



USDA

Thomcord grapes appear to be a good fit for the climate of southwestern Idaho, researchers say. They can survive below-zero winters and still produce a bountiful crop.

## University of Idaho fruit researchers bullish on Thomcord table grapes

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — The state's emerging table grape industry may have found a new go-to variety.

Fruit researchers at University of Idaho's Parma Research and Extension Center report that Thomcord grapes are performing well under southwestern Idaho conditions.

Thomcord grapes, which are a cross between Thompson

seedless and Concord grapes, have been grown in other parts of the country for several decades.

UI researchers began testing them seven years ago to see how they would perform under southwestern Idaho's weather and soil conditions. They now feel confident enough to promote them as a good variety to grow in this region.

"Now that we can see that they are phenomenal and that

they are really producing well, we can highly recommend Thomcord," said table grape grower Tom Elias, a research assistant at UI's trial orchard in Parma. "I think (growers) are really, really going to like them."

Despite a harsh winter — temperatures fell to minus 21 degrees at the Parma center orchard in January — none of the Thomcord plants died.

"We had 100 percent survival under minus 21 degrees," said

Essie Fallahi, who manages UI's pomology program. "We are very excited about this variety."

Elias, secretary-treasurer of the Snake River Table Grape Growers Association, said the variety has exceeded expectations.

"This winter was probably the ultimate test for the Thomcord here in Idaho," he said. "The longevity of the grape, the size of the grape and its hardiness are just going to be dynamite for this area."



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Cat Salois, McGregor Co. director of research, and Walla Walla area farmer Dean Farrens look over chickpeas during the company's crop tour June 22 in Colfax, Wash.

## Tour spotlights chickpeas as crop gains popularity

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

COLFAX, Wash. — More farmers are raising chickpeas for the first time, so the McGregor Co. offered plot tours last week devoted to the pulse crop.

Chickpea acres were up 150 percent year over year, said Cat Salois, the company's director of research. "We felt it was pretty important to go ahead and put some kind of educational program on."

The tour showcased insecticides, nutrition, fertility, fungicides and weed control for the crop.

Salois believes the higher interest is because chickpea

prices are up and wheat prices are down.

Chickpeas — also known as garbanzo beans — are selling for \$36 to \$37 per hundredweight in Washington and Idaho. Soft white wheat ranges from \$4.85 per bushel to \$5.05 per bushel on the Portland market, near or below the break-even point for farmers.

"A crop that used to be considered a rotation is now holding the farm," Salois said.

"I see more acres of garbanzos right now, and I also see garbs where I've never seen them before," said farmer Dean Farrens, who has raised chickpeas east of Walla Walla, Wash., for 15 years.

He attended the tour to get

more information about weed control and emergence.

"They've been a pretty solid crop for us over the years," he said.

Colfax, Wash., farmer Dan Harder has raised chickpeas for 17 years.

"If you haven't raised them before, you better go talk to somebody who has," Harder said. "There are guys that have raised really good garbanzos year after year after year, and those are the guys you want to talk to and find out what they're doing."

Weeds such as dog fennel, lambsquarter and prickly lettuce are the biggest problems, Harder said.

"Chickpeas do not yield

well with weed competition, because they don't compete," he said. "And diseases can wipe you out."

Carryover of chemicals used in wheat propagation can also be a big problem, Harder said.

Harder believes chickpea acreage could drop by as much as half next year as its prices decrease and wheat prices increase, but Salois predicts wheat prices won't rally for several years. Chickpea prices could remain strong for the same amount of time, she said.

Farmers don't think about managing chickpeas the same way they think about managing wheat, Salois said.

## California pear harvest forecast up 27 percent

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

California pear harvest starts the first week of July and the industry forecast is up for the first time in several years.

On June 22, the California Pear Advisory Board in Sacramento estimated the crop at 3.27 million 36-pound boxes, up 27 percent from the 2016 final of 2.4 million.

"It's a good crop in all growing districts. Similar to the crop we had in 2013. We hope it pans out in greater returns to growers," said Chris Zanobini, Advisory Board executive director.

The crop trended downward the past three years. Some acreage in the Sacramento Delta was converted to wine grapes and there were four years of drought with warmer winters resulting in lighter fruit set, Zanobini said. But tree removal to combat fire blight disease probably was the largest impact the last two years, he said.

Better winter chill led to greater fruit set this year and volumes should be sufficient, he said, for the fresh market, canned and other processing.

Good weather is needed for proper sizing with a recent hot streak being too hot and anything below 95 degrees being good, he said.

Rivermaid Trading Co. in Lodi is the only grower of Sunspite, the first variety picked, with trees yielding about 15,000 boxes annually near Walnut Grove. The company is the state's largest pear grower and packer, handling more than half the fresh-pack volume.

Sunspite will be followed by Starkrimson 10 days before Bartlett in the delta region followed by Bosc, Zanobini said. Harvest usually ends in Mendocino and Lake counties in the north in mid-September, he said.

"It looks like harvest is 12 days behind last year and five to six days behind average which is not bad because the Northwest is still sitting on quite a few pears (from the 2016 crop)," he said.

Washington and Oregon expect to harvest a 17.6-million, 44-pound-box crop, down 2 percent from last year and down 10 percent from a five-year average of 19.6 million.

Picking is expected to start with Comice and Seckel in Medford on Aug. 2.



Courtesy California Pear Advisory Board

A California pear orchard. The California Pear Advisory Board estimates this year's crop at 3.27 million 36-pound boxes, up 27 percent from the 2016 final count of 2.4 million.

## Opposition continues despite changes to rural Oregon land use bill

### Bill relaxing restrictions in slow-growth counties clears Senate committee

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

SALEM — Supporters of a bill to relax Oregon's land use restrictions in slow-growth counties were unable to overcome objections to the proposal despite several revisions.

Nonetheless, Senate Bill 432 was referred to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means on June 26 by the Senate Rules Committee, albeit without a "do pass" recommendation.

Under the original language of the bill, counties with fewer than 50,000 residents that have experienced no growth since the previous federal population census were exempted from statewide land use planning goals.

The amended version of SB 432 allows such slow-growing counties, and the cities within them, to adopt exceptions to statewide land use planning goals.

Such exceptions cannot take place on high-value farmland or adversely affect areas protected under a preservation plan for the greater sage grouse, a sensitive bird species.

The amendment also clarifies that counties that experience population growth greater than 4 percent or 1,000 residents between census reports cannot qualify for new land use exceptions.

"For all the angst over this bill, the impact on the ground is very small," said Dave Hunnicutt, executive director of Oregonians In Action, a property rights group that supports SB 432.

The Association of Oregon Counties and the League of Oregon Cities also support the bill, with representatives testifying that it provides economically struggling counties with more autonomy.

## Supreme Court asked to reverse GMO cooking oil class action suit

### Potential decision could have repercussions for food label litigation

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

A legal dispute over labeling vegetable oil as "natural" even though it contains genetically engineered ingredients could have repercussions for other food-related class action lawsuits.

Earlier this year, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals allowed a lawsuit against the Conagra food processing company to proceed as a class action, which means numerous consumers who bought its Wesson vegetable oil can join in the litigation.

The complaint alleges that Conagra deceived consumers with labels claiming the oil was "100 percent Natural" despite being derived from genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, which aren't considered natural.

Conagra now wants the U.S. Supreme Court to re-



Associated Press File

Conagra Foods' main office in Omaha, Neb. The company has appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court a lower court's designation of a lawsuit over cooking oil labels as a class action.

verse the class action designation because there's no way to "efficiently and reliably identify" the millions of people who've bought Wesson oil over the past decade.

"That left only one other possible source of information about the transactions — consumers' memories of low-value grocery store purchases, recalled years later in hopes of a cash reward," Conagra said in its Supreme Court review request.

Apart from having implications for foods containing

that the cereal is made of fruit? Are coffee drinkers really surprised to learn that iced lattes, in fact, contain some ice?" GMA said in a court brief. "But to defendants facing the settlement pressure that comes with a certified class, the explosion of food and beverage litigation is no laughing matter."

Although class certification doesn't mean the plaintiffs have won the case, courts have recognized the designation tremendously increases potential financial liability — to the point where companies often decide to settle questionable cases they'd otherwise prefer to fight.

Conagra, GMA and other business groups believe the nation's highest court should review the GMO vegetable oil case due to a "circuit split" among federal appellate courts.

There's no requirement for plaintiffs to reliably identify a multitude of class members in the 9th Circuit, 6th Circuit and 7th Circuit, but such a test exists in the 2nd Circuit, 3rd Circuit, 4th Circuit and 11th Circuit, they argue.