

Washington



Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

Opponents of a proposal to build a coal export terminal on the Columbia River wave signs at a public hearing May 24, 2016, in Longview, Wash. Washington Farm Bureau CEO John Stuhlmiller says the Department of Ecology has set a bad precedent by denying the project a permit to fill wetlands for reasons unrelated to water quality.

Washington Farm Bureau: Nixing coal dock bad omen

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington Farm Bureau CEO John Stuhlmiller said Monday that he was disappointed but not surprised that the Department of Ecology denied a key permit for a coal export terminal on the Columbia River in Longview.

The project's purpose, shipping Powder River Basin coal to Asia, probably will doom it with Gov. Jay Inslee's climate change-conscious administration, he said.

"The fact that you're moving coal is heavy on everybody's mind," Stuhlmiller said. "Personally, I think it's probably a legacy issue for the administration."

The Farm Bureau has supported Millennium Bulk Terminals since the coal company began applying for permits more than five years ago.

The Farm Bureau says that new rail lines and docks in the state will help all exporters, including farmers.

The proposal suffered a major setback Sept. 26 when Ecology denied a permit that Millennium needs under the federal Clean Water Act to fill wetlands and dredge the Columbia River. Millennium complained Ecology was biased against the project and said that it will appeal

to the Environmental and Land Use Hearings Office, a state board.

An alliance of business groups has organized a campaign to send emails to Ecology to demonstrate public support for the terminal, and the Farm Bureau has asked its members to join in.

Ecology didn't mention climate change in its 19-page denial letter to Millennium, but Ecology has said it would hold Millennium responsible for increased carbon emissions in countries that take the coal.

Ecology's stated reasons for denying the permit — one of about 20 state, federal and local permits the project needs — weren't confined to wetlands or the river. Ecology's concerns included noise, air pollution, traffic at rail crossings and crowded shipping lanes.

Ecology Director Maia Bellon said in a written statement there were "simply too many unavoidable and negative impacts for the project to move forward."

Many of the reasons given by Ecology were related to how the project would affect a neighborhood across a state highway from Longview's heavily industrialized waterfront. A study found an influx of locomotives would raise cancer rates, according to Ecology.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Randy Fortenbery, a small grains economist at Washington State University, says storing grain is riskier for farmers this year with flat wheat prices.

Economist: Flat wheat price means storage 'risky'

Stocks down, domestic demand remains same

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Storing grain is a risky economic move for wheat growers this fall, a grain economist says, since prices aren't likely to go up before the end of the year.

"I'm not expecting (farmers) to get rewarded for sitting on grain another two, three or four months," said Randy Fortenbery, Washington State University small grains economist.

If prices don't go up, farmers cannot be compensated for their storage costs,

Fortenbery said.

Storage typically doesn't pay off for farmers in fall and winter, he said, but it tends to pay off later in the spring, when challenges to planting a spring crop or a large reduction in spring wheat acreage can occur, he said.

"If you're just sort of trying to hold your grain to get through the end of the year for tax purposes or whatever, I don't think you're going to get paid for that, given what the current market conditions look like," Fortenbery said.

Asked if he's recommending selling, Fortenbery said every grower's situation varies, and some individual markets could offer a storage incentive. It depends on how much risk the farmer wants to take.

"This is one of the more risky years to speculate on storage," he said. "If you're not willing to be a high risk-taker, this probably isn't a good year to store."

Fortenbery expects prices on the Portland market to remain in the \$5.45-\$5.50 per bushel range through the end of December.

"That's a pretty tough price" compared to growers' cost of production, Fortenbery said. Some farmers may be near their break-even point.

U.S. wheat stocks recently were 2.25 billion bushels, down 11 percent from the same date in 2016. The reduced stock is part of the reason prices are higher than they were a year ago, but farmers shouldn't expect it to mean prices will go higher,

Fortenbery said.

A combination of lower production and domestic demand that stayed the same means some of that demand will be met out of inventory, Fortenbery said.

The USDA expects exports to be down by 75 million bushels compared to a year ago, from 1.06 billion bushels, but still higher than 2015-2016, which was a low point, Fortenbery said. Even though exports are off, the total carry-out of bushels in stock will be reduced.

While the wheat stock level by itself doesn't suggest higher prices, other things could happen to boost them, such as a smaller Australian crop than expected and a weaker U.S. dollar boosting exports, Fortenbery said.

Labor contractor fined \$105,000 for no license

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

OTHELLO, Wash. — A farm labor contractor has been fined \$105,000 by the state Department of Labor & Industries for allegedly operating without a license.

The fine, issued to Agri Aide of Othello, is the largest ever levied against a farm labor contractor by the department, a department news release says.

Marivel Brunetti, co-owner of Agri Aide with Jose Luis Brunetti, told Capital Press the fine wasn't for operating without a license and that she was trying to take care of the matter with L&I right then and couldn't talk.

The penalty is based on the firm's history of repeated violations, L&I said. Agri Aide did not file an appeal by an Oct. 6 deadline but made a \$2,000 payment toward the infraction, L&I said.

Agri Aide operated without a license in 2012, 2013 and 2015 and received maximum fines in those cases, the news release states. Violations included forging a contractor license in 2012 and failing to tell workers about conditions of employment in 2015, L&I said.

Investigation of the latest case began in May based on a complaint. It involved Agri Aide workers transplanting chili plants at Williamson Farms in Quincy.

Williamson Farms hadn't checked the Agri Aide license since 2006 and said it would no longer work with any unlicensed contractor, L&I said.

Tisa Soeteber, L&I agricultural employment specialist, said farmers should check farm labor contractor licenses annually before using them, that the Farm Labor Contractor Act protects workers' rights and limits farmers' liability for using unlicensed contractors.

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