

Idaho governor requests federal disaster declarations

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Gov. Butch Otter has sent a letter to USDA asking the federal agency to issue a disaster declaration for 10 Idaho counties to help food producers impacted by recent flooding.

Otter's letter requests declarations for Ada, Boundary, Canyon, Cassia, Custer, Jerome, Minidoka, Payette, Twin Falls and Washington counties. Adjacent counties would also become eligible for emergency federal loans and services made possible by a disaster declaration signed by the secretary of agriculture.

At the height of the flooding a few weeks ago, Otter and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown flew over flooded farms, ranches and dairies in Southern Idaho and Eastern Oregon. Otter asked USDA's Farm Service Agency to be prepared to inform area food producers about federal disaster programs to help them recover from the damage.

"Our tour confirmed the need for the State of Idaho to help our local communities dig out and bail out from our worst winter storms since the mid-1980s," Otter wrote.

Aaron Johnson, acting executive director of the Idaho



Courtesy of Ryan Cranney
Oakley, Idaho, grower Ryan Cranney's field is covered by standing water. Gov. Butch Otter has asked USDA to issue federal disaster declarations for 10 Idaho counties due to flooding.

Farm Service Agency, said no estimates of the extent of the damage have been made, and producers' requests for help have yet to come in. Johnson said producers understand snowpack remains in the mountains and more flooding may be coming, with warmer weather in the forecast.

"They are waiting to make a determination of how bad the total damage is going to be," Johnson said.

Before flood waters receded, Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Bob Naerebout said his organization commissioned a plane and videographer to document the damage in the Magic and Treasure valleys.

"It's important for all of those who suffered losses during the flooding to be able to document them and turn that into the county level so

they can document total losses," Naerebout said.

From the air, Naerebout saw tarped silage piles covered by water, flooded barns and soggy haystacks.

"We saw a lot of large bales of straw and hay to divert the water that was coming," he said.

Idaho hay analyst Seth Hoyt said the flooding will affect forage supplies, though the extent of the impact is un-

known. Hoyt imagines conditions will delay early cuttings of alfalfa and wheat for silage by about 30 days.

Oakley grower Ryan Cranney heads a local flood district that has been promised state aid, and he hopes to also obtain federal emergency aid to help cover costs of clearing ice and pumping flood water from canals to protect surrounding property.

Cranney may also pursue FSA emergency assistance for his farm and ranch, where standing water has contributed to a doubling of his calf mortality, fall crops were destroyed and fields will have to be reworked.

Several Idaho counties have also received separate state flooding disaster declarations for infrastructure and are pursuing federal declarations to help cover road and bridge damage, said Elizabeth Duncan, a spokeswoman for the Idaho Office of Emergency Management.

Duncan said the state Legislature has authorized \$52 million toward infrastructure repairs, which would provide state matching funds to leverage federal dollars, pending Otter's approval. Duncan's agency is also tasked with forming an expert review panel to allocate the funds.

Farm Service Agency gears up to help flooded Calif. farms

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

DAVIS, Calif. — The USDA is accepting applications from farmers and ranchers in Northern and Central California seeking assistance after this winter's flooding.

The Farm Service Agency is making available emergency low-interest loans to growers in counties included in President Donald Trump's Feb. 14 declaration, which stretches through much of the state.

The loans are available to a producer who suffered at least a 30 percent loss of a primary crop or loss of income as a result of the disaster, according to the FSA website.

County FSA offices are also beginning to help growers access other aid programs that didn't require the declaration, such as a tree replacement program for farms on which standing water damaged a young orchard or vineyard, said Jacque Johnson, the FSA's acting state executive director.

Johnson said she expects some applications for loans and other aid, but much of the damage was minor enough that farmers could address it themselves.

"There is a lot of damage, but typically we don't have hundreds and hundreds of people applying," she said. "There is damage, but not so much damage that a farmer is not able to address it without assistance from the federal government."

The aid follows a series of heavy winter storms that flooded fields, blew trees over and interfered with the almond blossom. Flood waters soaked artichokes and cauliflower in the Salinas Valley, covered rice and other fields in the middle Sacramento Valley, forced animals to higher ground along the Tuolumne and San Joaquin rivers and prompted workers to shore up weak spots in nearly 1,600 miles of levees in the Central Valley.

Among the programs available to growers:

- The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides relief for losses because of feed or water shortages, disease, adverse weather or other conditions. It covers damaged or destroyed livestock feed that was intended for use by the producer's eligible livestock, the California Cattlemen's Association advises.

- The program also covers up to 150 lost grazing days when livestock must be removed because of flooding and beehive losses from a natural disaster such as flooding, the CCA notes.

- The Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides producers who have purchased the coverage with financial assistance for low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting because of the disaster.

- The Livestock Indemnity Program pays eligible producers for livestock deaths that were caused by the disaster.

- The Tree Assistance Program (TAP) helps orchardists and nursery tree growers who lost trees, shrubs and vines because of the disaster.

- The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) funds rehabilitation of land damaged by natural disasters, including replacing fences and removing debris.

- HayNet is an FSA-supported advertising site allowing farmers and ranchers to post "need hay" and "have hay" ads online, the CCA notes. Farmers can also post similar messages relating to grazing land. The site is www.fsa.usda.gov/haynet.

Each program has specific deadlines and requirements. Visit www.fsa.usda.gov or call your local Farm Service Agency office for details.



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