

USDA organic chief McEvoy steps down

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press



USDA Miles McEvoy, deputy administrator of the National Organic Program, is stepping down at the end of September after eight years at the helm.

Miles McEvoy, USDA deputy administrator of the National Organic Program, is stepping down after eight years at the helm to return to his home in Olympia, Wash.

In a Sept. 10 letter to the organic community, McEvoy said he will be leaving the job at the end of September and the program will be in "excellent hands" under the leadership of AMS Acting Administrator Bruce Summers and Acting Deputy Administrator Jenny Tucker.

David Glasgow, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service director of public affairs, said the agency had no fur-

ther details beyond McEvoy's personal letter to the organic community.

"It's been an incredible eight years and I'm honored to have served. I'm taking some time off and then will look for other opportunities to contribute to building the or-

ganic sector," McEvoy said in an email to Capital Press.

In his letter, he said it's been an incredible honor to serve the organic community and an extremely gratifying experience but he's been considering leaving for the last few years.

"I'm 60 now, my grandchildren are growing, and I want to spend more time with them. I'm ready to have a less intense work life and to spend more time biking and birding," he said.

He added he will miss the people at AMS and NOP, who use their talents every day to "protect organic integrity and support the organic community."

He also thanked organic

producers, processors, handlers, traders and consumers for building "an incredibly diverse, prosperous and life-enriching organic agriculture sector."

The Organic Trade Association did not have a comment when contacted, but presented McEvoy with an honorary lifetime membership at its award ceremony Wednesday, Maggie McNeil, OTA director of media relations, said.

In his letter, McEvoy said at his request the organic sector supplied him with a long list of priorities in his first few months on the job and most were accomplished.

"We transformed the NOP into a respected and functional program that is highly

regarded within USDA and around the world," he said.

He highlighted advancements in quality management, communication, certification, accreditation, appeals, enforcement, standards, international activities and an organic database.

But his tenure has not been without controversy, particularly scrutiny from advocacy groups and the media over the agency's handling of the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances in organic production and processing.

In his letter, he said the organic community will face challenges and opportunity in the years ahead and he encouraged the sector to em-

brace diversity in organic farming and processing, support each other in confronting the challenges of water availability and climate change and to not become too reductionist when reviewing materials to be allowed in organic production and processing.

McEvoy, who took the helm at NOP in October 2009, has been working in the organic industry for 25 years. In 1988, he was the first organic inspector for the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Before that, he spent 10 years working on farms, in wild-capture fisheries and in reforestation. He holds a master's degree in entomology from Cornell University.



U.S. Wheat Associates Members of a group representing Taiwanese millers sign a letter of intent to purchase U.S. wheat for two more years on Sept. 13 in Washington, D.C. They were also scheduled to travel to Idaho to sign an agreement.

Taiwan millers renew pledge on U.S. wheat

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Representatives of the fourth largest importer of Idaho wheat were scheduled to sign a pledge Sept. 20 at the Idaho Capitol to continue their grain purchases for two more years.

During the 11 a.m. ceremony, which Gov. Butch Otter said he planned to attend, officials of the Taiwan Flour Millers Association were to sign a letter agreeing to buy 1.8 million metric tons of U.S. wheat in 2018 and 2019 combined.

The Idaho Wheat Commission's vice chairman, Bill Florio, was to sign the letter. The Taiwanese group, which arrived in the U.S. Sept. 12 for an eight-day visit, signed the same pledge in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 13 and visited Montana and North Dakota. The letter of intent is symbolic and is renewed by the Taiwanese millers every two years, based on their projected grain demand. This marks the 11th time leaders with the association, which represents all 20 of Taiwan's millers, have signed a pledge to buy U.S. wheat.

"This is an opportunity for our groups to come together to thank each other for being

a customer and a supplier of wheat and to continue to grow our relationship," said Tereasa Waterman, the Idaho Wheat Commission's information and education manager.

During their time in the Gem State, the Taiwanese representatives planned to tour an artisan bakery in Boise and meet with Idaho wheat growers at a dinner hosted on Kuna grower Richard Durant's farm.

Waterman said 47 percent of Idaho's wheat is exported, and the Taiwanese buy roughly \$470 million in Idaho wheat annually. She said Taiwan buys a lot of hard red wheat from Idaho, but they're most interested in the state's soft white wheat, which they use in products such as cookies, crackers, cakes and noodles.

"The Pacific Northwest soft white is world famous for its high quality and end-use performance," she said.

Mark Fowler, vice president of overseas operations with U.S. Wheat Associates, said Taiwan buys most of its wheat from the Pacific Northwest, which has a freight advantage over other U.S. regions. Fowler said Taiwan is the eighth largest importer of U.S. wheat, averaging about 38 million bushels per year.

Walnut growers set to harvest smaller crop

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Walnut growers in California are expecting a slightly smaller crop this fall, but bigger nut sizes could be a hit in the global marketplace.

Farms in the southern San Joaquin Valley have begun harvesting the earliest varieties in what the National Agricultural Statistics Service expects to be a 650,000-ton statewide crop.

That's a 5 percent drop from last year's record production of 686,000 tons, and survey data shows a record low average nut set of 1,141 per tree, down 19 percent from 2016's average of 1,406, NASS reported.

But the lower nut sets were not a surprise, said Michelle Connelly, the California Walnut Board's executive director.

"It's a good thing because sizes were bigger" in this year's survey, Connelly said.

The in-shell weight per nut and length and width measurements all came in above last year's sizes, according to NASS. Overall, 98.1 percent of in-shell kernels were sound, the agency reported.

Larger, meatier walnuts could be a benefit as the industry is still rebounding from a price slide in 2014 and 2015 that made it difficult for some growers with young orchards to turn a profit.

The price per ton for the 2016-17 shipping year averaged \$1,810, up from \$1,670 in the previous year but still down from the peak of \$3,710 in 2013, according to NASS. The total value of the crop harvested in 2016 came in at \$1.24 billion, up from just over \$1 billion for the 2015 crop.

Growers have worked in recent years to maximize quality to get the most out of softening prices amid three straight record crops. Farm advisers have offered tips on producing high-quality, lighter kernels, such as not watering too much or too little,



Tim Hearden/Capital Press File Walnuts pour into a bin to be trucked to a processing plant. Growers are expecting a slightly smaller crop this year with larger nut sizes, according to a government report.

guarding against insects and trying to harvest near the beginning of hull split.

The larger sizes could be attractive in export markets where in-shell nuts are popular, Connelly said.

"It's certainly good news for export markets," she said.

Walnut harvests typical-

ly ramp up in late September and continue through October. This year's harvest is about a week late because of weather, Connelly said.

Walnut orchards received adequate chilling hours while sopping up record amounts of rain last winter and spring,

NASS noted. Some orchards were saturated for several weeks.

In the summer, a series of heat waves pushed temperatures in some parts of the Central Valley near or above 110 degrees, prompting growers to manage sunburn with kaolin particle films.

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