

Milk production down in Northwest, California

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

U.S. milk production in July at 18.2 billion pounds was up 1.8 percent year over year on an additional 74,000 cows and an extra 20 pounds per cow, according to the latest report from USDA National Agricultural Statistic Service.

However, production in the Northwest and California, was down, with fewer cows and lower milk production per cow reported in Washington and Oregon, fewer cows in California and lower production per cow in Idaho.

The cow count in Idaho increased 2,000 head to 601,000, but monthly milk production per cow was off 10 pounds to 2,155 pounds. That dropped total production by 0.2 percent.

The main reason is a long, hot summer that's dragged on for a couple of months, said Tony VanderHulst, a Wendell dairyman and president of the Idaho Dairymen's Association.

"Cows are tired. They're recovering from a long winter, and then they get a hot summer. It hammered on them; it's a double-whammy," he said.

Feed quality is fine, but cows are weary, milk prices are low and everybody's just trying to buckle down. It's a roller coaster ride, he said.

Mornings have been cooling off the last couple of weeks, but it's been a hot couple of months and milk production isn't going to turn around overnight. Fall is coming on, and cows will be using their energy to put on winter coats, he said.

"So they're getting over one winter and getting ready for another, and the Farmers' Almanac is expecting it to be another rough one," he said.

California's steady decline in milk production tapered off a bit in July, down only 0.2 percent. Cow numbers are still heading south — down 13,000 in July year over year to 1.75 million — but milk per cow saw a 10-pound boost.

Oregon was down only 1,000 cows from a year ago, but per-cow production dropped 40 pounds. Washington was down 2,000 cows and 30 pounds per cow.

Production was up mark-



Capital Press File

Milk production in the Pacific Northwest and California is down this year, but it's up in the rest of the U.S., according to the USDA.

edly in other Western states, with New Mexico up 8.4 percent, Arizona up 6.3 percent, Colorado up 6.8 percent and Utah up 9.6 percent.

Texas was up 14.8 percent and has posted double-digit increases all year. Cow numbers in July were up 25,000 head year over year, and production per cow was up 130 pounds.

Some of the Lone Star State's impressive increases this year are reflective of the industry's recovery from winter storm Goliath that hit in late December 2015, but producers have expanded herd size beyond pre-Goliath numbers, said Ellen Jordan, dairy specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

The cow count on Texas dairies — 461,000 in December 2015 — dropped to 455,000 in January 2016. In July, it was up to 515,000, according to USDA.

Herd growth was somewhat subdued last year. Growers refilled their pens after Goliath but have continued to add cows. A couple of good crop years have allowed them to finish filling their facilities. They might have added some pens, but there aren't any new facilities or parlor expansions, she said.

"So I think we'll continue with slow growth but not at this pace," she said.

In addition to the Northwest and California, production declines in July were seen in four other of the 23 reporting states. Production was down slightly in New York, where the cow count was up 4,000 head but milk per cow was down 15 pounds. Losses in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia were due to fewer cows.

Washington agency pictures more elk; farmers see more damage

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington wildlife managers are circulating a plan to enlarge the state's northernmost elk herd by more than 50 percent, raising concerns about more damaged crops and broken fences.

Skagit County Farm Bureau President Bill Schmidt said farmers have been coping with the growing North Cascades herd for years and that the new management plan proposed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife doesn't offer relief.

"It's pretty much the same old, same old to me," Schmidt said. "Not much has been done from our point of view."

The elk, known as the Nooksack herd, occupy more than 4,600 square miles, mostly in Skagit and Whatcom counties. The herd has grown from 300 to more than 1,200 animals in the past 15 years, according to WDFW. The department, which has an agreement to co-manage the herd with nine tribes, has a goal of increasing the population to 1,950.

WDFW acknowledges that complaints have increased in the past decade and has made reducing the number elk on farmland a goal in the plan. The proposal, however, doesn't include any new approaches.

"We need to talk to landowners, the Farm Bureau and tribes to develop strategies. It's a big priority for us," WDFW district biologist Fenner Yarborough said. "I don't think we can get all the elk off, but we can sure limit them and help some of those folks who are having a problem."

The elk have damaged orchards, vineyards, berry fields, pastures, row crops and tree farms, and livestock occasionally escape through broken fences, according to the department.

Schmidt said he's counted 110 elk in his 10-acre alfalfa field. "They just wiped it out," he said. "They've become very domesticated on this flatland."

According to the depart-



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is seeking comments on a plan to manage the North Cascades elk herd in Whatcom and Skagit counties. Farmers say the expanding herd is damaging crops.

ment's proposal, the herd's population peaked at about 1,700 in 1984, but then dwindled to a few hundred, partly because of overhunting. To reverse the herd's decline, WDFW and tribes prohibited hunting in some places and imported nearly 100 elk captured near Mount St. Helens.

Skagit County grower Larry Jensen said that two years ago he quit growing potatoes on 100 acres where elk congregated.

"They got real good at digging up potatoes with their horns and having a bite

or two and moving on," he said.

Besides direct crop losses, Jensen said he became increasingly concerned that defecating elk would cause him to fail food-safety audits and lose customers.

"Those two things weren't moving in the right direction," he said. "I said, 'The heck with this.'"

WDFW has a program to compensate farmers for crop damage, but Jensen said that filing a claim was difficult and time-consuming.

According to department

policy, the farmer must hire an adjuster and provide WDFW with tax, business and insurance records to substantiate a claim. WDFW reports paying 14 claims totaling \$67,412 since 2002 for agricultural damage caused by the herd.

In some years, WDFW has paid no claims because the Legislature didn't appropriate money. WDFW will take comments on the proposal until Sept. 7. The plan and how to submit comments can be found online at wdfw.wa.gov/news/jul2517b/

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