

Community rallies to care for sick cattle at E. Oregon ranch

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

HERMISTON, Ore. — Dressed in wool overalls and carrying a pitchfork, Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan looked more like a rancher than a lawman the morning of Jan. 25 as he paced the snow-covered pastures at Cedar Creek Cattle Co. near Hermiston.

Two weeks earlier, Rowan and deputies arrived at this property on Columbia Lane and South Edwards Road to discover more than a dozen dead cattle and 15 others so malnourished they couldn't be safely moved. Charges of animal neglect will likely be filed against the herd's owner, 55-year-old Michael Hockensmith, but in the meantime daily care of the animals has fallen to the sheriff's office.

On Jan. 25, officers recruited about 15 students from Blue Mountain Community College to help round up the cows for tagging and immunizations. A local veterinarian was also on hand to assess each animal's condition.

By day's end, Rowan said they processed 185 cattle with eight still to go. The death toll, which had been 14 animals, is now 17, including a two-year-old heifer found dead.

A necropsy determined the heifer, which was 7 1/2 months pregnant, had suffered from a bacterial disease and congestive heart failure.

"She had a rough life," said Brent Barton, a veterinarian with the Oregon Trail Vet-



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Blue Mountain Community College student Melanie Sederburg carries alfalfa over a fence to give to cattle that were confiscated by the Umatilla County Sheriff's department outside Hermiston, Ore.

erinary Clinic in Hermiston.

Upon investigation, Rowan said it appears the cattle were neglected over an extended period. There was no hay when officers first showed up weeks earlier, and water troughs had been allowed to freeze over with 6-8 inches of ice.

"We have some really malnourished animals we've been contending with," Rowan said.

Rowan said they expect to file multiple charges of first- and second-degree animal neglect against Hockensmith in the coming days. Jake Kamins, Oregon's deputy district attorney dedicated solely to animal cases, has been brought on as a special prosecutor.

Hockensmith has not re-

turned multiple calls by the EO Media Group for comment.

The sheriff's office has already spent several thousand dollars caring for the cattle, Rowan said. It also takes time and manpower to make sure the animals are properly fed, and to break through ice in the water troughs.

"It always stretches your resources," Rowan said. "At the same time, it's worthwhile. You hate to see the animals neglected."

Their goal Jan. 25 was to tag each of the cattle and give them much-needed vaccines, dewormer and a multi-mineral injection to boost their immune system.

To do that, students from

Matt Liscom's beef production class at BMCC joined the team to round up reluctant cattle and run them through the loading chutes.

From there, the animals were ushered one by one into a metal squeeze chute designed to hold them still, where Barton could perform his assessment. Some cattle thrashed, struggled and even fell down inside the contraption, getting themselves stuck in the process.

"They're not used to people handling them," Barton said. "Essentially, they're pretty tender creatures right now. They've already been through quite a cold spell."

Liscom, an agriculture science instructor at BMCC, said



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

A black Angus cow is held in a squeeze chute while undergoing a veterinary check at the ranch.

they were contacted by the sheriff's office last week to lend a hand, and he decided it would be a valuable educational opportunity for his beef production students.

"We had a lab day anyway, so it worked out well that we could help out the county as well as learn," Liscom said.

Liscom said the class was not there to pass any judgment, or to determine who is right and who is wrong in the case.

"We're just here to help care for these animals as best we can," he said.

When it comes to cattle care, providing enough food and water is critical to the animals' survival. Chris Schachtschneider, a professor of livestock and rangeland with Oregon State University Extension, said a cow needs to eat at least 2.5 percent of its body weight in dry feed every day.

Otherwise, Schachtschnei-

der said the animals lose their fat reserves and the body essentially begins to eat away at muscles and other internal organs. Once that happens, it can be hard to reverse.

"If they're too far down that road, successful recovery is very unlikely," he said.

This year's unusually intense winter has caused some issues for local ranchers, Schachtschneider said, especially for those cows that have already begun calving. Schachtschneider said he's seen instances where ranchers are bringing calves inside and using hairdryers to keep them warm.

But as long as the animals have good feed and good water, Schachtschneider said they tend to withstand cold fairly well.

"The animals are really resilient to (the weather) if they have proper nutrition," he said.

Oregon Nursery Hall of Fame adds six new members

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Six new members will be added to the Oregon Nurseries Hall of Fame when industry members gather for a reception and dinner Feb. 22 in Wilsonville.

Named to the Hall of Fame this year were:

- Jack Bigej, second-generation owner of Al's Garden Center. After taking over for his father, Al, Bigej expanded the business into four growing facilities and three retail stores, with a fourth store upcoming. He served as Oregon Association of Nurseries president in 1993 and was made an OAN honorary life member in 2004. His son, Mark, is OAN president this year.

- Dick Joyce, owner of Joyce Farms, noted for his long service to the industry. He was OAN president in 1983 and was made an honorary life member in 2003.

- Ray Klupenger, owner of Klupenger Nursery. He joined the family business in 1959, served as association president in 1972 and was one of the founders of the OAN's annual Farwest Trade Show. His father, Joe Klupenger, was part of the first Hall of Fame group inducted in 1991.

- The late Bruce Usrey, who worked with Monrovia for nearly five decades and was president and CEO. He managed the company's expansion, which included adding a growing facility in Dayton. Usrey died in 2015.

- The late Glenn and Viola Walters. They learned the business at George Teufel's holly farm, then established Glenn Walters Nursery in 1948. It became one of the most influential nurseries in Oregon, according to OAN. Glenn Walter died in 2010; Viola died in 2015.

The industry established its hall of fame in 1991; it now has 45 members.

The induction banquet begins at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 22, at the Holiday Inn in Wilsonville. Tickets are \$80 a person or \$640 for a table of eight, and include appetizers, a drink ticket, dinner and wine. Tickets can be bought online at www.oan.org.

Panel OKs higher payout for deer, elk damage

Property loss would be covered, too

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Lawmakers are considering legislation to double the maximum payout for crops lost to deer and elk and also compensate farmers for damage by the ungulates to fences and irrigation systems.

Instead of \$10,000, a Washington farmer could receive up to \$20,000 a year under a program administered by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

House Bill 1399 also would raise the damage threshold for filing a claim to \$1,500 from \$1,000.

Farmers who have worked with WDFW to prevent damage by deer and elk are eligible to file claims. The compensation program also covers commercial crops, pastures and Christmas trees, but it does not pay for damages to other property.

"Our folks have been self-funding damage to fences, irrigation pipes and other property for decades, so if they can get some of those damage costs returned back to them, that's great," Wash-



Courtesy of WDFW

A Roosevelt elk. State lawmakers are considering increasing the compensation to farmers who sustain crop and property loss to elk and deer.

ington Farm Bureau Director of Government Relations Tom Davis said.

The bill's prime sponsor, Moses Lake Republican Tom Dent, said that elk and deer step on and break equipment.

"The ranchers who are feeding and raising these animals, basically, sometimes have great loss to property," he said. "It's not unusual to have several thousands of dollars of damage."

The state sets aside \$150,000 annually to set-

tle all claims, though the state has never exceeded that amount, according to an analysis of the bill. The agency said it could not estimate how much more the state would pay out under the bill.

WDFW Game Division Manager Anis Aoude told the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee at a recent hearing that the agency supports increasing maximum payouts.

He said raising the damage threshold to \$1,500 will

limit "frivolous claims."

The Farm Bureau opposes raising the minimum claim.

"I know there are lots of folks in our membership who would not support raising it to \$1,500 because that means they're self-funding the first \$1,500 damage done on their farm or ranch," Davis said.

He challenged WDFW's implication that farmers file frivolous claims.

"A lot of people don't file because it's an onerous system. It's too much work. They'd rather just pass," Davis said.

A farmer must report to WDFW within 72 hours of discovering damage. To then file a claim, a producer must hire an adjuster and submit tax records, business records and insurance records.

"I question whether there are a lot of frivolous claims," Davis said.

Davis also asked lawmakers to use the bill to overturn a rule change made in 2015 by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Previously, the state paid for an adjuster to assess crop damage. Now farmers must split the cost with WDFW up to \$600. At the time of the rule change, WDFW said splitting the cost would discourage frivolous claims.

Unsecured pesticides cause costly mishaps, expert says

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Oregon farmers aren't legally required to secure pesticide containers during transport but doing so anyway can prevent financial calamity, according to a safety expert.

Currently, Oregon traffic rules prohibit dealers from traveling with unsecured pesticides, but the regulation doesn't apply to farmers, said Garnet Cooke, pesticide coordinator with the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Even so, growers in the state would be wise not to exploit that loophole.

Farmers can be held liable for clean-up costs if they're shown to have caused a pesticide spill, which isn't unthinkable given the abundance of smartphone cameras, Cooke said.

"It's very expensive," she said during a recent pesticide safety seminar at the Northwest Ag Show in Portland, Ore.

Regulators from Oregon OSHA can penalize farmers if their employees attempt to



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Garnet Cooke, right, pesticide coordinator at the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration, speaks with participants during a pesticide safety workshop at the recent Northwest Ag Show in Portland, Ore.

clean up a pesticide spill without sufficient training or equipment, but not for improper transport, Cooke said.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture faces a similar regulatory gap, since it can only cite growers for improper pesticide usage — and chemicals aren't actually being used during transport, she said.

In the event of a spill, though, costs can quickly spiral out of control.

Cooke gave the example

of an exhausted driver who wrecked a truck after falling asleep near The Dalles, Ore., spilling a pesticide that's toxic to fish next to a creek.

Nearly 30 state and federal agencies responded to the accident, which required the removal of 6,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment, she said.

The creek was also dammed to allow for about 5 million gallons of water to be pumped out, Cooke said. The total cost

of the clean-up came to \$7 million, for which the driver's company and its insurers were responsible.

A spill resulting from unsecured pesticide containers at a nursery near Independence, Ore., was less extensive, but the clean-up still cost \$250,000, she said.

Just having a "hazardous material" or "hazmat" response team show up at a spill site costs at least \$500, plus \$1,125 per hour of work, Cooke said.

"The cheapest way is prevention," she said.

While properly securing pesticides is more time-consuming, employers shouldn't allow their drivers to skip the task, Cooke said. "Allow them the time it's going to take to do it."

Unsecured pesticide containers are a safety hazard even if they don't immediately spill.

In one case, a pesticide container fell off a truck into grass along the road but remained closed, Cooke said. It was eventually mowed over by the landowner, causing him to get sick and killing a cat that wandered into the spill area.

Planning for drought still important, experts say

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — Though 2016-17 turned out to be a wet winter, university and industry experts urge ranchers to continue to plan for drought in how they manage their pastures and feed.

Knowing when to water and which animals to give the highest-quality supplemental feed could help cow-calf operations through the next drought, University of California Cooperative Extension advisers say.

Such measures may include irrigating pasture with limited water in the spring, when the crop demand is greater, rather than the fall, said Larry Forero, a UCCE adviser based in Redding.

"People usually irrigate based on a schedule," Forero told producers during a California Cattlemen's Association-sponsored forum Jan. 27 at the Red Bluff Bull and Gelding Sale. "They're not necessarily irrigating based on demand."

Research that Forero has been conducting since the 1990s has shown that rangelands' peak water demand is in the summer, when the days are warmer and longer, but that they can get by with less water in September and October than ranchers often apply, he said.

He noted that when one local water district faced a 25 percent reduction at the height of the drought in 2014, it decided to forgo October irrigation that year and send the water in April and May instead.

As for grazing ground, Forero advises producers not to deficit irrigate.

"If water gets short, reduce the amount of land you're irrigating and irrigate what you have well," he said, adding that producers should leave about 5 inches of stubble after grazing so the grass will survive.

For producers using supplemental feed, early weaning of calves leads to significant savings in hay and other feed, said Josh Davy, a UCCE livestock adviser in Red Bluff.

Cows that have had their calves weaned early can be shifted to more marginal grazing ground or feed, while high-quality pasture or high-energy and -protein feeds can go directly to the calf, researchers advise.