

Rancher pleads guilty in theft of cattle

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

JEROME, Idaho — A Jerome rancher pleaded guilty to one count of grand theft in district court on Monday for branding as is own and selling about 99 head of cattle belonging to a California man.

Jason D. Anderson was initially charged with eight counts of grand theft, six counts of obtaining a brand certificate with false information and one count of unlawful branding by the Jerome County prosecuting attorney in July 2016, according to court documents.

The single felony count of grand theft is a compilation of the other counts of grand theft, said Doug Nelson, Anderson's attorney.

The criminal activity took place between the fall of 2011 and January 2015 and involved shorthorn cattle owned by Gary Marchi, a resident of California.

In his plea, Anderson agreed to pay restitution to Marchi at a value to be determined for 43 cows, 17 calves and one bull he sold in 2012 and the sale of 18 calves born in 2012 and 20 calves born in 2013.

In Monday's hearing, Judge Eric Wildman asked Anderson why he was pleading guilty.



Capital Press File

A Jerome, Idaho, rancher pleaded guilty Monday to the theft of cattle belonging to a California man.

"Because I sold the cattle," Anderson said.

Grand theft carries a penalty of up to 14 years in prison and a fine of up to \$5,000, Wildman said, adding that the court is not bound by the plea agreement.

Anderson had said he would comment in person after the plea hearing but on Monday said that on the advice of his lawyer he wouldn't comment until after his sentencing, which is scheduled for May 1.

Nelson also declined to comment but said, "I will have a lot of comment at sentencing; this is not as simple as it sounds."

Marchi alleged in a phone interview there were more cattle involved than stated in the plea agreement, but "if you can't track the sales, you're out of luck."

Marchi, who raises pastured cattle for beef, said he sent the majority of his cattle to Anderson in Idaho because he lost all his rental pasture in California when the land was sold. He had never met Anderson but made his acquaintance through another cattleman.

The cattle he lost through the alleged theft — which he estimated at more than 60 cows, two to three calf crops and other calves — are val-

ued at more than \$400,000, he said.

The lesson is "don't ever trust anybody," he said.

Unable to come to Idaho to check on his cattle because his parents were dying and he was dealing with all that entails as well as his own business, Marchi said he called Anderson from time to time and Anderson would always tell him everything is fine.

Marchi's registered herd was the result of a long-term breeding program, which earned recognition for quality and consistency, and some of his cattle had won awards, he said.

"I won't live long enough to get the genetics back. It's not just the money; it's all I've worked for my whole life," he said.

Court documents show Marchi had 64 cows and calves and two bulls transported to Anderson in June 2011 after the cattle were vaccinated and cows were pregnancy checked.

Anderson told investigators he branded Marchi's cows with his own brand in the fall of 2011 because he was renting pasture and could only run his own cattle there, according to court records.

In July 2012, Anderson sold one cow and one bull at Marchi's request and sent the

payments to Marchi, who later sent two more bulls to Anderson.

In January 2013, Marchi mailed his branding iron to Anderson so he could brand calves, but Anderson told investigators he never used the brand, according to court records.

In several phone calls, Marchi told Anderson he needed steers sent to California for butchering. In June 2014, Marchi mailed a check to Anderson for pasture and feed as he did every month — or on occasion, every other month — and included a note requesting Anderson ship any steers weighing 1,000 pounds or more to California.

Marchi received no response and on Oct. 5, 2014, called Anderson, who didn't answer, and left a message asking Anderson to call him back.

The following day, Anderson called Marchi and told him a deputy sheriff and another man came and took all of Marchi's cattle, stating there was a lien against them. He said he was given a paper but couldn't find it.

Marchi contacted Idaho State Brand Inspector Larry Hayhurst, who in turn contacted the Idaho State Police in early November 2014 to open an investigation of the theft of

approximately 63 cows and calves and two bulls.

That investigation revealed civil action in district court against Anderson and his wife relating to loans by the Idaho Agricultural Credit Association. In December 2014, an officer of Idaho Ag Credit told a state police detective the civil action was satisfied with the forfeiture of cattle, according to an affidavit by State Police Detective Ken White.

White stated paperwork of transactions show Anderson sold Marchi's cattle through the Twin Falls Livestock Commission, Burley Livestock Auction and Jerome Buying Station and had five steers butchered by Scarrow Meat and sold the beef.

At the times of the sales, Anderson purported ownership of the cattle to the state brand department. All of the Marchi cattle sold either had Anderson's brand or no brand, and Anderson did not send any of the money from the sales to Marchi, telling detectives Marchi owed him money for the upkeep of the cattle, White stated.

Copies of checks provided by Marchi show Anderson continued to receive and cash or deposit checks from Marchi after the last of the cattle were sold, White stated.

Winter delays Washington fruit tree pruning, bloom

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Fruit tree pruning is taking longer and bloom of all tree fruits and cherry harvest likely will start a couple weeks later than last year in Central Washington, all because of a winter that doesn't want to end.

More snow dumped in the Cascade Range on March 7 and fell all day without accumulating in lower elevations such as Wenatchee. Such winter weather is in the forecast for the region for four to six weeks.

"No cherries in May probably is a good thing because there's less chance we will compete with California cherries in the marketplace," said Andy Gale, general manager of Stemilt AgServices in Wenatchee. Stemilt AgServices manages more than 8,000 acres of orchard throughout Central Washington as a subsidiary of Stemilt Growers, a large fruit company in Wenatchee.

Washington cherry harvest usually starts in early June. But it began in late May the last two years because of warm springs. Beside a more normal start time, it looks like



Montezuma Rubio stands on a ladder to prune Red Gala apple trees at Piepel Orchard in East Wenatchee, Wash., on March 6. A colder winter than seen in several years has put some growers behind schedule in pruning.



Photos by Dan Wheat/Capital Press

there will be a better spread of harvest timing throughout the region this year instead of high volumes ripening in a short window, Gale said.

"We're behind like everyone else, but we brought a few more H-2A (visa foreign guestworkers) up (from Mexico) so we're getting after it," Scott McDougall, president of McDougall & Sons, Wenatchee, said of pruning.

There's more time to prune because cold weather held back bud development so "our company is in reasonably good shape," McDougall said.

Several growers, including Jesus Limon of Wenatchee said they also were aided by

getting a jump on pruning last fall as soon as trees went dormant and before winter cold and snow.

"I'm probably five to six days behind (on pruning), which is not real bad. We were shut down two to three weeks in December and January because of snow and cold," Limon said.

Mike Robinson, general manager of Double Diamond Fruit Co., Quincy, said snow was over his knees and too deep for pruning platforms to operate in January. He said his crews usually finish pruning March 1 but will be going until April 1 this year.

"It's deceptive to say we're a month behind because we

got a jump on it in the fall," he said. He's on target given the lateness of the season, he said.

"I was spraying (pre-bloom pesticides) at this time last year, but I'm four weeks away now," said Jim Keller, orchard operations manager of Apple King, Yakima.

Bloom was just 10 days apart from the Tri-Cities to the upper Yakima Valley last year because of heat and this year's spread will be a more normal three weeks to a month, Keller said.

Fruit tree buds are beginning to swell at Apple King's Royal Slope orchard where there is no snow, but the company's Tieton ranch, elevation 2,000 feet, still has one-and-a-

half feet of snow, he said.

Spring frost danger to buds and fruit is heightened by prolonged winter, Keller said.

Bud development may be three weeks later than last year, Gale said. It will be later in northern and higher elevation orchards, he said.

Stemilt has 500 H-2A workers now to help with pruning and will peak at 1,200 H-2A workers from cherry to apple harvest this year, compared to about 900 last year, as more high-density plantings require more labor at critical times, Gale said.

Gale and Keller said they are concerned about the Trump administration's crackdown on criminal illegal

immigrants scaring off domestic workers.

"But most of what is happening now is just media hype trying to stir things up," Keller said. "All my pruning crews are as big as I want and are domestic workers. Other companies bring in H-2A workers and hopefully it continues to leave us the domestics."

He said workers also are staying because he's paying more. The company is paying in the \$12 per hour range because of the state minimum wage being \$11, he said. Apple King's piece rate equates to \$14 to \$15 per hour but doesn't really cost more because of what workers produce per acre, he said.

Now Accepting Donations!

owaonline.org