

# Return of Argentine lemons upsets citrus growers

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

California and Arizona citrus growers are chafing over a USDA decision to reopen U.S. ports to lemons from Argentina after a 15-year ban because of disease and pest concerns.

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service on Dec. 20 announced it will accept lemons from northwest Argentina — the nation's main citrus growing region — if they meet certain conditions, including registration and monitoring of farms and packinghouses and assurances that places of production are pest-free.

The decision isn't sitting

well with groups such as California Citrus Mutual and the U.S. Citrus Science Council, which urged officials to scrap the proposal during meetings in Washington, D.C., earlier last year.

The volume of lemons grown in California and Arizona is 497,350 metric tons annually valued at \$647 million, according to USDA.

Lemons from Mexico and Chile currently dominate the U.S. import market, shipping an average 46,376 metric tons annually, according to USDA.

Richard Pidduck, a citrus grower who chairs the Santa Paula, Calif.-based science council, said the risk is unacceptable considering that

the California citrus industry is already fighting the Asian citrus psyllid and the deadly tree disease huanglongbing.

"We're being invaded by new species almost every year," Pidduck told the Capital Press. "The USDA does not have a very good track record of protecting against these offshore pests and diseases, so it's disconcerting that they're planning to open the door even wider."

Publishing the final rule was the first of several steps that must be completed before Argentina can begin shipping lemons, USDA spokeswoman Suzanne Bond said.

The APHIS and Argentina's National Plant Protection

Organization, known by the initials SENASA for its name in Spanish, must now finalize a work plan that details the conditions Argentina must meet for every U.S.-bound shipment, she said.

Additionally, SENASA will have to collect and APHIS will need to verify six months of fruit fly data. APHIS must also verify that packinghouses have met the safeguarding requirements written in the plan, Bond said.

"Until these steps are completed, APHIS will not issue import permits for Argentine lemons," she said in an email.

In a news release, APHIS said it has reviewed Argentina's citrus production and packing practices and has

made site visits there in 2007, 2015 and in September to inspect production.

Among the USDA's conditions for entry are that Argentine grove sanitation, monitoring and pest control practices are in place; that packing areas are treated with a surface disinfectant; a lot identification method is in place; and that inspections for pest quarantines are handled by SENASA, according to the USDA's website.

Argentine lemons have been blocked from U.S. entry since 2001 because of concerns about two plant diseases — citrus variegated chlorosis and citrus greening, the Reuters news service said.

Their re-entry comes as

California is strengthening its quarantine for the Asian citrus psyllid, which can carry the tree-killing disease huanglongbing, which is also known as citrus greening. The disease has devastated the citrus industry in the Southeastern U.S.

Industry leaders also argue they'll become less competitive as cheaper offshore fruit is allowed to "steal shelf space" as their costs increase.

USDA officials counter that economic impacts to American producers will be minimal because Argentina's production season is opposite that of the U.S. and its lemons would help the U.S. meet the peak summer demand for the fruit, according to an analysis.

## Registration opens for oilseed workshops

### Farmers to discuss forming canola grower association

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Registration is open for Washington state oilseed workshops slated for Jan. 26 in Hartline, Jan. 31 in Ritzville and Feb. 2 in Clarkston.

Karen Sowers, oilseed cropping systems research associate at Washington State University Extension, said the workshops will cover a range of rainfall zones and cropping systems.

"This is pretty much the only opportunity to attend a workshop this specific toward canola, mustard and other oilseeds," she said.

The program is designed for both expert oilseed growers and those just trying the crop for the first time. Oilseeds are still new for many farmers, Sowers said.

"Canola is not your father's wheat," she said. "It does take more management, it does take a little more time."

Sowers said she's heard from farmers that raising canola improved their abilities as a farmer because they spend more time in their fields.

Last year, Washington growers grew roughly 33,000 acres of canola. Sowers expects that number to increase.

"It feels like the momentum is here, between poor or low cereal commodity prices and problems like falling number or weed control issues in a cereal crop that can be controlled by a broadleaf crop like canola and mustard," she said. "It's kind of opened people's eyes a little more to what could be out there."

Sessions include what to scout for in a field and signs of chemical drift, pests and diseases. Sowers said discussions will be encouraged.

She recommends new oilseed farmers consider their herbicide histories in the soil for several years back. Herbicide residual-tolerant varieties of winter and spring canola are available, she said.

Speakers from Oregon's Willamette Valley and Oklahoma will also discuss the formation of a Pacific Northwest canola growers' association. The Willamette Valley already has an organization.

"We're the only canola-growing region in the country that does not have an association," Sowers said.

A meeting Feb. 1 will further discuss a new organization, Sowers said.

Registration is \$20. Sowers expects 100 people at each session.

"People will go home with resources in their hands," she said.

Online

<http://css.wsu.edu/biofuels/>

# New Chelan Fruit plant saves on labor

By **DAN WHEAT**  
Capital Press

CHELAN, Wash. — A year after it started, Chelan Fruit Cooperative is wrapping up construction of an \$85 million rebuild of its main apple packing plant destroyed by wildfire in 2015.

It's the largest single construction investment in the town's history, says Reggie Collins, the co-op's general manager.

"I don't think there is anything close. Not even the Wal-Mart store," he said.

Workers began putting in foundations last February. A 34,000-bin controlled atmosphere storage building was done by the end of June. Packing facilities were finished in the fall and the plant has been operating since Nov. 1. Administrative offices and the employee lunchroom and restrooms will be finished by the end of January.

It's 693,000 square feet of buildings. Some 50,000 cubic yards of concrete were poured. Electrical conduit runs 39 miles and electrical wiring 230 miles, Collins said. There are 20 sprinkler systems with eight miles of pipe and 3,850 sprinkler heads.

Lightning struck Chelan Butte within a few miles of the plant on Aug. 14, 2015. Wind swept fire into the east edge of town so fast that businesses and homes were lost. Chelan Fruit's Plant No. 1 was destroyed and Plant No. 2, right next door, was saved, partly by planes dumping fire retardant directly on it. Smoke and cosmetic damage were quickly cleaned and that plant continued operating.

Plant No. 1 could have been rebuilt as it was for \$65 million. That much was covered by insurance. But the co-op took a longterm loan for \$20 million to cover upgrades.

"We hope payments are covered by efficiencies and savings in operations from the upgrades so we don't have



Photos by Dan Wheat/Capital Press  
Guadalupe Hernandez grabs automatically bagged Gala apples from the new Chelan Fruit Cooperative packing line on Jan. 3.



Pre-sized and graded Gala apples await in water lanes for movement into bins for automated movement toward storage at Chelan Fruit Co-op's new plant, Jan. 3.

to increase packing charges," Collins said.

Big-ticket items include the latest optical apple sizer-sorters from MAF Industries of France on a pre-size line and New Zealand's Compac on one of two packing lines.

The Compac Spectrim takes up to 500 high-definition images of a single piece of fruit as it passes through the machine at a rate of 12 pieces per second, Compac states. The MAF Agrobotic operates similarly. Both sys-

tems analyze fruit externally and internally and sort for quality, size and color. They both can eliminate human defect sorting but people can be used if there's a special need like a lot of hail-damaged apples, Collins said.

A second packing line has human instead of additional high-tech sorting after the pre-sizer. It has the greatest versatility for different types of tray and bag packaging.

"We went with MAF on the front end based on handling. We think it's best on

fruit handling and Compac is best on color sorting," Collins said.

He said he knows of no other fruit packer using two different sizer-sorter manufacturers but views it as an ultimate double-check for maximum consistency in quality.

Fruit enters the system from orchards at harvest or later from storage and is sorted and sized on the MAF pre-size line. It goes back in storage in bins and is brought out as needed for packing on the Compac line.

"So say we pre-size some fruit and two weeks later pack it and some bitter pit shows up. We have Compac Spectrim on the back end to sort that out. In the past, it was all done by hand," Collins said.

The high-tech sizer-sorters, greater automation of bin handling at the dump station and on the pre-size line and robotic palletizing of packed fruit save about 20 percent on labor when running two shifts of 175 people, Collins said. Even with that savings, Chelan Fruit has been short 80 to 100 people this fall and is short 60 right now, he said.

The plant runs 80 to 90 bins per hour or 1,200 bins per day with two, eight-hour shifts, the same as the old plant, he said.

Along with Plant No. 2 and packing plants at Beebe and Pateros, Chelan Fruit can run about 3,000 bins of apples per day. The co-op packs about 7 million boxes of apples and pears annually and 1.5 million boxes of cherries. Administrative and packing employment totals 800 people most of the year and reaches 1,100 to 1,200 during cherry harvest.

The new CA storage at Plant No. 1 is built so that an Automated Storage and Retrieval System (ASRS) can be added in the future, but right now the cost would not be made up by the six out of eight forklift operator positions it saves, Collins said.

ASRS uses robotic cranes and dollies and greater computerization of inventory to move fruit in and out of storage without humans, stacking it higher and at greater densities. Matson Fruit in Selah and some companies in California are using it and it is a coming trend, Collins said.

# Race to save rare breed of pigs hinges on eating them

By **PATRICK WHITTLE**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON, Maine — Susan Frank and her dogs spend their days shepherding hairy, black pigs with names like Bacon, Pork Chop and Yummy around a chunk of Maine woods. Her farm, which raises and fattens the rare American mulefoot hogs for slaughter, is essential to their survival, she believes.

Frank's mulefoots are representative of a breed that was once the rarest of all U.S. livestock, according to some agricultural censuses, and remains critically rare, the Livestock Conservancy says. There are fewer than 500 registered, purebred, breeding mulefoots in the country (they are even more uncommon elsewhere), and Frank's Dogpatch Farm accounts for a dozen of them, along with some 170 others, some of which are cross-breeds.

The way to save declining breeds of livestock, she argues, is to get people to eat them — thereby increas-



Robert F. Bukaty/Associated Press

Susan Frank pets one of her mulefoot pigs at Dogpatch Farm in Washington, Maine. The American mulefoot hog was once the rarest of all U.S. livestock breeds, and they are still listed as critically rare by the Livestock Conservancy. There are fewer than 500 registered, purebred, breeding mulefoots.

ing demand that will lead to more breeding. She wants the mulefoot restored to its early 20th-century status as a premier pig.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is listening. The agency is giving her \$50,000 to help increase interest in

products made with mulefoot meat, and Frank is spreading her gospel to chefs, restaurants and markets around New England and New York.

"I know it sounds weird, but you have to eat a rare breed to help it come back," she said. "I see it as a way to

spread the word about mulefoot."

The mulefoot is named for its non-cloven hoof, and was the subject of a vibrant industry including some 200 herds a century ago. But its tendency for slow growth and small litters reduced its appeal for industrial pig farming, and the mulefoot was down to just one significant herd in Missouri a decade ago, when a slow drive to save the breed began.

Frank got into the business in 2012 after acquiring her first three purebreds. The pigs were popular with small farmers and homesteaders because of their hardiness and high yields of meat and lard, said Darlene Goehringer, a mulefoot farmer in Hurlock, Maryland.

"If nobody wants them for pork, who would keep them?" Goehringer said. "This isn't like raising a parrot."

The drive to save the mulefoot is motivated in part by the importance of preserving genetic stock, said Jeannette Beranger, a programs director

with the Livestock Conservancy. Mulefoots, like other old breeds of livestock, are genetic storehouses that can't be replicated if they become extinct, she said.

"Even though we're not going to feed the world with mulefoot hogs, the reason you want to keep them around is because they might have qualities that might not be present in other commercial hogs," Beranger said.

Frank's farm has 20 acres of fenced-in birch, beech and hornbeam trees where the hogs roam free, noshing on feed pellets and the occasional apple or pumpkin. She wants to organize a food festival based around mulefoot products, with some wineries and breweries.

Until then, she'll be raising her pigs and working to convince restaurants in food-crazy places like Portland, Boston and New York to use their meat.

"It's not just to make a living for me," she said. "It'll help the breed come back."