

McMorris Rodgers calls for ag committee hearing in E. Washington

Crop insurance, falling number problems top grower priorities

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers wants the House Agriculture Committee to hold a farm bill hearing in Eastern Washington. McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., said she would like to see the hearing held in Pullman so the committee could also review research at Washington State University. “I’m going to keep requesting and hoping we can get a farm bill hearing in Washington state to give everyone an opportunity to bring their priorities forward,” she said.

No members of the House from Idaho, Oregon or Washington currently serve on the House Ag Committee. McMorris Rodgers said she has a “great” relationship with the committee chairman, Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Texas, who is still putting the hearing schedule together.

She held a farm bill listen-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers wants the House Agriculture Committee to have a farm bill hearing in Eastern Washington.

ing session April 17 in Colfax, Wash. Growers emphasized to her the importance of crop insurance and the need for more research on the falling number problem in wheat, she said. Lawmakers have already proposed amendments to the dairy Margin Protection Program. The program allows farmers to insure the margin between the average nation-

al milk price and the average national feed cost. One proposal would require USDA to calculate margins in each state instead of nationally. Critics argue the current program does not reflect actual feed costs or milk prices. McMorris Rodgers said she will continue to listen to Eastern Washington growers’ priorities regarding the farm bill.

Oregon hemp commission proposal passes muster

Committee also approves bills related to farmland preservation, sudden oak death

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A proposed Oregon Industrial Hemp Commission, which would promote and research the crop, has secured the unanimous support of the House Agriculture Committee. The commission would be appointed by the Oregon Department of Agriculture director by 2018 and decide how much hemp growers would pay to fund its activities. After passing the House Agriculture Committee on April 13, House Bill 2372 has now been referred to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which decides budget policy. The Ways and Means Committee is expected to take a particularly critical eye to legislation this year, given



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

A hemp crop grows in an Oregon field last year.

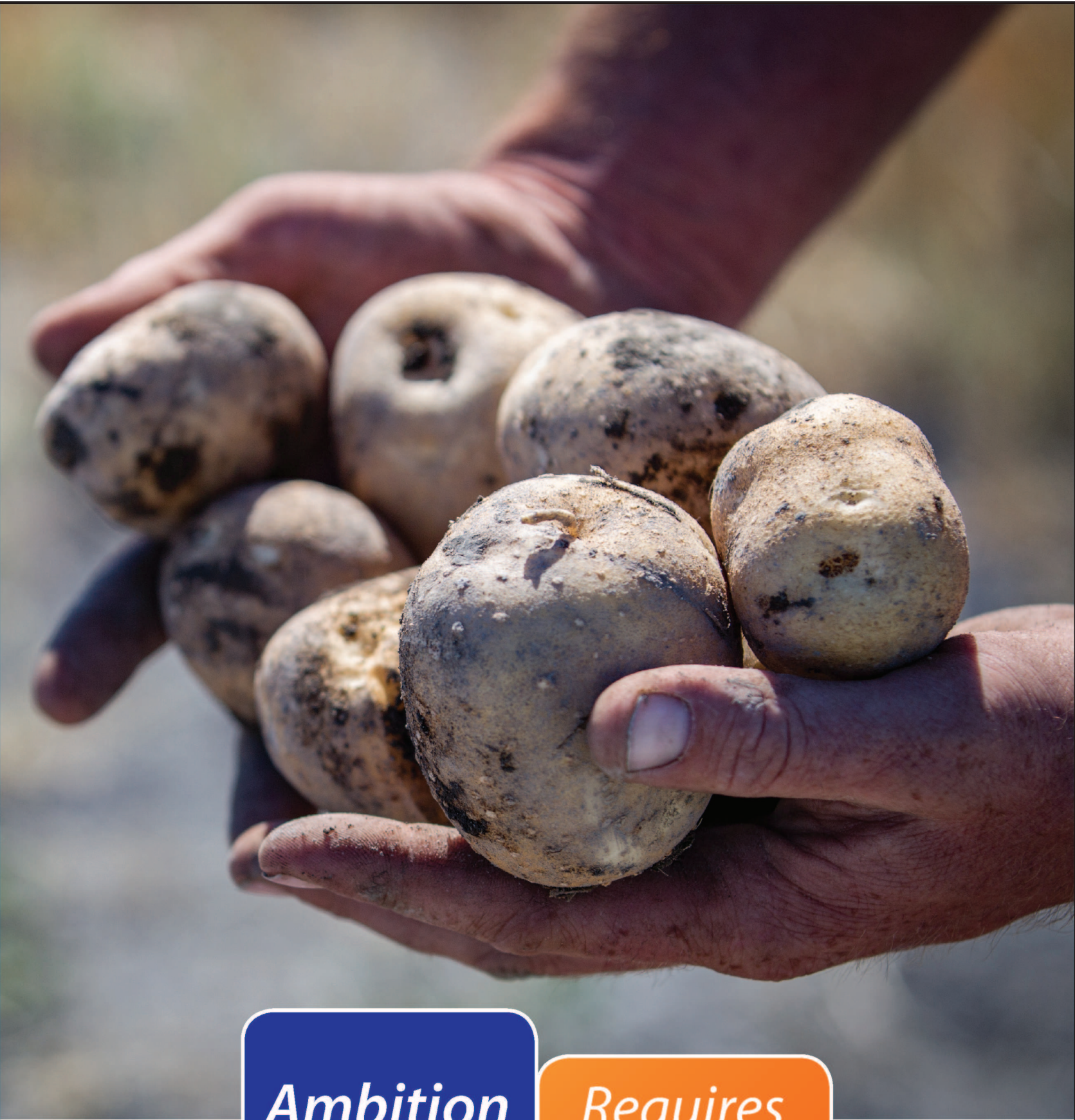
Oregon’s projected budget deficit. However, establishing the commission isn’t expected to have any fiscal impact on ODA and the referral isn’t likely to be an obstacle for HB 2372, said Courtney Moran, an attorney specializing in hemp who supports the bill. “I don’t foresee any problem with that at all,” she said. The committee’s chairman, Brian Clem, D-Salem, reflected on the crop’s long journey since Oregon lawmakers initially legalized hemp production in 2009.

Back then, Clem said, he considered the proposal by former Sen. David Nelson, R-Pendleton, to be “strange,” but he now realizes hemp offers a new opportunity to Oregon farmers. Hemp breeders would also be able to certify their seed purity through Oregon State University, the same as with other seed crops, under House Bill 2371. The proposal, which would also create a hemp research pilot program at OSU, was unanimously approved April 18 by the House Agriculture Committee for a vote on the House floor.

In other business:

- The committee unanimously voted in favor of House Bill 3151, which appropriates \$695,000 to the Oregon Department of Forestry for the fight against phytophthora ramorum.
- Discussion of the fungal-like pathogen, commonly known as sudden oak death, elicited expressions of regret from a couple representatives. “It’s a shame we didn’t react properly and we didn’t pay attention,” said Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Medford, of the disease’s early years.
- Rep. Caddy McKeown, D-Coos Bay, warned against being “penny wise and pound foolish” in light of the pathogen’s “existential threat.”
- The bill has also been referred to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.
- An interagency task force has battled the disease since 2001 in Oregon’s Curry County — where it’s found in the wild — and the pathogen was found in two dozen Oregon nurseries in 2003, which resulted in restrictions on shipping ornamental nursery stock.
- A bill creating the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Fund, which is aimed at farmland preservation, passed the committee 7-2 with a referral to the Ways and Means Committee.

The amount dedicated to the fund isn’t specified in House Bill 3249, but rule-making and support for the commission overseeing it are expected to cost \$190,000 in the 2017-2019 biennium and \$90,000 in the 2019-2021 biennium. Money from the fund would buy conservation easements from farmers, ensuring their property won’t be developed, and assist with drawing up succession plans. Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, said he understood the succession problems facing Oregon’s farmers but he doesn’t believe it’s the government’s role to buy up development rights. He was joined by Rep. Esquivel in voting against the bill. Clem responded that he’s uneasy about the government directly buying land, but in the case of easements, the property remains in private hands and on the tax rolls. Farmers would be eligible for tax credits of 25 percent of the value of crops they donate to food banks under House Bill 3041, up from the current level of 15 percent. The proposal is supported by the Oregon Farm Bureau but opposed by Tax Fairness Oregon, a group that seeks to preserve state revenues from tax breaks. The bill was unanimously approved by the House Agriculture Committee and has now been referred to the House Revenue Committee.



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