

# Wildfires: Leave ranchers critical of firefighting efforts

WILDFIRES from Page 1

"We got the cows to safe pasture at the house. Without moving them they'd probably all be dead," Linville said.

The next morning she found three cows and their calves that had been missing and marveled that they had survived.

"There was no preparation for what was going to happen when the fire reached the valley floor. No line being dug, no water being put on it," she said.

Linville said about 5,500 of 6,000 acres of pasture and rangeland that she and her husband, David, own, were burned.

He works for a company teaching nuclear proliferation detection and was in the Dominican Republic, she said.

"Every time there's a disaster, he's somewhere else, but my neighbors take good care of me," she said.

She's frustrated no attempt was made to save her grazing lands, but said the homes, cattle and orchards that were saved are more important.

Sachs, 32, helped Linville dig fire breaks and protect her hay stacks with water hoses. Other neighbors did the same at their ranches.

## 'Unhappy people'

The fire could have been stopped where it crossed the road but Douglas County firefighters blew a hose and retreated, Sachs said. They also were squabbling over where the fire district line ended, he said.

Sachs lost a few bales of hay and the edges of his alfalfa field were scorched. He blamed the leadership for fire agencies missing "three opportunities" to stop the fire before it spread significantly and reached Grant County.

"There are a lot of unhappy people up here," he said.

"I can't address that. I don't know of any information to lend either way. We have as many resources organized as we can. We run into different opinions on most fires and are always told we could do better," Nick Mickel, firefighter spokesman, said when asked to respond to Sachs' comments.

"I know radio and cell coverage in that area is pretty limited. There's steep canyons and gullies and communication was a real challenge," Mickel said.

By Wednesday, June 28, firefighters from many agencies were on the scene.

"They had lots of crews here willing to do fire lines and stop places but were getting no direction," said Dave Billingsley, 74, a Palisades rancher. He said all of the 37,891 acres burned in the Sutherland and Straight Hollow fires was public or private rangeland for cattle.

## 'We were fortunate'

"We were fortunate. A lot of retardant drop (Wednesday) kept it from spreading toward



Photos by Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The main parts of lightning-caused wildfires were still burning June 29 in rangeland above the mouth of Moses Coulee and State Highway 28, 15 miles southeast of Wenatchee, Wash.



Palisades, Wash., rancher Justin Sachs swaths alfalfa in the Moses Coulee on June 29 after wildfires in the area were under control. He's critical of firefighting efforts.

our cattle. A fence burned, otherwise we're good," Billingsley's wife, Charlotte, said.

Thursday morning, rancher Jan Biram stopped at the Linvilles on her way down coulee.

"We moved 78 (cows) yesterday, short 16 with 10 of those we think are OK but six we don't know about. They weren't in a good spot but they may turn out fine," she told Linville, adding, "My husband's daughter in Eltopia has pasture for six pair and you're welcome to it."

After Biram left, Linville said she's not sure about boarding out her cows where she can't check them every day. Eltopia is 100 miles southeast. She said she'll probably graze

them on 40 acres of grass that was going to be hay.

"We won't sell as much hay as we normally do," she said.

Friday, Biram said five of their other six cows and some bulls were found. Her husband, Mike, spent a couple days riding range looking for them.

They lost a lot of rangeland in Whiskey Dick Canyon that's "pretty well burned out," she said.

Bill Sieverkropp, 58, a rancher atop Monument Hill south of Moses Coulee, said one of his 150 mother cows died in the fire.

"We feel pretty fortunate. It could have been a lot worse. We got the cows out as flames

were coming over the ridge," he said. "We moved them to summer fallow where they were safe."

He said his cousin lost 50 to 75 acres of wheat and that other neighbors had wheat fields scorched on the edges.

"It was still green enough that it wouldn't get going. Another week or two and it would have a whole different story," he said.

## Rangeland lost

Sieverkropp said he's most frustrated with the firefighters' lack of effort to put the fire out.

"There were a whole bunch of firefighters on Wednesday sitting on roads watching the fire, on Overen Road off

## Wildfires burn 46,621 acres

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Small fires about 15 miles south of Wenatchee caused by lightning strikes on June 26 grew together into larger wildfires the next two days, threatening dozens of homes and burning 46,621 acres of rangeland and sage grouse habitat.

The fires expanded rapidly because of wind and an abundance of grass and brush, increased by cool spring weather. Winds died down on June 29, a big help in controlling the fires.

The Sutherland Canyon Fire, near Palisades in the Moses Coulee in Douglas and Grant counties, was listed at 47,500 acres but was downgraded to 29,433 acres after it was determined it had not grown together with the Straight Hollow Fire, which was 8,458 acres. They came within a quarter mile of each other, fire officials said. Both fires were under control by June 29 and listed at 90 percent contained on July 2.

Baird Springs Road," he said. "I never saw one fire rig leave the county road to go out and even try to put the fire out. If they could not fight the fire with a bulldozer or airplane, they were not going to leave the county road to do it."

"I complained and said we need to get brush rigs up there. It fell on deaf ears. No one would leave the road. In the last conversation I had with a fire boss, he said they'd lost firefighters in the past and have to think about safety. I totally agree with that, but you can still fight the fire and be safe. They don't seem to understand that rangeland is part of our livelihood."

When fire jumped Overen Road and burned a small

patch on the other side, firefighters used a bulldozer to build a line around it when the job could have been done just as well with shovels, he said.

He said a U.S. Forest Service fire manager told him that they want to know what jurisdiction a given area is before they fight fire because they want to know where their money will come from.

"It's all about money. It's become a business more than something you do to help your neighbor," Sieverkropp said. "We need a change in fire management philosophy. It would be great to explain it to The Donald (President Donald Trump). He's a kind of down-to-earth, practical 'let's get things done' type of guy."

# Organics: Fruits and vegetables continue to lead way in food sales

ORGANICS from Page 1

Organic fruits and vegetables held onto the top position in the organic line-up with \$15.6 billion in sales, 36.3 percent of all organic food sales. Those sales were 8.4 percent higher year over year, more than double the 3.3 percent growth in their non-organic counterparts, and now account for 15 percent of all produce sales.

Organic meat and poultry sales shot up 17 percent to \$991 million for the category's biggest gain ever. Meat and poultry is one of the smallest organic food categories, but organic poultry moved beyond many years of supply shortages and grew at a rate of 23 percent — compared with 9.2 percent in 2015.

The other smallest category, condiments, is not a headliner but is showing interesting trends, according to OTA.

"Dips and spices both hit home runs, recording the

## U.S. organic food sales and growth (Billions of dollars)

| Year | Organic food sales | Total food sales | Organic percent of total sales |
|------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2007 | \$18.2             | \$628.2          | 2.9%                           |
| '08  | 21.6               | 659              | 3.3                            |
| '09  | 22.5               | 669.7            | 3.4                            |
| '10  | 24.1               | 677.4            | 3.6                            |
| '11  | 26.3               | 714              | 3.7                            |
| '12  | 29                 | 740.5            | 3.9                            |
| '13  | 32.3               | 760.5            | 4.3                            |
| '14  | 36                 | 787.6            | 4.6                            |
| '15  | 39.8               | 808              | 4.9                            |
| 2016 | 43.1               | 812.9            | 5.3                            |

Source: Organic Trade Association 2017 Organic Industry Survey

Capital Press graphic

"Dips and spices both hit home runs, recording the highest growth rates within the food categories." — OTA

highest growth rates within the food categories," OTA reported. Organic dips posted 41 percent growth in 2016 with \$57 million in sales, and sales of organic spices increased 35 percent to \$193 million.

The survey did note oversupply in produce, poultry, dairy and eggs in 2016. The change in the organic marketplace from undersupply to oversupply "simply exemplified the ebb and flow of sup-

ply and demand as the industry grows," OTA stated.

"The biggest challenge is how to grow at a rate that allows for farmers to be paid fairly for the extra work they do in organic ... while also assuring stability of supply, shortage versus glut, spikes in prices versus drops in prices," said Matt Dillon, Clif Bar's director of agricultural policy and programs.

Growth in the organic sector also continues to translate into jobs across the supply chain, OTA stated.

More than 65 percent of organic farms sold product in wholesale markets in 2016, and more than 60 percent of organic businesses with more than five employees reported an increase in full-time employment with plans to continue increasing staff in 2017.

"Organic offers in many cases the choice for growth and more viable, stable prices for farmers and food manufacturers," Batcha said.

## Duvall: Trump affords chance to achieve changes

DUVALL from Page 1

Duvall said he and other AFBF staff will continue to make sure members of Congress and the Trump administration hear farmers' stories and about the issues important to them.

"But when you call them and back it up, that means all the difference in the world," he said. "We just need you to play your part."

Duvall, who has met with Trump twice, told Capital Press that the president "speaks our language in a lot of ways. He's a businessman, he understands trade and wants to make ... trade fair for everybody. Trade is a big issue for agriculture."

He also said Trump is "really heavy on regulatory reform and getting rid of regulations that get in the way of small businesses and farms and ranches. That's our kind of language."

He said Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, who is also from Georgia, is only the fourth of the 30 USDA

secretaries that farmed as an adult.

"That means we've had 26 other ag secretaries that have never done what you do every day," he told producers at the Big D Ranch in Meridian. ("Perdue" has the credentials to be the best ag secretary to ever serve this country. I think you'll be pleased with his progress in his role.")

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt "is a farmer-friendly person that understands common sense and sound science," he added.

"We think there's a great opportunity between those three and (Interior Secretary Ryan) Zinke to actually get some really good things done and fix some of the problems we're facing," Duvall said.

"We have people in place that want to support us, that want to make changes to help us in rural America," he said. "So we've got to continue to call them, email them and give them evidence that we're standing behind them on those issues."