

## Washington

## WSDA picks projects for USDA money

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Washington State Department of Agriculture has submitted 20 projects to the USDA to receive a total of \$4.1 million in federal specialty crop grants.

The USDA is expected to announce grant recipients in the fall. The USDA last year funded all projects selected by WSDA.

The grants range from \$75,000 to \$250,000. Some of the money will be spent to promote sales of apples, asparagus, wine and other products. Some grants will fund research into such subjects as managing plant diseases and fertilizing with manure.

Several grants will fund research at Washington State University. A large grant will go to The Center for Produce Safety and the University of California-Davis to work on a reusable anti-bacterial liner for plastic containers.

Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture.

The selected projects are:

- \$250,000 to the Washing-

ton State Potato Commission: To support the "Washington Grown" television series and other videos that publicize Washington farms and crops.

- \$250,000 to The Center for Produce Safety and UC-Davis: Unsanitary plastic containers can contaminate produce. Researchers are developing liners that can be cleaned with bleach and reused.

- \$249,973 to WSU professor Pius Ndegwa: To make pellets from manure that are free of pathogens and weeds and economical to transport.

- \$249,951 to WSU professor Sindhuja Sankaran: To detect diseases in stored potatoes. Farmers lose 6 percent of their potatoes in storage.

- \$249,116 to Washington State Department of Agriculture: WSDA will work with the Washington Farm Bureau to help farmers sell cut flowers.

- \$248,700 to WSU professor Richard Knowles: The Department of Horticulture will research cultivating potatoes with the right size and shape for french fries.

- \$240,775 to USDA-Agricultural Research Service, John Henning: To breed drought-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

Washington State University berry breeder Pat Moore looks at sprouting plants at WSU's research center in Puyallup in 2016. The Washington Department of Agriculture has submitted 20 projects, including Moore's, to the USDA for funding.

and heat-tolerant hops.

Climate predictions suggest that the Yakima Valley will get hotter, threatening hops and craft beers.

- \$230,155 to WSU professor Achour Amiri: To research spraying fungicides to manage gray mold, a major disease for apples and pears.

- \$225,000 to Washington Wine Industry Foundation: To update an online guide for wine grape growers and processors.

According to the grant summary, the updated guide will help producers "build and manage businesses that are economically viable, socially

supportive and ecologically sound."

- \$216,497 to the Washington Hop Commission: The commission and USDA will research managing hop powdery mildew.

According to the grant summary, the disease has become a serious problem for Cascade hops, the most widely planted variety.

- \$200,000 to Viva Farms in the Skagit Valley: The farm helps new farmers and farmworkers go into business.

- \$177,808 to WSU research scientist Carol Miles: To research technology for cider apple orchards, and devel-

op pruning and harvest plans for small, medium and large orchards.

- \$176,000 to Washington State Fruit Commission: To make videos and write articles in Spanish on topics such as food safety, worker safety and farm management.

- \$165,134 to Washington State Wine Commission: To develop a wine education program to promote sales to international markets.

- \$153,090 to WSDA and WSU: To continue research into how fertilizing red raspberries with manure affects food safety.

According to the grant summary, red raspberry growers are not allowed to fertilize with manure. The soil is poorer, and farmers must replant more often.

- \$120,000 to the Washington Asparagus Commission: The commission proposes to hire a marketing firm to promote April, May and June as fresh asparagus season in the Northwest.

Washington asparagus farmers are increasing production after a two-decade decline. The goal will be for Wash-

ington, Oregon and Idaho consumers to absorb 50 percent of the new production. The industry assumes the other half will go to the other 47 states and Canada.

- \$110,401 to WSU research scientist Pat Moore: To breed strawberries for the fresh fruit market. Washington strawberry growers primarily supply berries for processing, but that market has been declining.

- \$105,560 to the Organic Seed Alliance: To market and cultivate purple sprouting broccoli and to release a new variety. Research will be conducted on farms in Clallam, Jefferson, King, Skagit and Snohomish counties.

- \$80,968 WSU research scientist Gary Chastagner: To research controlling post-harvest botrytis disease in peony flowers.

- \$75,000 to the Washington Apple Commission: To produce, film and translate into seven languages a video showcasing Washington apples.

The video will target consumers in Mexico, Central America, India, the Middle East, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Indonesia.

## WAFLA sues to end attorney general's probe

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WATERVILLE, Wash. — WAFLA has filed a complaint in Douglas County Superior Court seeking an end to the state attorney general's civil investigation of the organization. WAFLA is also asking for damages and attorney fees.

Attorney General Bob Ferguson began investigating WAFLA, formerly the Washington Farm Labor Association, in late 2015 for advice it publicly gave members regarding an agriculture wage and practices survey conducted by the state Employment Security Department.

The department claimed WAFLA biased the 2015 survey by warning growers that choosing piece rate over hourly wage reporting could artificially inflate prevailing

Dan Wheat/Capital Press  
Dan Fazio, director of WAFLA, Feb. 23, 2017.

wages for the next season.

WAFLA complied with a request for information from the attorney general, turning over more than 120,000 pages of documents. During the investigation, the Employment Security Department

conceded WAFLA's advice was legally correct and altered its survey the next year to incorporate WAFLA's suggestions.

The AG issued a second request for documents last fall that Douglas County Superior Court Judge John Hotchkiss struck down as an invasion of privacy and unconstitutional.

The AG did not appeal the ruling, refused several requests by WAFLA to close the investigation and in February issued a third Civil Investigative Demand for information.

"The state and the AG have no legitimate basis upon which to investigate WAFLA under RCW 19.86 (state law). Their conduct constitutes harassment. They should be enjoined from issuing further CIDs and the WAFLA investigation should

be terminated," the June 22 court complaint states.

"Farmers rely on WAFLA to vigorously monitor government actions and point out problems when they arise. That is what we did and we commend (the Employment Security Department) for making the necessary changes to their annual survey," said Dan Fazio, WAFLA director. "It is time to end this politically motivated investigation and move on."

Brionna Aho, AG spokeswoman, said the AG had not been served with the complaint so she had no specific comment. She said in general the "AG's Antitrust Division has a responsibility to protect consumers from anti-competitive conduct. We continue to uphold that responsibility and will go wherever the law takes us."

In January, Phil Talmadge,

a Seattle attorney representing WAFLA, told Capital Press the investigation "constitutes harassment" if it continues without any suggestion of violation of law.

Talmadge, a former state Supreme Court justice and former Democratic state senator, said Ferguson, also a Democrat, is "very political" and his investigation of WAFLA was a "fishing expedition" spawned by labor unions and legal services who don't like the H-2A visa foreign guestworker program "because they think someone is waiting out there for the opportunity to pick apples."

In reaction to those comments, Aho said in January, "We continue to believe it is appropriate for us to investigate WAFLA's conduct and are evaluating the most appropriate avenues to move forward."

## Stemilt Basin land deal on hold in ownership dispute

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The sale of two sections of land between state agencies in the Stemilt Basin isn't likely until fall.

A dispute over ownership of Lilly Lake on Section 22 and lack of a new state budget have held up the sale of Sections 16 and 22 from the state Department of Natural Resources to the state Fish and Wildlife Department for \$1.95 million, says James Brown, WDFW regional director in Ephrata.

In the meantime, the Mathison family is free to install an irrigation pipeline and power line across Section 16 to develop a cherry orchard

Dan Wheat/Capital Press File  
West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, Wash.

on Section 17, which it owns. DNR granted an easement to the Mathisons' company,

Wheeler Ridge LLC, earlier this year, Brown said.

The Mathison family also owns Stemilt Growers LLC in Wenatchee.

Pipeline, powerline and road improvement work has not started yet but the family is working on a plan and talking with other stakeholders and may start planting cherry trees next spring, said West Mathison, Stemilt Growers president.

Neighbors and the Wenatchee Sportsmen's Association have long opposed further orchard development as detrimental to wildlife, including the 6,000-head Colockum elk herd that migrates through the area.

The Mathisons have said

they will ensure migratory pathways are maintained but have been criticized for wildlife mitigation efforts at their orchard on Section 10, which they lease from DNR.

The area is high elevation and produces late-season cherries, which can bring high prices.

Section 17 is at an elevation of 4,200 feet, and it is questionable whether cherry trees can withstand harsh spring frosts there, Mathison has said.

Test blocks of 10 to 20 acres will be planted and if they do well up to 250 acres will be planted, he has said.

The Mathison family owns more than 1,000 acres

of other cherry orchards on Stemilt Hill at roughly 1,600-foot of elevation and higher.

Meanwhile, an agreement for DNR's sale of Sections 16 and 22 to WDFW has expired since a state budget has not been approved, but the agencies have a verbal commitment to renew the agreement when a budget is passed, Brown said.

A dispute over ownership of Lilly Lake doesn't have to be resolved but must be documented, he said.

DNR and the Upper Stemilt Irrigation District both claim ownership to the 18-acre lake dating back to a 1902 court case. DNR may want more money for the lake, he said.

## WSU extends search for dean

Washington State University administrators will continue the search for a new dean to lead its College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences this fall.

WSU provost and executive vice president Dan Bernardo made the announcement this week.

WSU began the search for a new CAHNRS dean last fall.

In a message to stakeholders, Bernardo said he elected not to extend an offer to the single candidate who interviewed for the position. Follow-up efforts to identify additional interviewees "have not proven fruitful," Bernardo said in the message.

The school will restart the search during the fall semester "with the goal of recruiting a larger, more experienced and diverse set of finalists."

Bernardo said in his message he hopes to retain the single interviewee as a "viable and interested candidate."

Current dean Ron Mittelhammer will continue until a suitable replacement is identified, Bernardo said. Mittelhammer was appointed interim dean in June 2013 and dean for a two-year term in September 2014.

"This search has been characterized by an extremely unique set of circumstances that have taken us to this point," Bernardo said in his message. "I have spent a significant amount of time researching this situation and am comfortable and confident with this decision."

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