

'Buck stops' with ag employer with it comes to pesticide safety

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Pesticide expert Kaci Buhl of Oregon State University said "the buck stops with the ag employer" when it comes to worker safety standards.

by Oregon farmers, but the changes tighten requirements for record keeping regarding

training, safety procedures and application history.

Buhl summarized the major changes:

- Annual mandatory farm-worker training. The previous requirement was every five years.

- More training regarding "take home" exposure, such as pesticide residue on work clothing.

- Children under 18 for the first time are prohibited from handling pesticides. The farmer's immediate family is excluded from the regulation.

- Additional clarity regarding "no entry" exclusion zones of zero, 25 and 100 feet from where pesticides were applied. Buhl reminded producers that exclusion zones travel with the equipment.

- Mandatory "no entry" signs and mandatory record keeping.

- Changes in protective equipment requirements to make them consistent with Department of Labor Standards. Workers wearing respirators must first be medically certified and must undergo a "fit" test to make sure the gear is working properly.

- Specific amounts of water per worker must be available at the work site for routine hand-washing and emergency eye flushing. Eye wash stations are required at pesticide mixing and loading sites.

Buhl said worker training is critical. Labor contractors who can supply crews that have been properly trained in handling pesticides will have an advantage. How-

ever, farmers are ultimately responsible for making sure workers follow safety rules.

"The buck stops with the ag employer," Buhl said.

Buhl spoke during the Jan. 24-26 Northwest Agricultural Show at the Portland Expo Center. The annual event typically includes a trade show and equipment displays combined with workshops on regulatory or production issues.

Pesticide use on farms is a flash point for some consumers and environmental activists. Buhl said the public is afraid of or unfamiliar with pesticides. "We have a job to do, to tell the story that they are not as toxic as people think," she said.

One producer in the audience complained that the safety gear required by pesti-

cide guidelines makes workers look like "astronauts" and gives the impression to passersby that the material is far more hazardous than it is.

A nursery owner in the audience asked about exclusion zones. Many operations, he said, have hedges around their property in part to contain pesticide drift. There might be unseen walkers or bicyclists on the other side who are within the exclusion zone. Buhl said part of a producer's "due diligence" would involve stopping spraying to take a look, posting flaggers on the other side of the hedge and similar methods.

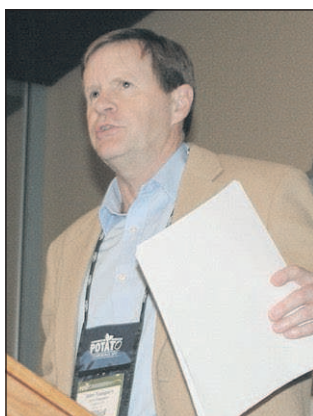
"Suspend, evaluate, ensure," she said.

Some of the EPA changes went into effect this year; the rest take effect in January 2018.

Potatoes show strength in exports and food service

Marketing organization promotes health benefits to active consumers

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

John Toasperm, chief marketing officer of Potatoes USA, provides an update on sales of U.S. potatoes Jan. 25 during the Washington-Oregon Potato Conference in Kennewick, Wash. Fries are the top side dish in food service, with other potatoes second, he said.

he said of food service.

Frozen potato sales in domestic food service began to grow again last year after several years of decline, Toasperm said.

One out of every three menus has a "loaded" fry product, including poutine and "tater tot nachos," another reason for the increase, Toasperm said.

Fries are the top side dish in food service, with other potatoes coming in second, Toasperm said. Even though they're the top two, he still sees room for growth.

"We certainly are the top of the mountain," he said. "Everybody's looking to knock us off."

In retail, more consumers are buying their food at the deli section of grocery stores. Potatoes need to expand into "new and different" dishes beyond mashed or potato salad, Toasperm said.

Potatoes USA aims to increase U.S. potato exports, market access and overseas consumption.

The organization is advertising potato benefits for athletes and will expand into other "active lifestyle" customers, promoting carbohydrates, potassium, protein and Vitamin C benefits in the U.S. and internationally.

"We see huge potential in being proactive in making people feel like they must eat potatoes, not that it's OK to eat potatoes," Toasperm said.

Online
<http://www.potatoesusa.com/>

KENNEWICK, Wash. — U.S. potato sales showed growth in the first quarter of the new marketing year, and the industry plans to promote the crop's nutritional benefits to more consumers.

The biggest challenge U.S. potato farmers face is the strong dollar, making their products more expensive compared to potatoes from competing sources such as Canada and Europe, said John Toasperm, chief marketing officer of Potatoes USA in Denver. He spoke at the Washington-Oregon Potato Conference in Kennewick, Wash.

Fresh potato sales are up 7 percent this year, Toasperm said. Roughly 20 percent of U.S. potatoes are exported, primarily in frozen and dehydrated forms.

In July through November of the current marketing year, compared to the same period in 2015:

- Dehydrated potato exports are down 19 percent, from 62,000 metric tons in 2015 to 50,000 metric tons in 2016, but signs of recovery began in November 2016, Toasperm said.

- Fresh potato exports were up 14 percent, from nearly 170,000 metric tons in 2015 to 194,000 metric tons last year.

- Frozen potato exports are up 3 percent, from 415,000 metric tons in 2015 to roughly 428,000 metric tons in 2016.

- Seed potato exports are up 6 percent, from roughly 3,900 metric tons to 4,100 metric tons.

In domestic markets, most potatoes were sold through food service channels.

The value of food consumers purchased through food services such as restaurants surpassed the value of food purchased through retail for the first time last year, Toasperm said.

"It is really growing, and potatoes are well positioned,"

Idaho FFA members descend on Capitol for Day on the Hill event

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Hundreds of Idaho FFA members from around Idaho, wearing their traditional blue jackets, met with legislators and farm industry leaders during the group's annual Cenarrusa Day on the Hill event.

"I loved seeing those blue jackets around the Capitol today," Lt. Gov. Brad Little, a Republican rancher and farmer from Emmett, told several hundred FFA members during a luncheon. "You're the future of the state of Idaho."

The event gives FFA members a chance to learn first-hand how public policy is developed and meet with leaders of the state's agricultural industry.

Little said one of the most crucial issues facing the state's economy is its talent pool. He said the skills FFA members acquire through the program are "critical for Idaho to be in the condition we need to be in. All of the things you learn are critical to our future."

The event is named after former Idaho Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, who died in 2013 and whose 51 years in the Legislature and executive branches of Idaho



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Members of the Idaho FFA's Rupert chapter were among the hundreds of FFA members from across the state who attended the annual Cenarrusa Day on the Hill event in Boise, which allows them to learn how public policy is developed and meet with ag industry leaders.

government made him the longest serving public servant in state history.

He started the first ag classes at Cambridge and Carey high schools and was a strong supporter of Idaho agriculture.

During the luncheon, Freda Cenarrusa, his wife of 66 years, announced that the proceeds from the sale of 22 acres of the family ranch would be used to support Idaho FFA.

She was one of three people who received honorary FFA memberships

during the luncheon.

Pete and Freda Cenarrusa "were a true partnership, working hand in hand on behalf of our great state and its agricultural industry," Idaho FFA Secretary Jenny Bautista said.

Sen. Jeff Siddoway, a Republican sheep rancher from Terreton, also received an honorary FFA membership for his lifelong support of Idaho agriculture and FFA.

"Sen. Siddoway has been active in promoting the Idaho livestock and crop industries, locally, statewide, nationally and

internationally," Bautista said.

Honorary FFA membership was also granted to former Rep. Gayle Batt, who during her time in the legislature provided crucial support for the Idaho Ag Education Initiative, which provided about \$2 million more in annual funding for secondary ag education, including FFA programs, in Idaho.

Batt, who was raised on her family's farm in Wilder, "has worked countless hours to protect the agriculture industry that she loves," Bautista said.

State attorney general pushes WAFLA probe after setback

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson is continuing an investigation of the farm labor association WAFLA even after a judge stopped his latest demand for information.

"We continue to believe it is appropriate for us to investigate WAFLA's conduct and are evaluating the most appropriate avenues to move forward," attorney general spokeswoman Brionna Aho said.

Phil Talmadge, the Seattle attorney representing WAFLA, told Capital Press the investigation "constitutes harassment" if it continues without any suggestion of violation of law. Talmadge is also a former state Supreme Court justice and former Democratic state senator.

Talmadge said Ferguson, a Democrat, is "very political" and his investigation of WAFLA was a "fishing expedition" spawned by labor unions and



Bob Ferguson

Phil Talmadge

legal services who don't like the H-2A visa foreign guest-worker program "because they think someone is waiting out there for the opportunity to pick apples."

The attorney general's office opened its investigation a year ago after the state Employment Security Department alleged WAFLA director Dan Fazio biased growers' answers to a 2015 wage survey, reducing what they otherwise may have reported for how much workers earned picking Granny Smith, Golden Delicious and Fuji apples.

The survey required employers to choose between reporting hourly wages or piece rates at the peak of harvest. Fazio warned growers that

choosing piece rates when labor demand is highest could artificially inflate prevailing wages for the next season. He recommended growers report hourly wages and told the ESD it should survey both. The U.S. Department of Labor can use the surveys in setting minimum H-2A wages.

Last January, the attorney general issued the first Civil Investigative Demand — known by the initials CID — in the case, requesting thousands of pages of WAFLA documents to investigate whether the organization violated state or federal laws regarding unfair business practices or restraint of trade.

WAFLA is a major supplier of H-2A guestworkers in Washington and Oregon.

Fazio said at WAFLA's Jan. 26 Workforce Summit that attorneys advised him to turn over all records. He turned over 122,000 pages of documents.

"I said I don't have a Hillary problem. Come get them," Fazio said.

WAFLA has spent more than \$300,000 on the case, he said.

In the meantime, ESD changed its fall 2016 survey to ask for both hourly and piece rates. Fazio then asked the attorney general to drop its investigation.

Instead, the attorney general issued a second CID.

WAFLA filed a petition in Douglas County Superior Court to have the second CID set aside as a violation of WAFLA's constitutional rights, including unreasonable search and seizure.

In October, the attorney general's office said it was investigating possible antitrust violations and that it was confident the court would affirm its authority to compel WAFLA to respond.

On Dec. 22, Douglas County Superior Court Judge John Hotchkiss set aside the CID, calling it "defective" for not identifying sections of law possibly violated by WAFLA.

College of Southern Idaho mulls trout farm purchase from state

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

JEROME, Idaho — The College of Southern Idaho is in discussions with the Idaho Water Board about purchasing the former Pristine Springs fish facility — positioning CSI for possible expansion of its aquaculture and agriculture programs.

Curtis Eaton, special assistant to the CSI president, explained the college's main campus in Twin Falls has a geothermal heating system. CSI's primary interest in making the deal is obtaining a geothermal well that comes with the property to prevent future

development of the hot-water aquifer, which would threaten the viability of the college's unique heating system.

Eaton said securing the 4.5 cubic-foot-per-second geothermal water right would also enable CSI to expand its heating system as the college grows. A dozen buildings at the Twin Falls campus use geothermal heat wholly or in part, Eaton said. Eaton said recent estimates place the cost of retrofitting CSI's heating system to a combination of electricity and gas at more than \$1 million, and the added energy cost compared with geothermal heat would be hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

Eaton said the college also sees a potential perk in using the raceways and a couple of hundred acres of irrigated farm land that come with the property to bolster its livestock, crop science and aquaculture programs. CSI raises trout and sturgeon and works closely on aquaculture with the University of Idaho, Eaton said.

"The college began with support from the agriculture community, and it continues to be a very important part of what CSI is," Eaton said.

Eaton said a riparian area and animal habitat would also be useful to CSI's environmental science program. The college is also mulling the possi-

bility of creating a public park at Pristine Springs, he said.

Plans to grow agricultural programs would have to wait until after the expiration of a long-term lease for fish production with Colorado-based Evaqua Farms. Evaqua, which bought the assets of SeaPac of Idaho on Jan. 1, has 17 years remaining on its lease, according to a manager with the company.

The state, the City of Twin Falls and groundwater districts jointly purchased Pristine Springs in 2008 to resolve a water call by Blue Lakes Trout Farm. IGWA paid about \$10 million for 10 cubic feet per second of spring

water. Twin Falls also received water, and the state spent about \$5 million to acquire the hatchery, geothermal well, farm land and buildings.

Though IGWA acquired the first-use water rights once held by the facility, Evaqua fattens fish with water that has already passed through upstream aquaculture facilities.

Idaho Department of Water Resources Planning Division Manager Brian Patton said the board signed a letter of intent to sell the property on Dec. 22. Patton said the most recent board appraisal placed the facility's value at \$3.6 million, compared to a \$2.7 million estimate from a CSI appraisal.