



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Workers tray pack Red Delicious apples on one of Chelan Fruit's new packing lines in Chelan, Wash., on Jan. 3. The line requires 20 percent fewer workers. New lines like this are common in Washington state and are being installed in Michigan and New York as packers modernize.

Michigan may best N.Y. as second-biggest apple producer

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

With its large crop this season, the Michigan apple industry set new shipment records from mid-October through Christmas and is claiming the title of second-largest apple producer from New York.

But others are saying, "not so fast," and that New York had a bad year and will regain its No. 2 spot.

"With 11.3 million total apple trees in commercial production on 35,500 acres, Michigan is the second-largest producer of apples in the United States and distributes apples to 27 states and 18 countries," the Michigan Apple Committee said in a Jan. 6 news release.

In August, the U.S. Apple Association forecast Michigan's total fresh and processing crop at 31 million 42-pound boxes, surpassing New York's 30 million but still far behind No. 1 Washington at 149 million. But those are only forecasts. End of apple year volumes won't be reported by USDA until next July.

Meanwhile, from start of harvest in August through Jan. 7, USDA shows Michigan sold 4.5 million, 40-pound boxes of apples compared with 3.8 million for New York and 51.8 million for Washington.

"This year our crop is definitely much higher than New York, but it's something we will flop back and forth on," Diane Smith, the Michigan Apple Committee executive director, told Capital Press.

Cynthia Haskins, new president of the New York Apple and Cherry Growers Association, declined comment.

But Mark Seetin, director of industry and regulatory affairs

at the U.S. Apple Association, said while Michigan may well surpass New York for the first time, it wouldn't have happened had Michigan not had a very good year and New York a bad one.

New York's crop was reduced by spring frost, cold weather during fruit set and a long summer drought, he said.

New York has the capacity to be running 33 million to 34 million-box crops, Seetin said.

New York's five-year USDA average is 28.5 million boxes. Michigan's is 20.8 million. However, Michigan's was skewed downward more than New York's by a crop wiped out in 2012 by an early spring warm-up followed by a freeze.

Both states have been increasing new, high-density plantings and shifting to more fresh market sales away from processing because of the 30 percent or more price advantage, Seetin said.

Desmond O'Rourke, a consultant and retired Washington State University agriculture economics professor, said Michigan beating New York is an anomaly.

While Michigan and New York are both modernizing and developing new varieties, New York has probably the strongest regional marketing association, has the huge New York market on its doorstep and can better exploit the "buy local" movement.

SnapDragon and RubyFrost are new Cornell University varieties exclusive to New York growers, he said. Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania are in league with some Washington companies on new varieties and all will become tougher competitors for Washington in their home regions, he said.

Researchers find jointed goatgrass resistant to Beyond herbicide

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Jointed goatgrass resistant to Beyond herbicide has been found in Eastern Washington, according to researchers.

BASF's Clearfield technology allows farmers to use imidazolinone herbicides, marketed under the Beyond trade name, to combat weeds such as jointed goatgrass.

The jointed goatgrass found is resistant to imazamox, the active ingredient in Beyond.

The resistant biotype — a group of genetically identical plants within a species — is 144 times more resistant than other goatgrass plants, according to Washington State University researchers. To see even a little response in the resistant plants, researchers had to use six times the labeled use-rate of Beyond.

"It's definitely of concern, because there's only one herbicide that controls jointed goatgrass," said Ian Burke, an associate professor of weed science at WSU. "It's a big deal because we grow a lot of seed wheat. It can't have any jointed goatgrass in there. If this were to become widespread, we would have some real problems."

The resistant plants were found on one farm, Burke said. The problem occurred in a dry-

land wheat producing area in the intermediate rainfall zone. He declined to identify the farmer or give a specific location.

Burke believes his research team will be able to kill all the resistant plants, but he said other resistant plants could appear.

"We don't know if this particular biotype might have spread. We don't think so," he said. "We know there's widespread use of Beyond in the region for jointed goatgrass management."

It's just as likely that another biotype could have developed resistance, Burke said.

The resistance developed because of the repeated use of Beyond, he said.

"I don't want to suggest that the grower disobeyed (BASF stewardship guidelines), but just because of the rotation he was in, it was the ideal conditions to set it up for failure," he said.

In a statement, BASF said it supports the university's research to preserve the long-term benefits of the Clearfield wheat production system.

"Wheat producers are asked to help protect and prolong the usefulness of these technologies and requirements highlighted in the Clearfield stewardship guidelines to help prevent the onset of herbicide resistance in weeds," BASF stated.

Port of Portland subsidy question kicked to Oregon Supreme Court

Northwest farm exports affected by dispute

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Questions about the legality of a Port of Portland subsidy for ocean carriers have been kicked to the Oregon Supreme Court by a federal appeals court.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that the financial system used to manage the subsidy program isn't clearly legal under current Oregon case law.

"We are hesitant to expand Oregon law in a manner that may be contrary to Oregon's wishes and in an important subject matter in Oregon's history," the ruling said.

At issue is a Port of Portland program that paid ocean carriers to stop at its beleaguered Terminal 6 container terminal, offsetting the carriers' costs



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

A container stacker operated by a longshoreman works at the Port of Portland's container terminal in this file photo. The container terminal has stopped operating but the longshoremen's union still opposes a subsidy program that attracted ocean carriers to the facility.

of calling on the facility.

The port created the subsidy because of alleged work slowdowns by the longshoremen's union due to a labor dispute that discouraged ocean carriers from calling on Terminal 6.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union filed a lawsuit challenging the subsidy program for allegedly using taxpayer dollars for the benefit of private organiza-

tions, thereby violating Oregon's constitution.

Northwest agricultural exporters depended on the Portland container facility to ship crops to Asia, but ocean carriers stopped calling on Terminal 6 in 2015 due to low productivity — despite the subsidies.

Local agricultural exporters are now saddled with greater transportation costs, as they must truck goods to

Seattle-area ports, but the Port of Portland hopes to eventually restart Terminal 6.

The dispute over the subsidy is part of a broader legal war between the port, the longshoremen's union and terminal operator ICTSI that's seen as hindering the resumption of container service.

The Port of Portland argues the subsidy program is legal because the money is drawn from rent payments paid by ICTSI, not tax dollars.

The ILWU counters that the subsidy program is impermissible because the funds were commingled with tax money in a single bank account.

"The Port has demonstrated that, as a factual matter, its accounting and financial management systems adequately tracked, managed, and segregated the tax and non-tax revenues," the 9th Circuit said.

Even so, Oregon legal precedents are silent on whether such accounting methods are allowable, the 9th Circuit said.



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

Josue Arenas of Hermiston, Ore., sorts out rocks, grass and rotten potatoes as the tubers travel on a conveyor belt outside Hermiston in this file photo. The U.S. potato industry has taken exception to a diet that mimics what Stone Age people ate, and excludes potatoes and processed foods.

Potato industry targets Paleo diet

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

SALT LAKE CITY — The U.S. potato industry has taken umbrage to a popular dietary fad, which is based on the premise that humans ate healthier during the Stone Age than following the advent of agriculture.

The Paleolithic diet — coined by Colorado State University emeritus professor Loren Cordain — promotes foods that would have been available to hunter-gatherers more than 10,000 years ago — such as grass-fed meat, wild game, nuts, fruits and non-starchy vegetables.

In addition to processed foods and salt, the popular diet frowns upon some of the ma-

ajor commodities produced in the Northwest, including potatoes, cereals, dairy, sugar and legumes. Cordain reasons the foods weren't present during the Paleolithic Period, and humans, therefore, haven't adapted to eating them.

Cordain vows Paleo dieters achieve weight loss, reduced diabetes and diseases, increased energy, fewer allergies, better digestion and increased muscle. Critics counter that modern foods, developed over centuries of selective breeding, don't resemble Paleolithic foods. They also note the diet's conspicuous absence of Stone Age dietary staples — such as rats, mice, squirrels, stripped bark, insects and lizards — and question the wisdom of emulating an an-

cient people who typically died in their 30s.

The potato industry — still seeking to improve consumer perceptions affected by the low-carbohydrate Atkins diet craze — recently launched a campaign highlighting the importance of the spud's protein, vitamin C, potassium and carbohydrates to athletic performance.

"I think a lot of people are really getting tired of all of these really restrictive diets and are more interested in learning how to eat properly in a way they can work into their lifestyle, based on the basic ideas of moderation and good diversity," said John Toasperm, chief marketing officer at Potatoes USA.

The organization has been

publicizing a paper critical of the Paleo diet, published in the December issue of the American College of Sports Medicine's Health and Fitness Journal. The author, Katherine Beals, an associate professor in Utah State University's Department of Nutrition and Integrated Sociology, has consulted for Potatoes USA in the past, though her paper wasn't commissioned by the industry.

During the peak of the Atkins diet's popularity, Beals conducted a clinical study finding its benefits were short-lived, and weren't sustainable beyond a year. She has similar suspicions about the Paleo diet, and her recent paper found no scientific basis to support eating like a caveman.

Gov. Otter recommends \$10M for major ag research center

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — In his state of the state address Jan. 9, Gov. Butch Otter recommended providing \$10 million in state funds toward a proposed \$45 million livestock and agricultural research facility in Idaho's Magic Valley area.

That news was quickly applauded by supporters of the proposed facility, which is a University of Idaho initiative and would be called the Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment.

"We are extremely pleased that the governor recognized the value of this research facility," said Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Bob Naerebout.

Cutting-edge dairy research would be conducted at the facility, as well as research on nutrient and wastewater management, water conservation, food safety, food sci-

ence and manufacturing, soil health and fertility, and forage cropping and agronomy.

"It will be a substantial agricultural research facility and it will be an extremely valuable asset to the agricultural industry as well as ... the state as a whole," Naerebout said.

The plan is for the state, UI and the agricultural industry to each contribute \$15 million toward the facility.

Otter, a Republican rancher, told Capital Press later that he will also ask legislators to provide \$5 million next year only if UI and industry have come up with two-thirds of their share.

In a news release, UI officials said the center would conduct research on many important issues for the state's livestock, crop and food-processing industries.

Otter's proposed budget also includes \$400,000 to support state efforts to control wolves.

Lt. Gov. Brad Little, a Republican rancher, said that money is important to continue the state's wolf management efforts, especially in rural areas that have been heavily impacted since the predators were re-introduced in Idaho in 1994.

"I've been around them. They're the top of the food chain," said Little. "There are quite a few rural areas where you have to manage wolves. We have an obligation to help those guys out."

Otter's proposed fiscal year 2017 budget includes \$500,000 in ongoing funding for graduate student housing at UI's agricultural research and extension stations.

It also includes \$750,000 to help develop animal tracking software that the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Brand Board will use to electronically manage animal identification numbers and other data about livestock move-

ments into and out of the state.

Otter also recommends \$750,000 to continue Idaho's efforts to protect sage grouse and improve the bird's habitat.

The governor said he's optimistic that meaningful regulatory efforts can be accomplished under the new Trump administration "to keep such agencies as the EPA, the BLM, the Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in check."

He said he would not advocate that Idaho take control of federal land in the state.

He gave a shout-out to the eight volunteer Rangeland Fire Protection Associations in Idaho that have helped the state and BLM fight wildfires the past several years.

The RFPAs, which consist mostly of ranchers, offer "a first-attack capability that helps stop range fires before they devastate the landscape," Otter said.