

LABOR

Finding enough workers worries growers, packers

SHORTAGES



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Benjamin Lugo ties pieces of reflective fabric together as Fernando Licona pulls it down a row of trees using an ATV at Lyall Orchards near Mattawa, Wash. The fabric helps ripen fruit. They are year-round workers but owner Charles Lyall says he's concerned about having enough pickers for the upcoming harvests.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Workers place bagged spinach into boxes for shipping at the Ocean Mist Farms processing facility in Castroville, Calif., in February. A shortage of seasonal agricultural workers in California is reportedly more severe this year.

'What we have is a relatively fixed pool of laborers, and a growing need'

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

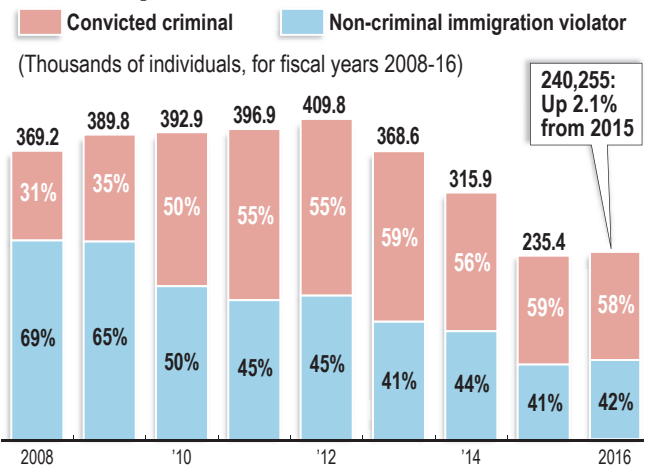
It's three weeks before the start of harvest and the Chelan Fruit Cooperative is short hundreds of workers needed to pack this year's cherry crop. General Manager Reggie Collins worries about whether some of the crop will have to go unpicked in June and July.

"Last year, we were scared to death and we were able to get barely enough for our packing lines with high school kids. This year it looks shorter," Collins said from the co-op's offices in Chelan, Wash.

"Three weeks before cherry season last year, we had 241 new applications beyond our regular staff. This year we have 40," he said. "We're probably 400 short right now and we will start packing on the 10th or 12th of June."

Some 840 miles to the south, Scott Brown, production manager of Morada Produce in Linden, Calif., says the largest cherry crop in years has labor stretched so thin that companies

ICE deportations from the U.S.



Source: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Dept. of Homeland Security

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Turn to LABOR, Page 12

Westland backs out of potentially lucrative Central Project

Lawsuit filed by patrons continues in state court

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

ECHO, Ore. — The Westland Irrigation District is abandoning years of work to secure additional water from the Columbia River in order to defend a lawsuit filed by patrons alleging "massive misappropriation" of senior water rights.

Farmers reacted with surprise and disappointment Monday during a special district board meeting, where members voted unanimously to back out of the Central Project — one of three proposals to pump mitigated Columbia River irrigation water in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Unlike the neighboring Stanfield and Hermiston irrigation districts, Westland does not have the ability to switch over to Columbia River water when flows from the Umatilla River drop below a certain point in



The Northeast Oregon Water Association is trying to develop water transportation infrastructure that could one day deliver water to irrigation equipment like this on a farm just outside Hermiston.

EO Media Group file photo

the summer. That means the district depends entirely on Mother Nature, as well as stored water in McKay Reservoir.

Riding the momentum of a regional effort led by the Northeast Oregon Water Association, or NOWA, Westland had sought to tap

into the Columbia and guarantee a full irrigation season for producers. It even appeared the district was on the verge of a deal, holding weekly meetings with patrons to iron out legal and logistical details moving forward.

Instead, the Central Project fell apart over a lawsuit accusing Westland of systematically cheating small farmers out of their senior water rights for the benefit of a few larger

Turn to WESTLAND, Page 12

Azure Farms 'on the right track' but faces challenges

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press



David Stelzer, CEO of Azure Standard.

Azure Farms, the Sherman County, Ore., organic operation, faces a difficult and potentially expensive task to control the weeds that neighboring wheat farmers are complaining about.

Judit Barroso, a weed scientist at Oregon State University's Columbia Basin Research and

Extension Station in Pendleton, said she and other OSU experts are willing to help solve the problem that has simmered for years and boiled over this spring into a massive social media campaign that targeted county officials and a confrontational community meeting.

Barroso said the perennial weeds growing at Azure Farms are difficult to control, and it will take more than a single

application or action to do the job. Because Azure Farms is organic, it would lose certification for three years if it attacks its weeds with the herbicides used by conventional farms in the area. Some local farmers believe the weed problem is so bad that Azure should spray, take its lumps with decertification and start organic farming again with clean fields in three years.

Dan Arp, dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences at OSU, said weed scientist Barroso will provide "evidence-based information with regard to what may or may not work" to control the weeds. The help could include information on treatment methods and weed seed transmission, he said.

Turn to WEEDS, Page 12

DON'T MISS OUT!

Subscribe to the Capital Press E-mail Newsletters and stay informed on the topics that matter most to you.

Visit www.CapitalPress.com/Newsletters and sign up today!



7 29467 70125 0



Capital Press
The West's **Ag** Weekly