame of the machine is mounted. The conveyors are removable for transport.

Similar conveyors are used in harvesting lettuce but they are one side only and self-propelled, making them more expensive, Dagorret said.

Automated Ag Systems placed in the Top 10 at the 2014 World Ag Expo with its Bandit Xpress, a platform harvest assist for picking apples and other tree fruit.

Inslee ties carbon tax to irrigation project funding

Senate GOP leaders criticize budget plan

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has offered his suggestion for funding irrigation and other water projects — a carbon tax.

A two-year spending plan presented this week by Inslee includes a tax on power plants and importers of natural gas or petroleum. The governor’s office projects raising \$1.9 billion the first year.

Inslee, who has made climate change a signature issue, proposes putting about \$1 billion into education.

Other revenue from the new tax would fund renewable energy projects and carbon-cutting programs, such as providing incentives to drive electric cars.

Some \$250 million would go for irrigation, flood control and preventing storm-water pollution. Lawmakers have been looking for a way to finance billions of dollars worth of water projects, including measures to guard against drought in the agriculture-rich Yakima Valley.

Inslee’s carbon-tax proposal is similar to a statewide initiative that failed in November.

I-732, however, would have cut other taxes, leading some groups that favor taxing fossil fuels to oppose the measure.

According to the governor’s office, Inslee’s new proposal would encourage alternatives to fossil fuels



Don Jenkins/Capital Press
Washington Gov. Jay Inslee talks about his 2017-19 budget proposal Dec. 14 in Olympia. Inslee proposes a carbon tax, with some of the added revenue paying for irrigation and other water projects.

while raising money for education and other uses.

Previous legislatures have rebuffed Inslee on taxing carbon. The chairman of the Senate budget committee, Centralia Republican John Braun, issued a statement Wednesday calling the tax “unpopular with voters.”

Senate Republicans also criticized Inslee for proposing a \$46.8 billion operating budget — 21 percent more than the two-budget that expires June 30. Inslee’s spending plan relies on \$4.39 billion in new taxes, including a 7.9 percent cap-

ital gains tax on the sale of stocks and bonds.

“His plan threatens the stability of Washington’s economy and would undermine families,” Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, said in a written statement.

The governor also advocated ending some tax exemptions, including one that deducts the trade-in value of used farm equipment when calculating sales tax on new equipment. The deduction also applies to vehicles and other goods.

Inslee said Wednesday at a press conference that it was morally and constitutionally impossible to meet the state’s obligations without new taxes.

“It’s just a fiscal fact,” he said.

Inslee said he was hopeful Republicans will entertain his proposals, noting that both parties are working under an order from the state Supreme Court to increase education spending.

“They’re all in the soup together,” Inslee said.

Although unable to convince lawmakers to tax carbon, Inslee claimed the authority to cap carbon with a rule finalized in September by the Department of Ecology. The Washington Farm Bureau and other groups are suing to overturn the cap.

Under Inslee’s tax proposal, a \$25 per ton fee on carbon would take effect May 1, 2018. The tax would increase annually by 3.5 percent, plus inflation.

The 2017 Legislature convenes Jan. 9.

McMorris Rodgers: Invite ‘came out of the blue’

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers said she never received an offer to become U.S. Secretary of the Interior from President-elect Donald Trump despite reports that she was the front-runner for the job.

McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., said Vice President-elect Mike Pence called her “out of the blue” the Friday before Thanksgiving, asking her to meet with Trump. Several meetings covered various topics, including issues involving the Interior Department.

“Last Thursday, I was on the floor for votes, members were congratulating me and I just kept reinforcing with them that I haven’t been asked to do anything,” she said in an interview Dec. 16. The congratulations were premature.

“That’s ultimately the president-elect’s decision to make,” McMorris Rodgers told the Capital Press.

Asked if she would consider secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any other jobs in Trump’s cabinet, McMorris Rodgers said she hasn’t been contacted further.

Idaho Gov. Butch Otter is said to be among the front-runners for the USDA job.

The Wall Street Journal re-



Capital Press File

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers was a front-runner for Secretary of the Interior under President-elect Donald Trump. Rep. Ryan Zinke of Montana was ultimately selected.

ported Dec. 16 that McMorris Rodgers was a front-runner until the president-elect’s son, Donald Trump Jr., suggested Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke. Trump appointed Zinke to the Interior position, his transition team confirmed.

McMorris Rodgers said she’d let the article speak for itself.

“I walked away energized more than ever that he’s a man of action,” she said of her meeting with the next president. “This is somebody who is really challenging us to rethink the way these agencies are structured, the way the federal government functions and to focus on working men and

women in this country. (He) is going to improve opportunities and grow our economy.”

McMorris Rodgers called Zinke “a great choice” and welcomed a fellow Westerner in the job.

“Clearly this is an agency that has a huge impact on our way of life and our economy in Eastern Washington,” she said. “Rep. Zinke being from Montana and a Navy SEAL — I think it’s the perfect mix of perspective and leadership that is needed in a position as large as the Interior secretary.”

McMorris Rodgers said she will continue to work on Interior matters, including those involving the Columbia River, Indian affairs and better forest management.

“I am concerned that so often when the federal government purchases land or owns land, they put up barriers to access, whether it is for outdoor recreation, grazing or any kind of activity,” she said. “I’m going to continue to be very active in a way that is going to ensure these agencies are responding to the people of Eastern Washington.”

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- Ag Policy Update - Washington Policy Center
- Hydropower Update

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