

Snow damage to onion industry nears \$100M

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

NYSSA, Ore. — As much as \$100 million in damages were caused when dozens of onion storage sheds and packing facilities collapsed under the weight of deep snows that have buried Idaho and Eastern Oregon.

About 50 onion buildings collapsed under the weight of up to 40 inches of snow that has fallen during the harshest winter in memory.

"It's an absolute catastrophe," said Shay Myers, general manager of Owyhee Produce in Nyssa. Three of the company's storage sheds and the building housing one of its packing lines collapsed.

Myers estimated the total damage to the onion industry in southwestern Idaho and Malheur County, Ore., could be near \$100 million.

The region's 300 onion farmers and 30 shippers produce about 25 percent of the nation's big bulb storage onions.

The damage is devastating. In many cases, it looks like a tornado tore through the buildings, said Partners Produce co-owner Eddie Rodriguez.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Hundreds of thousands of pounds of onions were lost when this onion storage shed in Nyssa, Ore., collapsed under the weight of several feet of snow. About 50 storage sheds and packing facilities have been destroyed.

"They're still going down as we speak," he said. "Now, it's just happening everywhere. The snow is heavy and there's too much of it."

Partners has lost four buildings, including its main packing line in Payette, Idaho, which will be out of commission at least seven months.

The lost production has pushed the prices shippers receive for their onions up dramatically. For example, the price for a 50-pound bag of yellow jumbo onions was around \$3.50 before the collapses but is nearly \$10 now.

"There have been a lot of sheds that haven't been able to pack onions. That's why the

market's gone up," said Paul Skeen, president of the Malheur County Onion Growers Association.

This region produces more than 1 billion pounds of Spanish big bulb onions annually, but the building collapses have claimed a good chunk of last year's production. That's because once the onions are ex-



Courtesy Photo

A demolition machine clears 500,000 pounds of onions that were lost when a large storage facility in Nyssa, Ore., collapsed under the weight of several feet of snow. The record-setting snow in Idaho and Eastern Oregon has caused damage estimated at up to \$100 million.

posed to the cold and freeze, they are no good.

Owyhee Produce alone lost 20 million pounds of onions when its buildings collapsed.

Snake River Produce in Nyssa lost the equivalent of 35, 40,000-pound truckloads of onions when four of its buildings collapsed.

"That's peanuts compared to what some have lost," said manager Kay Riley. "Everywhere you go ... there's a building on the ground. It's pretty dramatic."

Onion industry leaders have contacted state and federal representatives to ask for help in

finding assistance for the region. An estimated 150 farm- and non-farm-related buildings have been destroyed.

"I've personally seen at least 40 collapsed buildings, probably more," said state Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario. "It really looks like they were hit by a bomb. It's really shocking."

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both D-Ore., have asked the federal government to begin the process that would result in a federal disaster declaration for Malheur County and other Eastern Oregon counties impacted by the severe winter.

Farm groups sue California over gray wolf's endangered listing

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Two farm groups are suing the state Fish and Game Commission over its 2014 decision to list the gray wolf as endangered in California.

The Pacific Legal Foundation filed the action Jan. 31 in the San Diego Superior Court on behalf of the California Farm Bureau Federation and California Cattlemen's Association.

The groups contend the listing was based on flimsy evidence, as it came after a single wolf — OR-7 — wandered into the state in 2011; that regulators undercounted the wolf's population by looking only at its numbers in California; and that it shouldn't be covered under California's Endangered Species Act because it is a non-native species.

The groups further argue the listing, which took effect Jan. 1, puts ranchers' livestock at risk by taking away what they consider reasonable measures to ward off wolf attacks.

"(T)here are better ways than through the gray wolf's listing to protect the wolf while preserving the livelihoods of California ranchers," PLF attorneys Damien Schiff and Tony Francois wrote in the complaint.

They noted that the CCA and Farm Bureau have been "active participants" in a state Department of Fish and Wildlife-established working group to develop a wolf recovery plan for California.

"But the wolf's listing will undercut any value such a plan might otherwise have by substantially limiting the depart-



Courtesy of USFWS

OR-7 became the first known gray wolf in California when it arrived in 2011. It has since returned to Oregon.

ment's management discretion and foreclosing various livestock production measures that (ranchers) might otherwise pursue," the attorneys wrote.

California Secretary of State Xavier Becerra's office referred inquiries to the Fish and Game Commission, whose spokeswoman, Jordan Traverso, did not immediately respond to messages from the Capital Press seeking comment.

A legal challenge was widely anticipated after the commission's 3-1 vote on June 4, 2014, to list the species despite Fish and Wildlife's recommendation that the wolf not be listed yet because no packs had become established in California.

The Center for Biological Diversity and other environmental groups requested the petition in 2012 shortly after the arrival of OR-7, the first known gray wolf in California. That wolf later returned to Oregon and mated and produced pups, but another pack became established in far Northern California.

"I think they're really tilting at windmills with this lawsuit," said Amaroq Weiss, the Center for Biological Diversity's West Coast wolf organizer. "The arguments they're making appear to be pretty baseless."

The PLF argues that never before had a listing been initiated by a single animal's occasional wanderings into the state, and that the commission failed to consider that the wolf's overall status has improved to the point that the federal government has considered removing it from its own "endangered" list.

On whether the gray wolf is a native species under the law, the foundation acknowledges there is evidence that Great Plains and Mexican wolves once were present in California. But there is no evidence the Northwestern wolf subspecies, which includes the wolves introduced into Idaho that spread into Oregon and Washington, ever lived in California, the attorneys assert.

Weiss countered that the Department of Fish and Wildlife had already been studying wolves for about two years before OR-7 appeared and that the state was preparing for the species' eventual re-entry into California.

She said that between OR-7's pack and the Shasta Pack, there are at most about 10 wolves in California. And as for the wolf's origin, she pointed to research that shows at least three different subspecies of wolves lived in California before the 1920s and that she believes the state's endangered species law is consistent with the federal law, which only considers species and not subspecies.

Tillamook pledges \$1.5M to new OSU dairy facility

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

The Tillamook County Creamery Association has pledged \$1.5 million to help build a new dairy science center at Oregon State University.

The facility is part of a planned food and beverage center that will include wine and beer making and other food made through fermentation. The dairy section will include an automated, small-scale manufacturing plant to produce cheese, ice cream, cultured products and powders. Oregon State's small dairy herd, housed a quarter-mile away, will provide milk for the facility.

OSU already has a "beautiful little pilot plant" to make artisan cheese but the new facility will expand the opportunities for students, said Lisbeth Goddik, dairy processing Extension specialist and a food science professor.

"This is taking the training to a new level," Goddik said.

She said the dairy industry, particularly on the West Coast, is doing well. Exports to Mexico, China, Japan and elsewhere have fueled the industry's rise, she said. The industry's strong position has paid off in jobs for program graduates. Goddik said national dairy companies now send recruiters to OSU.

"The industry realizes we have some pretty good students come out of here," she said.

The dairy part of the food building will cost about \$6 million, of which \$3 million is projected to come from donations such as the one from Tillamook. The rest is proposed to come from state bonds, pending legislative approval this year.

Patrick Criteser, president of



Courtesy of OSU

Oregon State University food science students, left to right, Danton Batty, Julia Cresto and Kyle Lackey muscle the heavy curds toward one side of the vat to squeeze out the whey. OSU master cheesemaker Robin Frojen, in the blue apron, supervises.

the Tillamook Creamery group, said in a prepared statement that the donation demonstrates the co-op's confidence in OSU to train the next generation of

dairy scientists. The group is a farmer-owned cooperative that produces the familiar Tillamook brand cheese and other products.

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9:45-10:30 a.m.	Crop disease update	James Woodhall
10:30-10:40 a.m. Break		
10:40-11:10 a.m.	Precision fertilizer management	Olga Walsh
11:10 a.m.-noon	Low falling numbers demo	Katherine O'Brien
noon-1 p.m. Lunch		
1-1:45 p.m.	Soil health demo	Travis Youngberg
1:45-2:30 p.m.	Unmanned aerial vehicles	Craig Thompson
2:30 p.m. Adjourn		