

Oregon mayors face off at watermelon giveaway

Annual promotion builds goodwill for Hermiston

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
EO Media Group

PORTLAND — Amid some light trash-talking and heavy pressure, Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann faced off against Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler in a watermelon seed-spitting contest at Portland’s Pioneer Court-house Square Aug. 4.

“I understand Mayor Wheeler has never done this before, so we’ll give him a practice round so he doesn’t get embarrassed by us professional seed-spitters,” Drotzmann said.

Wheeler appreciated the handicap.

“Normally, when doing something this important I’d have practiced,” he said, “But I’ve never spit a watermelon seed. You’d better win,” Wheeler told his Hermiston counterpart, “Or you’re not going to have a job in Hermiston!”

Drotzmann can keep his job, after he launched a seed past the one Wheeler spit, but not without a twist: both men were beaten by Wheeler’s director of strategic partnerships,



Jayati Ramakrishnan/EO Media Group
Hermiston city councilors, chamber members and Mayor David Drotzmann pose with Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler before the watermelon giveaway in Portland on Aug. 4.

Jennifer Arguinzoni, who stepped in at the last minute to participate.

Each mayor also spoke briefly about the event, to a crowd that had gathered to collect the free watermelons that some Portlanders have come to anticipate each summer.

“These are the best watermelons in the world and there’s no reason to get melons shipped from anywhere else,” Wheeler said.

Wheeler also spoke about other facets of Eastern Ore-

gon’s largest city.

“Hermiston is a thriving city,” he said. “While we think of watermelons, there’s lots of good employment opportunities. They’re working very hard under this mayor on economic prosperity. It’s good to take a fun day like this and remember that we are one state.”

Drotzmann said he was glad to be showcasing Hermiston’s most famous crop on the west side of the state.

“Normally when we’re here, we’re a hundred deep,”

he said. “We’ve got a lot of good produce to give away.”

Debbie Pedro, president/CEO of the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, estimated that they were giving away nine bins of melons, each of which contained between 20 and 30 melons.

Drotzmann added that partnering with Portland was important for both cities.

“It’s interesting because Portland is larger than us by about 650,000. So we think they have different issues —



Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler spits a watermelon seed in his first seed-spitting contest.

but when we sit down with them, the issues we have are very similar. We’re thinking about economic development, public safety, housing, water. How do we, as a state, continue to be prosperous?”

After the brief remarks, Drotzmann and Hermiston city councilors Lori Davis, Rod Hardin and Jackie Meyers started handing out melons. They were joined by Hermiston Energy Services superintendent Nate Rivera and Debbie Pedro, Josh Burns, Shirley Parsons, Ian Coyle and Cindy Meyers from the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce.

Though the crowd wasn’t as thick as some councilors recalled in past years, there was a steady stream of people throughout the giveaway. Burns stood at the corner of Pioneer Courthouse Square, advertising the presence of free melons to Portlanders walking past, which brought in several waves of eager customers.

Feedlot profits drive large cattle placements

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The latest USDA cattle on feed report caught most industry watchers off guard with a 16 percent year-over-year increase in the number of cattle placed into feedlots in June.

“Placements were surprisingly big,” said Derrell Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension livestock marketing specialist.

They were 10 percent higher than analysts had expected and pushed feedlot inventories more than 4 percent higher than June 2016, he said.

At 1.77 million head, June placements into large feedlots were up 245,000 head from a year earlier. Total on-feed numbers on July 1, at more than 10.8 million, were

Cattle on feed, placements, marketing and other disappearances, June

(Feedlots with 1,000-head capacity or more)

Item	(1,000 head)		Percent change
	2016	2017	
Placed on feed, June	1,525	1,770	16%
Fed cattle marketed, June	1,912	1,989	4
Other disappearance, June*	61	56	-8

Item	(1,000 head)		Percent change
	2016	2017	
On feed, July 1	10,356	10,821	4

*Includes death loss, movement from feedlots to pasture, and shipments to other feedlots for further feeding.

Source: USDA NASS

Capital Press graphic

465,000 above last year’s level, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

“Feedlots have been very profitable and have an incentive to go ahead and keep placing cattle. They placed all the heavyweight cattle they normally would place

and placed lightweight cattle as well,” Peel said.

Feedlots have suffered a lot over much of the last few years, and they’re finally profitable. The price relationship between feeder cattle and fed cattle has lined up, and grain costs are low. Month-to-month estimates on

returns show May was close to as high a return as the feedlot segment has ever seen, he said.

Feedlot returns in the Southern Plains are the highest in more than a decade, with the Livestock Marketing Information Center estimating average returns at \$177 a head in the first six months of the year.

May was the highest month so far this year, showing a profit of \$260 per head, and June followed at \$208 a head, according to LMIC.

“This is in stark contrast to the last two years of negative returns, which were estimated as deep as \$500 per head in late 2015,” Katelyn McCulloch, American Farm Bureau economist, said in LMIC’s July report.

The high returns have encouraged feedlots to refill

inventory quickly this year in the wake of aggressive marketings, and analysts are expecting high placements to continue, she said.

June was the fourth consecutive month of large placements, with feedlots dipping into the feeder-cattle supply pool a little early, Peel said.

In general, marketing of fed cattle is at a good pace — 4 percent higher in June than a year earlier. That’s why the cattle on feed number hasn’t increased more than it has. But with large placements the last four months, marketing is not quite keeping up with the number of cattle going into feedlots, he said.

Feedlot returns will likely shrink in the second half of the year and could turn back to the red by the end of 2017.

Levee repairs underway, but many more are needed

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

YUBA CITY, Calif. — Crews are racing this summer to complete several high-priority levee repairs while California lawmakers and others scramble to find funding for many more that are needed.

Local, state and federal dignitaries gathered Aug. 3 to highlight a \$28.5 million effort to put in 2.9 miles of slurry wall to shore up a levee along the Feather River. The project aims to protect about 75,000 residents from flooding.

A few miles downriver, work is proceeding on a \$12 million project to refurbish a one-mile stretch of levee protecting agricultural land that needed emergency repairs last winter, said Mike Inamine,

executive director of the Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency.

“In February, there was a flood fight mounted because there was so much seepage that we had to hire a contractor to place an emergency berm that covered the toe of the levee,” Inamine said.

These projects are only “a start,” said state Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber, who was unsuccessful in getting \$100 million more for levee repair included in the state budget this summer.

“There are many parts of the levee system along the Feather and Sacramento rivers that are going to need help before the rains hit,” he said.

As it was, the two levee projects in the Yuba City area were mostly funded by the state, including money from

Proposition 1E, a \$4.9 billion flood protection bond passed in 2006. The projects are part of a flood control program in the Central Valley that could cost up to \$20 billion over the next 20 to 30 years, said Clyde MacDonald, a member of the state’s Central Valley Flood Protection Board.

A sense of urgency prevails this summer after high river levels during a historically wet winter exposed weak spots in nearly 1,600 miles of levees in rural parts of the Central Valley.

Among the most troubled areas is the Feather River below the Oroville Dam, whose spillways nearly failed in February. In the corridor between Oroville and Yuba City, orchards on the Feather River’s floodplain were inundated several times this year, as

were some orchards beyond the levees that accumulated water because of seepage.

Numerous instances of erosion occurred along the Feather River amid wild fluctuations of water levels as officials closed and reopened the Oroville Dam’s spillway. Some growers lost trees because of the erosion.

In Yuba City, a segment of levee next to the urban center showed signs of seepage and erosion, prompting 250 people to gather at a rally last month to demand action. One section of the levee has already failed and been repaired several times, the last of which was by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2000.

Efforts to find more money for repairs are ongoing. Nielsen said he’s been in conference calls with local districts

to learn their most critical levee needs and is working with Gov. Jerry Brown’s administration to identify funding.

“I think they’re fully aware of the needs,” Nielsen said. “This is the State Water Project. Fixing the (Oroville) spillway is critical, but ... if you don’t have a conveyance system that works, then you don’t need a dam.”

The state board is working through the Army Corps of Engineers to get \$5 million for levee repairs south of Yuba City, but that likely won’t come this year, Inamine said.

“We’re targeting to try to get that into our 2018 work plan,” he said. “The federal process is quite a bit slower than what we can do locally. It’s typically two or three years down the road.”

Census of Ag seeks more info this year

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — During the 2017 Census of Agriculture, USDA hopes to capture more data about producers who are military veterans as well as female and young farmers and ranchers.

“We’ve added questions to this year’s census to get more information in those three areas in particular,” Kevin Barnes, director of western field operations for USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, said during the Western Association of State Departments of Agriculture’s annual meeting last week.

Barnes also told Capital Press that farmers can help the farming industry and themselves by ensuring they complete the census of ag survey, which producers can respond to by mail or online.

“The Census of Agriculture benefits farmers greatly ... by providing information that will be important in decision making at the state, national and local levels,” he said.

A lot of federal and state funds are allocated to the industry based on the data provided by the census, and it’s also used to shape farm programs and policies, he said.

“It’s not only county, state and federal officials that use that information, but also agribusinesses use this information almost explicitly when making decisions on where to build businesses,” Barnes said. “Agriculture is global now with a global market. The more information we have on what we produce in this country, the better we are able to market ourselves internationally.”

The census, taken every five years, is a complete count of every farm and ranch in the nation that produces or would normally produce at least \$1,000 worth of farm products during the census year.

It includes information on land use and ownership, production practices, income, expenditures and operator characteristics for every county in the nation.

USDA will collect data for the new census during 2017 and 2018, analyze and compile it in 2018 and release it in February 2019.

Expanded questions in the 2017 census will seek more information about farmers who are military veterans.

“There are several programs in place trying to move veterans into agriculture, so we’re trying to get more information about veterans involved in agriculture,” Barnes said.

Questions have also been expanded to try to better capture the number of women involved in farming.

Barnes said some people believe there are a lot more women involved in agriculture than what has been reflected in previous census efforts.

An effort is also being made to gain more information about young and beginning farmers.

There is a lot of interest in succession planning and what’s going to happen with the future of agriculture “so we are trying to collect more information about and identify those young farmers who are participating in agriculture,” Barnes said.

Monsanto sells high-speed planter division

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

After its previous deal with Deere & Company was thwarted by the federal government, Monsanto is instead selling its high-speed planter division to AGCO.

Antitrust regulators from the U.S. Department of Justice sued Deere last year to block its purchase of Monsanto’s Precision Planting company, arguing the sale undermined competition.

The government’s complaint alleged that Deere would effectively control 86 percent of the U.S. market for high-speed planters, but the defendants countered there is no distinct market for such equipment.

The defendants also claimed the complaint was largely filed at the behest of CNH Industrial and Kinze Manufacturing, which opposed the deal with Deere.

In May, Deere and Monsanto dropped their defense of

the lawsuit.

Monsanto has now announced that rival machinery manufacturer AGCO has agreed to buy the high-speed planter division for an undisclosed sum. Deere had agreed to pay \$190 million for the company.

Monsanto, which is predominantly a biotech, seed and pesticide company, acquired the Precision Planting technology when it took over the Climate Corp., an agricultural data firm, in 2013.

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