

Idaho farm groups oppose 'sanctuary city' ban

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho farm groups will oppose an immigration-related bill that would ban "sanctuary cities" because they believe some of its provisions could have a chilling effect on the state's agricultural workforce.

A so-called sanctuary city is one that discourages cooperation with federal immigration agencies. There are currently none in Idaho.

House Bill 76 would prohibit sanctuary cities in Idaho and allow the state to withhold funding if one was created.

But the bill also includes

a provision that requires law enforcement officers, in the case of someone who has been arrested but is unable to prove he is in the U.S. lawfully, to hold that person for up to 48 hours until they can determine whether there is a federal immigration hold on him.

During a Food Producers of Idaho meeting Feb. 1, some members said that could send a message to many in the agricultural industry's workforce that they are not welcome in the state.

Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Bob Naerebout said the six-page legislation appears to be a mandate to law enforcement in

Idaho and his industry is concerned about where it may lead.

"The agricultural workforce is already scared and nervous," he said. "I think it's time to stand up and say, 'These are people that are important to our industry.'"

FPI members voted unanimously to oppose the bill.

Idaho Grain Producers Association Governmental Affairs Director Rich Garber said industry is still sorting through the language of the bill to understand what its full implications could be.

"If this bill plays out the way it appears it could, it could be really devastating to Idaho's agricultural work-

force," he said. "We're very concerned about (it)."

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Greg Chaney, R-Caldwell, told Capital Press his bill is in no way targeted at agriculture and he was surprised the FPI opposed it.

"I am very pro agriculture and I understand what their workforce needs are," he said. "I have a lot of respect for agriculture. These aren't ... the people this legislation is targeted at."

He said his bill is targeted at those who seek to obstruct federal immigration law.

The part of the bill ag leaders are concerned about only relates to someone who al-

ready has a hold put on them by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Chaney said.

He met with Naerebout Feb. 3 to discuss the bill and said that "we agree on more than we disagree on. We will keep talking."

USDA and the U.S. Department of Labor estimates put the number of workers in the nation's agricultural workforce here illegally as high as 70 percent, Naerebout said, and audits that have occurred across U.S. agriculture suggest that 70 percent is probably accurate.

He said farmers and ag industry companies have to ac-

cept certain legal documentation provided by prospective workers.

"I'm not going to question whether that documentation is legal," he said. "That's not our job. We can't do that."

The ag industry's concerns about the legislation represent just one piece of the overall immigration issue, Naerebout said.

"The issue is, we don't have a viable labor force," he said. "This is just a symptom of ... what's wrong in the whole immigration equation right now. This is a direct result of the failure of Congress over the past decade to address immigration reform."

Idaho potato industry makes progress against diseases

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

IDAHO FALLS — The head of Idaho's potato seed certification program says growers appear to have made progress in controlling bacterial ring rot challenges, and their potato virus Y infection rates seem to have flattened.

Alan Westra, area manager of the Idaho Crop Improvement Association, based his observations on early numbers from ongoing seed certification testing.

In 2014 — following a ring rot flare-up — Idaho implemented rules governing the devastating pathogen, including mandatory testing of seed lots seeking certification or recertification. The association has zero tolerance for ring rot, rejecting any seed lots in which the disease is found. Officials also seek to trace the origin of infections.

Westra said ring rot laboratory testing and field inspections eliminated 1,700 acres from the certification program in 2015. He said results from 64 percent of 2016 seed lots required to undergo testing are



Submitted Photo

Bacterial ring rot is among the diseases targeted by the Idaho Crop Improvement Association.

in, and just 10 acres have been eliminated.

"So far, it's down considerably from what it has been in the last three years," Westra said. "Hopefully, it's due to the fact that we've been testing, plus the industry at large is doing a better job between all of the other testing that's done outside of the program and a greater attention to sanitation."

The program also calls for swabbing of equipment to gauge effectiveness of sanitation. Westra said growers did a good job of sanitizing seed cutters — often implicated in spreading ring rot — but the bacteria was frequently found in unexpected places, includ-

ing pilers and conveyors. Ring rot also surfaced often on the rubber belts that move spud piles in potato trucks. He said one commercial trailer that was swabbed also tested positive for ring rot, indicating growers shouldn't assume ring rot originates from seed and that it is truly an "industry-wide problem."

The certification program also plants tubers from Idaho seed lots in Hawaii to test for PVY, which is spread by aphids. Of the 2015 seed, half of the lots had no confirmed PVY. Westra said 67 percent of acres were eligible for recertification through the program for having less than 2 percent PVY.

Drones' popularity takes off at Colusa Farm Show

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

COLUSA, Calif. — When it comes to their popularity in agriculture, drones are taking off.

Unmanned craft that look like miniature helicopters can take images from the air and gather information that helps farms with such things as precision irrigation and chemical treatments, experts say.

"We're still finding ways to apply them," said Dennis Ryan, principal engineer for the Redding, Calif.-based Vertical Sciences Inc., which was displaying a DJI S100 Plus rotary octocopter at its booth at the Colusa Farm Show on Feb. 7-9.

The 2-year-old company uses the camera drone to do mapping and imagery for growers, and Ryan and his business partner, Jim Bianchin, see plenty of room for growth in the industry.

"I think it's huge," Ryan said of the potential for drones in agriculture. "We don't even know what they're capable of at this point."



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Dennis Ryan, right, of Redding, Calif.-based Vertical Sciences Inc. discusses the use of a drone for taking aerial pictures with passers-by Feb. 7 at the Colusa Farm Show. Ryan says drones will make a big impact on agriculture in coming years.

This was Vertical Sciences' second year at the Colusa show, and Ryan said interest among growers has picked up significantly.

Nearby, Scott Gregory of Oroville, Calif.-based Ag One Solutions gave a presentation on all the uses of aerial imagery from drones.

"You can see a lot from the air that you can't see from the ground necessarily," Gregory said, adding that software interprets lots of data from still photos.

Images in infrared and other light spectrums can help a farmer determine if nitrogen is distributed evenly in soil, if irrigation system leaks are causing plant stress in tomato fields and if dodder — a parasitic plant — is sucking the nutrients out of alfalfa, Gregory explained.

Software applied to a high-resolution photo that spots every tomato plant in a field can provide a plant population count and estimate plant loss, he said.

"This can be pretty useful for a grower when you're try-

ing to estimate your yield," he said.

With GPS technology, an iPad and information from an aerial photo, a grower can go out and find trouble spots in a field or orchard and treat them without having to traverse the entire farm.

"This is the epitome of precision agriculture, in my opinion," Gregory said.

Western businesses using drones for agriculture are poised for significant expansion this season after the Federal Aviation Administration last summer eliminated a requirement that drone operators also be licensed pilots.

The new rules allow those without a pilot's license to take a 16-hour course and pass a test to get a remote pilot's certificate.

Even before the rule change, about 2,100 companies and individuals had federal permission to fly drones for farming, according to the drone industry's Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International.

Bill would clarify solid waste disposal rules for ag

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Western lawmakers have proposed an amendment to the federal Solid Waste Disposal Act to help farmers understand which manure management rules they're supposed to follow.

HR 848, the Farm Regulatory Certainty Act, would reaffirm and clarify Congress' intention regarding manure management under the Resources Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, also known as the Solid Waste Disposal Act.

The new legislation would also prevent farmers who are already engaged in legal action or making a "diligent attempt" to work with state or federal governments to address manure management issues from being targeted by citizen lawsuits, according to the lawmakers.

Manure runoff has been a concern in Skagit, Whatcom and Yakima counties in Washington state.

In early 2015, a federal judge in Washington applied solid waste disposal rules in the RCRA to dairy farms in the Yakima Valley. The Envi-

ronmental Protection Agency and Congress "clearly" never intended RCRA for that purpose, Washington Rep. Dan Newhouse told the Capital Press.

"They were not to target farmers, dairies, livestock producers," Newhouse said of the rule. "(Farmers) ended up having to comply with a rule they had no idea they were subject to."

The new legislation will provide farmers with clarity so they know which rules apply to them and can get better environmental results, Newhouse said.

"We're not talking about letting anybody off the hook when it comes to being responsible for the environment," Newhouse said. "We just want to make sure it's clear which rules they need to follow."

Newhouse and fellow Washington Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, both Republicans, and Rep. Jim Costa, D-Calif., introduced the bill. It has 27 additional sponsors, including Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., former chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., and Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif.

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