

‘So far, so good’ on Oregon organic farm’s weed control plan

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

Azure Farms, the organic operation that was at the center of a weed control argument in Sherman County, Ore., this spring, is responding quickly to complaints and generally living up to its side of an agreement with county officials, Commissioner Tom McCoy said.

“So far, so good,” McCoy said in an email update. “I explained that I considered the weed agreement like a farm lease — not so important as a legal document, but important

as a written statement of what each party should expect of the other.”

Neighboring wheat farmers, especially those who grow certified seed, have complained for years about weeds blowing onto their ground from Azure Farms, which as an organic operation would not use conventional chemical herbicides to deal with the problem. County officials said they would ask the Oregon Department of Agriculture to quarantine the farm’s production and warned they would spray herbicide and bill the 1,922-acre farm

for the work if the weeds weren’t controlled.

Azure Farms and its parent company, Azure Standard, of Dufur, Ore., appealed to supporters on social media. County officials were flooded with anguished, angry telephone calls and nearly 60,000 emails from around the country and even internationally.

The issue came to a head at a county court meeting in May, held at the local high school gym because the crowd was so large. Brothers David and Nathan Stelzer, who head the farm and product distribution company, apologized

for the social media response. They ultimately agreed to keep weeds in check using methods that won’t cause them to lose organic certification.

McCoy said the county has received several complaints about noxious weeds flowering at Azure Farms and being close to producing seeds.

“When we contacted the Stelzers, they responded quickly — usually by mowing down the weeds,” McCoy said by email. “They have always seemed to accept their responsibility to keep noxious weed seeds from blowing into their neighbor’s fields.”

Farm advocacy program offers laughs, education

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

FILER, Idaho — Minutes before the show, it looked like the “Thank A Farmer lady” wouldn’t have an audience. But kids of all ages — from infants to great grandparents — quickly filled the chairs and floor in the Ag Pavilion at the Twin Falls County Fair, and the show was off to an energetic start.

Joyce Rice, founder and presenter of the Thank A Farmer Magic Show, hails from a sixth-generation family farm in Iowa and is passionate about spreading an appreciation for farmers. For the past 12 years, she’s traveled all over the country performing a magic act that incorporates agricultural education.

Instead of abracadabra, the magic words “Thank a farmer” are enthusiastically chanted by the audience.

She promised the show would give the audience “fun farm facts to fool your family, friends and other fine folks,” and it delivered, even impressing people who had farmed for 50 years.



Joyce Rice performs a magic trick for the audience during the Thank A Farmer show at the Twin Falls County Fair on Sept. 1.



Youngsters and adults enjoy the Thank A Farmer Magic Show at the Twin Falls County Fair on Sept. 1.

program is education and raising awareness, but “everyone learns best when they’re having fun. You can get smart and have fun at the same time,” she said.

A half-hour program can’t do all that much education, but it can foster appreciation and awareness, she said.

The Thank A Farmer program — which includes educational materials and

speaking and consulting services — was created by Rice’s daughter, Rhonda Ross Swanson, in response to farm kids being bullied by town kids.

There are agricultural education programs for high school students, but no one was doing children’s education,” she said.

The younger children are, the better they learn. Once

Online
For more information, visit thankafarmer.org

they become aware of something, they notice it all the time, and once they develop a good feeling about agriculture and farmers, they never lose it, she said.

After the show, Viola Mulvaney, 7, of Buhl said she learned “farmers help us.”

She also learned how to make a cornstalk out of newspaper and that baseballs are made out of “farm stuff.”

Lynsie Nebecker, 11, of Twin Falls said she liked the magic tricks and how Rice involved the audience. She also learned that money is made out of cotton and baseballs are made with cowhide.

And she can’t wait to tell her mother she’s “pretty as a pig” when she puts on lipstick before church, because (the glycerin in) lipstick comes from pigs.

Trump urged not to withdraw from S. Korea trade agreement

U.S. wheat organizations are urging the Trump administration not to withdraw from the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, or KORUS.

President Donald Trump reportedly threatened to withdraw from the trade pact last weekend.

“We believe it would be irresponsible to unilaterally walk away from this or any other trade agreement,” said Mike Miller, chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates and a Ritzville, Wash., wheat farmer, in a joint press release issued by U.S. Wheat and National Association of Wheat Growers. “Withdrawing raises the specter of retaliation against agricultural exports and creates unnecessary uncertainty in the market.”

Any disruption gives Australia, Canada and Russia an opening to move in and take business away from the rela-



U.S. Wheat Associates Chairman Mike Miller has joined other industry leaders in urging the Trump administration not to withdraw from the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. South Korea is the third-largest importer of U.S. wheat.

tionships U.S. wheat farmers have built in South Korea for more than 60 years, at a time

when growers are struggling to remain profitable, Miller said.



Jeff Mingay of Iron Tree Solutions in Williams, Calif., checks the hydraulic hoses on a tomato harvester. The processing tomato crop is even smaller than anticipated, according to a USDA report.

Smaller tomato harvest may bring short-term pain to growers

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Processing tomato growers in California are bringing in an even smaller crop than they anticipated, which could mean long-term gain but short-term pain in terms of prices.

Contracted production is forecast at 11.5 million tons, or 50 tons per acre, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. That’s 8 percent below the 2018 crop and 2.5 percent below the May forecast.



This summer’s processing tomato crop is even smaller than anticipated, according to a USDA report.

And farms could have difficulty even meeting the revised estimate, said Bruce Rominger, a Winters, Calif., grower and board chairman of the California Tomato Growers Association.

“I think that report is still too optimistic,” Rominger said. “It’s going to be smaller than that.”

The industry was already girding for its lowest contracted production since 2006 as it tries to pare down stockpiles of canned tomatoes still in warehouses after record production in 2014 and 2015.

Planted acreage this season was expected to be 235,000, the lowest since 1988 and a 10 percent decrease from 2016, NASS reported.

Prices to growers have fallen from \$80 per ton in 2015 to \$70.50 per ton this year, Rominger said.

A shorter crop could lead to higher prices as carryover supplies dwindle, but prices for this season were set in advance and won’t change. Even with the May estimate, growers would have needed higher yields this summer to do more than break even, Rominger has said.

“It’s too early to tell how short the crop will be,” he said. “We do have quite a bit of inventory left over. It will certainly help to get rid of the heavy burden of inventory.”

Spring rains delayed planting for many growers, then several heat waves this summer shrank yields. The heat has caused the harvest in the Central Valley to be erratic, interrupting the smooth flow of tomatoes to the canneries, according to NASS.

California leads the world in processing tomato production and accounts for about 94 percent of the processing tomato acreage in the U.S., according to the USDA’s Economic Research Service.

Aquaponic problems lead to lawsuit

Idaho farm alleges improper installation

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Problems with the installation of an aquaponic greenhouse have led an Idaho farm to file a lawsuit against its equipment supplier.

Aquaponic greenhouses aim to provide an integrated system of raising crops and fish, but Garden Creek Farms said the system it bought from Nelson & Pade, an aquaponics firm, had multiple problems.

Nelson & Pade and its contractors, which are also defendants in the lawsuit, were paid to design and build the farm’s aquaponic greenhouse in 2013, according to the complaint.

A boiler and related components used to heat the greenhouse “were non-functioning or otherwise did not conform with industry standards,” requiring modifications that took several weeks, the plaintiff claims.

The greenhouse then experienced cooling problems that drove temperatures inside it as high as 136 degrees Fahrenheit, with the necessary improvements costing \$19,000, the complaint said.

Nelson & Pade also advised the farm to remove a filter against pathogens, resulting in an infestation that forced the farm to “decommission and sterilize the greenhouse and start over,” according to the lawsuit.

Heat exchangers recommended by the defendant also broke due to freezing, leading to further costly repairs, the complaint said.

The lawsuit claims Nelson & Pade violated a contract and warranty, among other accusations, and seeks damages and attorney fees in an unspecified amount above \$10,000.

Capital Press was unable to reach an attorney representing the defendant, but the company has filed an answer denying it was the source of the problems, which were caused by the negligence or other faulty conduct of the farm.