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Idaho

Decision expected soon on proposed Dry Creek Valley petition

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A court ruling is expected soon on a proposed petition that seeks to halt an \$80 million planned development in the Dry Creek Valley north of Boise.

The development is opposed by some farmers and other residents. It would be built on 350 acres of irrigated farmland and 1,050 acres of grazing land.

A group called the Dry

Creek Valley Coalition is trying to stop the development and save the farm ground. To do that, they hope to use a section of Idaho Code that allows citizens to put a county decision that is legislative in nature to a vote during a special election.

After Ada County Clerk Christopher Rich rejected an initial petition to start the referendum process, Dry Creek Valley Coalition founder Stephanie Rael, a local farm hand, filed a lawsuit that seeks

to force Rich to file the petition.

The issue has ended up in the courtroom of District Judge Jonathan Medema.

Rael has asked Medema to issue a writ ordering Rich to file the petition, which would begin the process that could result in a special election.

Coalition members want to ask voters to overturn a Feb. 21 ordinance passed by the Ada County Board of Commissioners that made amendments to the development plan.

They say that because it made changes to the original 2010 plan approved by the county, it is legislative in nature and subject to the referendum process.

Rael's petition met all the requirements of Idaho Code, said Brian Ertz, an attorney representing the coalition.

"My client is entitled to the filing of that petition," he said Oct. 20 during a packed hearing in Medema's courtroom.

Attorneys for Boise Hunter Homes, the developer, have asked Medema to issue a writ

ordering Rich not to file the petition.

BHH attorney Geoffrey Wardle said the ordinance passed by the commissioners is quasi-judicial and not legislative and thus not subject to a referendum.

"The key issue is whether or not Ordinance 864 is in fact eligible for a petition for referendum," he said. He said the ordinance is a "technical update and a revision of an ordinance that was adopted a long time before."

"The reality is that ordinance is quasi-judicial" and a clerk has no authority to file a petition for a referendum on an act that is not legislative in nature, Wardle said.

BHH owner Jim Hunter has told Capital Press that all farmers and landowners in Idaho should be concerned about this case because if the referendum were to move forward, people could use that process to undo any land-use decisions made by city councils and commissions.

Wet weather prevented 114,000 acres from being planted in Idaho

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho farmers were prevented from planting an unusually large number of acres this year due to soggy conditions that hampered their ability to get into their fields.

Across the state, growers claimed a total of 114,000 "prevented planting" acres in 2017, according to the Idaho Farm Service Agency.

Farmers can be eligible for prevented planting insurance when weather-related events stop them from planting a crop.

Those 114,000 prevented planting acres are "significantly more than we've had in recent years," said Idaho FSA Farm Program Manager Jeff Mitchell.

There are about 20,000 prevented planting acres in Idaho during a typical year, he said.

Mitchell said most of those acres couldn't be planted because fields were too soggy.

"It was just too wet," said North Idaho farmer Robert Blair, who was unable to plant about 150 acres this year, most of it winter wheat.

Almost 69,000 of Idaho's total prevented planting acres this year were wheat.

"There were plenty of spring wheat acres that didn't get planted this year," said "Genesee" Joe Anderson, a North Idaho grower. "It was too wet for some farmers."

The prevented planting acres included 18,000 acres of dry beans, which include chickpeas, 8,300 acres of canola, 6,500 acres of lentils, 2,300 acres of dry peas and 1,000 acres of potatoes.

North Idaho farmers were hardest hit, as most of the state's chickpeas, lentils and dry peas are grown there. The majority of the wheat acres not planted this year were in that region as well.

Weather conditions in North Idaho were particularly rough this year, Blair said. A heavy snowfall resulted in a lot of moisture following melt-off and then a late, cool spring was followed by heavy rains.

"It was a tough year around here," he said.

Farmers who receive prevented planting insurance get a percentage of their crop insurance payment based partly on their history of planted acres.

"It never makes them whole but it does help (reimburse) them for their costs," Mitchell said.

Blair said the payment "is enough money just to cover costs. You're not making money off of it."

He said growers have a lot of costs associated with their farm ground, whether or not a crop is planted. That could include turning it over in the fall, fertilizer, chemical applications and rent or taxes.

"Nobody wants to take prevented planting. There's no farmer in the world who doesn't want to grow a crop," Blair said. "It's a way to help growers absorb a very difficult year."

Ag production value down 6 percent in 2016; rebound likely

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The total value of Idaho agricultural production decreased 6 percent last year compared to 2015 and it was down 18 percent compared to 2014.

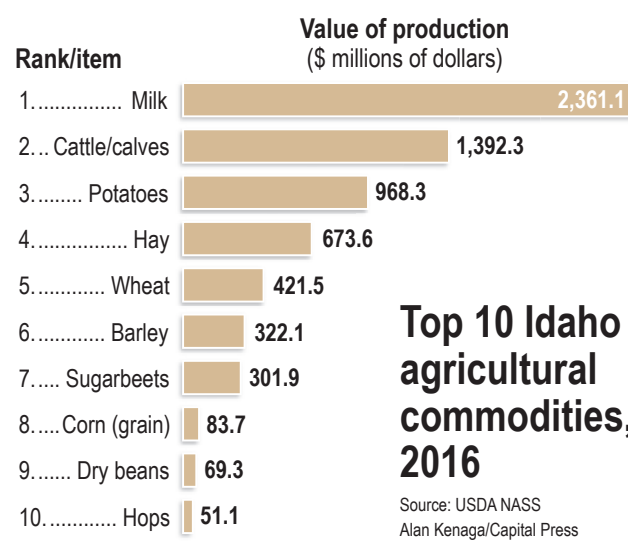
But farm economists expect a slight increase in 2017.

Idaho agricultural production totaled \$7.25 billion in 2016, down from \$7.75 billion in 2015 and \$8.8 billion in 2014, according to USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

While the value of milk, Idaho's top farm commodity, increased 0.2 percent to \$2.36 billion in 2016, the value of several other of the state's main farm commodities was down, some significantly.

The value of cattle and calves fell 17 percent last year to \$1.39 billion, hay production was valued at \$674 million, also down 17 percent, and wheat value was down 6 percent to \$422 million.

The value of potato production increased 6 percent to \$968 million, and spuds remained the state's highest



Top 10 Idaho agricultural commodities, 2016

Source: USDA NASS
Alan Kenagal/Capital Press



Sean Ellis/Capital Press File

Wheat was the No. 5 crop in Idaho, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. The total value of Idaho agricultural production in 2016 fell 6 percent compared to 2015 and 18 percent compared to 2014. But economists expect Idaho ag production value to be up slightly this year.

valued field crop.

Barley production was down 2 percent to \$322 million and sugar beet production was up slightly at \$301 million.

Hops entered the top 10 of Idaho farm commodities for the first time and in a big way, NASS valued Idaho hop production at \$51 million in 2016, up 66 percent from 2015 and 168 percent from 2014.

"Idaho has made a big move in hops," said University of Idaho Agricultur-

al Economist Garth Taylor. "The strength of the hops market has had an amazing effect on Idaho."

Corn for grain production was valued at \$84 million, a 23 percent increase over 2015, and jumped one spot to No. 8.

"The growth in Idaho's grain corn production was significant in 2016, largely due to supportive weather conditions resulting in a bumper crop of corn..." Doug Robison, Northwest Farm Credit Services' senior

vice president for agriculture in Western Idaho, told Capital Press in an email.

Dry edible beans, which include chickpeas, took the No. 9 spot with \$69 million in production, down less than a percent.

Onions dropped out of the top 10 last year with \$28 million in production, a 44 percent decrease.

With the price of many of Idaho's main farm commodities up slightly in 2017, agricultural economists expect Idaho farm production value

to rise this year.

"The value of Idaho's ag commodities will increase in 2017," Robison said. "While producer margins and profitability remain a challenge in many industries, the prices for most of Idaho's ag commodities have been higher in 2017 than the previous two years."

Taylor believes Idaho ag production value will be up slightly to unchanged this year, and UI Agricultural Economist Ben Eborn believes it will be up slightly.

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