

Harsh winter challenges Idaho dairies

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

A string of winter storms delivering blowing snow and sub-zero temperatures has wreaked havoc on Idaho dairies.

"We're just surviving," Wendell dairyman Tony VanderHulst said on Monday.

"We're doing what we can to keep cows comfortable, employees motivated and keep them (cows) warm and fed," he said. "It's been a rough one. I've been here since 2001, and it's the first really big, big, big winter I've seen."

The first storm rolled in around Thanksgiving, and it's been going ever since. The snow keeps coming, and everything's turning to ice, he said.

"We're using a lot of extra straw to keep cows from slipping (and) to keep them comfortable," he said.

The dairy typically uses one bale of straw per cow during the winter, but that's up to about 1-1/2 bales this winter. He's also had to add more protein to the feed ration to compensate for cows using more energy to main-



Willie Bokma enjoys a little sunshine at his dairy south of Twin Falls, Idaho, on Jan. 30. "It's really stressful on cows when it is this cold for this long," he said.

tain their body heat.

But the harsh conditions are still taking a toll. It's stressing cows' immune systems, making them more susceptible to mastitis and pneumonia, he said.

"There's a lot more cows going to beef because of the weather," he said.

South of Twin Falls, Willie Bokma is dealing with

his share of challenges as well. His cull numbers are up about 15 percent from a typical winter, with more mastitis and frozen teats taking a toll.

"For sure, we're losing more than regular. It's really stressful on cows when it is this cold for this long," he said.

The cold and snow have been steady on his place

since late December.

Icy conditions have caused cows to slip in alleyways, and he lost quite a few during the slick days. He's also lost quite a few baby calves to extremely cold nights.

"It's hard to keep an eye on cows calving and get them to warm areas," he said.

Getting around the dairy has also been challenging.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Cows at the Bokma Dairy take a sunny break on Jan. 30 after weeks of snow storms and extreme temperatures.

He's had to fight to keep county roads open for employees and milk trucks, working day and night at times, and keep feed bunks clear and corrals as dry as possible.

Near Wendell, snow has been blowing over the north/south roads. Pushing it off is creating snow piles as tall as six feet in some spots. The problem is there are only so many snow plows. Counties are relying on farmers to help keep roads clear, VanderHulst said.

For now, mud isn't a prob-

lem. But it will be when the snow starts to thaw, he said.

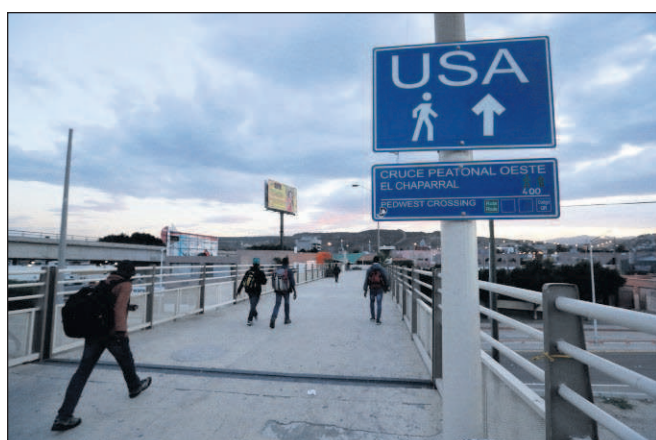
Bokma hopes the thaw comes slowly. He has the means to control both runoff from his farm and runoff from higher ground, but it will be challenging if it melts too quickly, he said.

Nonetheless, both dairy-

men are grateful for the snow.

"We need it, we need the water," VanderHulst said.

"We have plenty of moisture coming to the mountains east of us; that's good. You have to keep positive," Bokma said.



Gregory Bull/Associated Press

The border crossing in Tijuana, Mexico. Observers say work on immigration reform bills likely will start soon in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Immigration reform likely to be piecemeal effort

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

ELLENSBURG, Wash. — Work on immigration reform bills likely will start soon in the U.S. House of Representatives, as the Senate will be busy considering President Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee and Cabinet appointments, a labor attorney and former Bush administration official says.

Leon Sequeira, assistant secretary of labor under President George W. Bush, spoke Jan. 26 at the annual Workforce Summit of WAFLA, formerly the Washington Farm Labor Association, at Central Washington University in Ellensburg.

"A comprehensive reform approach you can bet on not happening," Sequeira said, noting comprehensive efforts "failed spectacularly" in the Bush years in 2006 and 2007 and in 2013 during the presidency of Barack Obama, "who never lacked for self confidence."

A piecemeal approach of enforcement bills regarding a U.S.-Mexican border wall and security is likely to start soon followed by domestic enforcement, including mandatory E-Verify (electronic verification of employment eligibility), he said.

"Once they clear out immigration and enforcement issues there's a chance you could see some reforms of visa programs, particularly in agriculture because there is a well-documented shortage of workers," he said.

The shortage is well understood by legislators, he said.

However, Frank Gasperini Jr., executive vice president of National Council for Agricultural Employers, has said labor-intensive agriculture is very concerned that E-Verify will devastate their workforce if not accompanied by guestworker reform and legal status for illegal domestic workers.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Robert Goodlatte, R-Va., will be the driving and controlling force, and

any H-2A agricultural visa reforms likely will follow his HR 1773 bill of two years ago, Sequeira said.

That bill moved administration of H-2A from the Department of Labor to the Department of Agriculture and changed the name to H-2C. It broadened the definition of agriculture to include processing and activities that are currently on the edge of eligibility.

"It contained significant reforms to housing requirements and made the program more user-friendly so you don't have to hire a lawyer before you hire a farmworker," he said.

It also provided legal work status for illegal immigrants in the country without giving them citizenship, he said.

Allocating visas by state is being talked about and requiring electronic processing of applications by agencies, he said.

Dan Fazio, WAFLA director, said he doesn't think immigration reform will pass this year or next because Democrats want a comprehensive bill and Republicans don't. That leaves regulatory reform by agencies as the only relief, he said.

But Sequeira said Republicans have political pressure to act. He said they will pass something in the House and the only question will be whether it can make it past Democratic opposition in the Senate.

Trade associations are busy formulating their immigration approaches for the administration and Congress, and a big part of what happens depends on who ends up in sub-cabinet secretary positions in key departments, Sequeira said. He said he's not looking for a position, being very busy with current clients.

The Trump administration likely will end Obama's "extreme hostility" to H-2A and deficiency notices on non-substantive issues, he said.

It's interesting, he said, that the federal government has programs like H-2A geared to alleviating farmworker shortages while it has other programs designed to help farmworkers find other employment.

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