

# Washington

# More farmworker housing planned

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

CASHMERE, Wash. — The farm labor association WAFLA plans to build farmworker housing in Cashmere while continuing projects in Okanogan and Chelan.

Pear growers in the Wenatchee Valley, from Wenatchee through Cashmere to Leavenworth, increasingly struggle with too few domestic workers to tend and harvest crops.

They have been turning to WAFLA to help them hire H-2A-visa foreign guest-workers and would hire more if they had more housing that the federal program requires them to provide.

“A lot of small growers around Dryden and in the valley need housing. Brender Creek is full,” said Dan Fazio, WAFLA’s director in Olympia.

Brender Creek is a \$6 million, 200-bed migrant farmworker housing facility in Cashmere constructed



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

Brender Creek migrant farmworker housing in Cashmere, Wash., shortly before it opened in 2015. The facility is mostly full now, and more farmworker housing is being planned.

with state and private funding and opened by the Washington Growers League in May 2015. The League also operates the 270-bed Sage Bluff facility near Malaga, south of Wenatchee, that it built in 2010.

The League reserves about 10 percent of the beds at both facilities each season for walk-in individual workers who pay \$8 per night to

stay. The rest is full most of the time.

The state and Chelan County are working to extend state funding and county operation of the 380-bed migrant farmworker camp in Monitor, just west of Wenatchee, through 2019, said Cathy Mulhall, county administrator.

Preliminary planning calls for groups of growers to own a 150- to 200-bed facility at

Cashmere that would be developed by WAFLA with private money and managed by WAFLA.

State grants — used at Brender Creek, Sage Bluff and by the League for a project in Mattawa and WAFLA for projects in Chelan and Okanogan — are restricted to H-2A and domestic migrant seasonal workers only, Fazio said.

The Cashmere property owners prefer private funding because it allows them more options such as housing local and year-round workers, he said.

The plan is to remove orchard to make room for the housing after the 2018 harvest and have it ready for use in 2019, Fazio said.

Meanwhile, WAFLA is open to more privately funded projects of 150 to 250 beds each in the next several years and is proceeding with plans in Okanogan and Chelan, Fazio said.

WAFLA was awarded a \$3 million state Department

of Commerce grant last December to build 166 beds of seasonal farmworker housing in the city of Okanogan. WAFLA planned to kick in \$750,000, break ground in May or June and be ready for occupancy in spring of 2018.

The project has been delayed by zoning changes taking longer than expected. Now the hope is to be open for the apple and pear harvest next year but maybe not for cherries, Fazio said.

WAFLA and others will shoulder costs of just under \$4 million, he said.

The site is 20 acres along the Okanogan River in the north end of town. Zoning allows a second phase of 106 beds for a total of 272 beds.

In Chelan, WAFLA plans to build an 180-bed facility near Chelan Fruit Cooperative’s new packing plant No. 1. Grower groups have donated nearly \$500,000 in land and other services for that project and WAFLA has applied for a \$3 million Commerce grant, Fazio said.

The grant could be awarded this December but is in doubt because the Legislature has not passed a capital budget, he said. The plan is for construction in 2018 for a spring 2019 opening, he said.

The Growers League has a \$3 million grant application pending for 192 beds for the \$5.3 million Phase 3 of its Mattawa housing.

Construction on the first two housing units of the 190-bed Phase 1 just began a couple of weeks ago, a year behind the original schedule do to utility issues with the city of Mattawa, said Cody Chrismer, League housing program manager. Phase 2 is another 190 beds, and eventually the League hopes to have more phases for a total of 2,000 beds, Chrismer said.

Even if Congress changes or replaces the H-2A program, farmworker housing will be needed, Fazio said. It’s difficult for the private sector to invest in housing when occupancy is seasonal, he said.

## Apples top crop, but varieties in ‘turmoil’

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

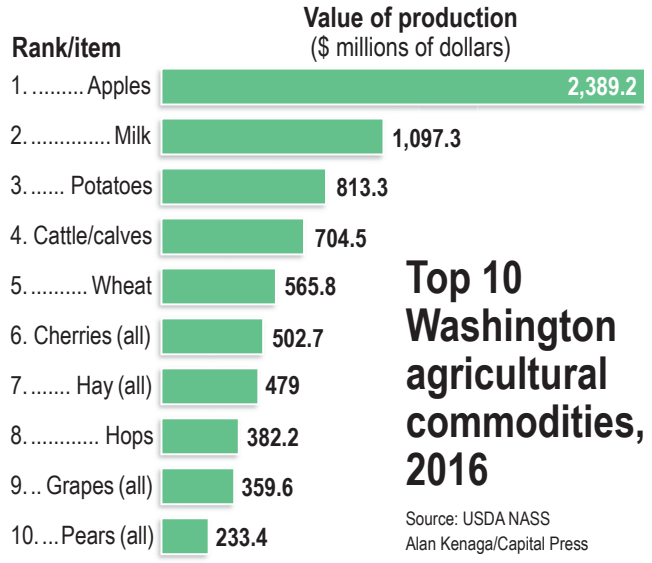
OLYMPIA — Agricultural production in Washington dropped 1 percent to \$10.6 billion in 2016 with apples as the top value commodity for the 12th year in a row, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Apples represented 22 percent of the total agricultural value at \$2.39 billion, up 3 percent from 2015 but down 4 percent from the record high of \$2.48 billion in 2012.

Those numbers belie the “terrific turmoil going on within the different varieties” in the industry, said Desmond O’Rourke, retired Washington State University agricultural economist and apple analyst in Pullman.

Honeycrisp, Granny Smith, Cripps Pink and Gala, along with about a dozen proprietary varieties, are carrying the industry while Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Braeburn, Jonagold and Cameo tend to generate losses for growers but usually not for packing houses, O’Rourke said.

The proprietary, club or managed varieties are controlled by individual companies and are not open to all growers. Established club varieties including Jazz, Envy, Pacific Rose, Ambrosia, Kanzi, Kiku, Autumn Glo-



ry, Lady Alice, Pinata, Rave, Koru, Smitten and Opal each range from 50,000 to 2 million, 40-pound boxes annually in volume and are doing well while others are coming along, O’Rourke said.

“Honeycrisp is durable. No one figured it would get to 10 million boxes and still be selling at the price its selling,” he said.

Honeycrisp is estimated at 12.4 million boxes for 2017 and usually sells at \$50 to \$60 per box.

The industry is hopeful the new Cosmic Crisp apple will be a big money maker as it becomes established in 2020 and beyond.

The Oct. 13 report from the NASS Northwest regional

office in Olympia lists milk in second place, after apples, at \$1.1 billion, down 3 percent from 2015 and at its lowest value since 2010.

Potatoes moved up 5 percent and one place to third at a record high \$813 million. Cattle and calves, valued at \$704 million, fell one spot to fourth, down 17 percent.

Wheat completed the top five commodities at \$657 million, up 9 percent.

## Otto top wheat variety in Wash. survey

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

The Washington Grain Commission has released its survey of wheat varieties planted for the 2017 harvest season, and Otto came out on top.

The top five winter wheat varieties were Washington State University’s Otto with 221,975 acres; Syngenta’s SY Ovation with 189,244 acres; WSU Clearfield variety Curiosity CL+ with 155,421 acres; ORCF-102 with 126,593 acres and WestBred’s WB1529 with 64,552 acres.

Commission CEO Glen Squires said farmers plant varieties with good agronomic characteristics, good emergence, disease packages and good yields. The survey helps identify what’s available for growers, the industry and overseas buyers.

Other varieties move up as time progresses and farmers get more comfortable with them, he said.

Arron Carter, WSU winter wheat breeder, said Otto is doing well across environments.

“It’s one of those varieties people can plant and rely on from year to year,” he said.

In 2016, SY Ovation led the pack with 248,368 acres, followed by Otto with 221,398 acres; ORCF-102 with 208,608 acres; Curiosity CL+ with 144,675 acres; WSU variety Xerpha with 118,720 acres and WB1529 with 71,184 acres.

In 2017, soft white winter club wheat Crescent, from the USDA Agricultural Research Service, rose to 98,484 acres over Bruehl, with 55,574 acres.

Last year, Bruehl had the top spot, with 188,030 acres to Crescent’s 60,944 acres. Squires believes the change was a reflection of concerns over falling numbers, the quality test used to measure starch damage. Bruehl is susceptible to starch damage, but typically a top variety, he said.

For hard red winter wheats, Keldin came in first with 100,911 acres. Limagrain Cereal Seeds’ LCS Jet had 97,830 acres, followed by SY Clearstone 2CL with 50,006 acres and

Farnum with 30,444 acres.

In 2016, Keldin was tops with 99,101 acres, followed by SY Clearstone 2CL with 31,117 acres; LCS Jet with 25,594 acres; LCS Azimut with 19,025 acres and Farnum with 17,880 acres.

Louise led the top five soft white common spring wheats in 2017 with 56,368 acres, followed by WB6121 with 36,623 acres; Diva with 18,384 acres; WB-1035 CL+ with 18,280 acres and Whit with 17,199 acres.

In 2016, WB6121 led the pack with 66,846 acres, followed by Louise with 53,712 acres; Diva with 37,158 acres; Whit with 34,661 acres and WB-1035 CL+ with 22,823 acres.

JD was the only soft white club spring wheat with 21,477 acres in 2017, down from 22,041 acres in 2016.

Hard white spring wheat totaled 389 acres, with 219 planted to WB-Hartline and 171 planted to Dayn in 2017. That’s down from 2016’s 1,114 acres, with 820 planted to WB-Hartline and 294 planted to Dayn.

## Yakima Basin reservoirs higher than normal

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Yakima Basin irrigators finished their season with more water in their mountain reservoirs than in the past two years and a bonus of 15 to 20 inches of rain and snow last weekend.

The storm, starting Thursday, Oct. 19, and ending Sunday, Oct. 22, brought 15 inches of precipitation in the mountains feeding the basin and 20 inches of snow in the highest elevations, said Joe Gutierrez, assistant river operator of the Yakima system for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Yakima.

“It was a good event. More than I expected. We’ve had larger in the past but this was the first of more to come we hope. It’s a good start for the water year,” Gutierrez said.

The Oct. 1-24 precipitation for the basin is 42.24 inches or 325 percent of average and 241 percent of the month’s average, he said.

It added 53,064 acre-feet of water to the basin’s five mountain reservoirs in five days, bringing the total to 361,077 acre-feet, which is 134 percent of average storage for this time of year.

Irrigation diversions ended Oct. 20 with the collective

low point of the five reservoirs most likely reached three days earlier at 306,840 acre-feet, said Chris Lynch, the Bureau’s Yakima Basin hydrologist.

“That should be the low point unless we get dry after this rain,” he said.

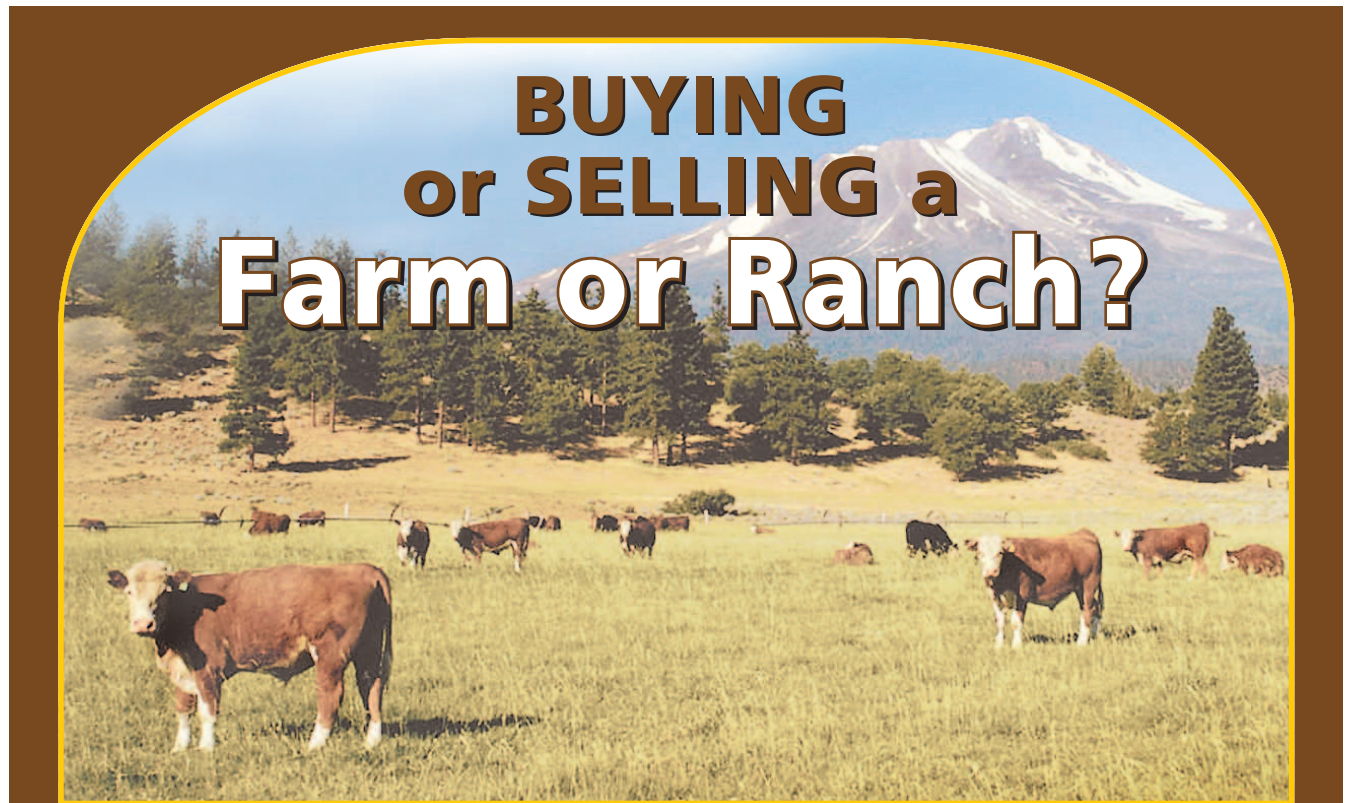
The low a year ago was 244,500 acre-feet on Oct. 12. Two years ago it was 107,323 acre-feet following the 2015 drought. The 30-year average low is 261,000 acre-feet.

Full pool of Keechelus, Kachess, Cle Elum, Rimrock and Bumping reservoirs is 1,065,400 acre-feet and is usually obtained before irrigation season begins in June.

The system serves 464,000 acres, most of it farmland, along 175 miles of the Yakima River in the Kittitas and Yakima valleys.

The long-term outlook calls for a La Nina weather pattern which Lynch said usually is good news. It should mean normal to above-average precipitation and temperatures on the cooler side, he said.

“It should mean a typical winter of normal snowpack and normal is good. But nature can always throw a curve ball. I’m hopeful we will be fine for the next irrigation season,” he said.



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