

Farmers plug into energy-saving incentives

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Being reimbursed for energy-saving measures is easier than most farmers and greenhouse owners think.

In 2016, the Energy Trust of Oregon provided incentives of \$1.25 million for 415 irrigation projects and \$150,000 in incentives for 18 greenhouse projects.

“On top of these incentives there are energy and water savings,” Susan Jowaiszas of Energy Trust said, “and those go on and on year after year.”

Six different greenhouse measures are available for customers of Northwest Natural Gas, Cascade Natural Gas or Avista.

“A great one is replacing non-infrared greenhouse covering with infrared-transmitting polycarbonate covering,”



Energy Trust of Oregon

A center pivot system with goosenecks, drops and low-flow sprinkler heads. Such water- and energy-saving improvements can save up to 50 percent on energy costs and are eligible for incentives from the Energy Trust of Oregon.

Energy Trust Ag and Industrial Outreach Manager Ulrike Mengelberg said. “We pay 2 cents per square foot — just about the difference in cost between a non-IR poly versus an IR poly covering, and the

energy savings on that is immense.”

The new unit heater rebate has also been popular, as is the greenhouse controller. Alerting features on the new controllers take some of



A pot-in-pot drip irrigation system at Alpha Nursery in Salem, Ore. Drip irrigation system conversions can save up to 40 percent on energy costs and are eligible for Energy Trust of Oregon incentives.

the anxiety out of greenhouse management. For instance, the operator can receive a text message when the temperature is off.

“It’s just one of those measures that makes a lot of sense; it controls your heating and your cooling and your venting,” Mengelberg said.

For those converting to under-bench heat, whether in the floor or directly underneath the plants, Energy Trust offers \$1.05 per foot on new tubing.

On the farm, Energy Trust offers rebates and custom incentives for irrigation system improvements to customers of

Portland General Electric and Pacific Power. Calculated incentives require pre-approval. The efficiency a new system brings is reimbursed at 25 cents per kilowatt-hour saved. Examples include replacing a wheel line with a center pivot or replacing a big gun with drip irrigation.

Another big upgrade for irrigation is replacing an oversized irrigation pump.

“Maybe they have the 100-horsepower pump that Grandpa put in and now the grandkids have better irrigation systems and only need a 50 horsepower,” Mengelberg

said. “We can help them pay for their new pump.”

Energy Trust’s incentive covers up to 40 percent of the cost of a new variable frequency drive. This allows farmers to use their pump more efficiently. Growers can also use their smart phones to remote start the new units.

Incentives are offered for just about anything that saves water because that means saving electricity, too.

“It’s easy — they just fill out the rebate form,” Mengelberg said. “There are about 14 different irrigation components they can get a rebate on.”

“We had one farmer who sent in a year’s worth of invoices on Dec. 27; it came in as a 55-page fax,” Mengelberg said. “We couldn’t use a third of them because they were too old — rebate forms are due within 6 months of purchase and before the end of the calendar year — but we ended up sending him a \$20,000 incentive check for things like nozzles and gaskets and sprinkler heads. It can really add up.”

For more information, go to www.energytrust.org/ag.

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