

Washington

WSDA starts writing rule to fine unapproved hemp

Department seeks to clarify its authority

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington State Department of Agriculture has started to develop rules to fine unlicensed hemp growers and processors, an exercise made necessary by state legislators getting ahead of federal law.

WSDA also may draw up penalties for violating the conditions of state-issued hemp licenses. Currently, the department can take away licenses, but not levy fines.

WSDA hasn't yet come up with suggested penalties and plans to circulate a preliminary proposal before making a formal proposal, officials said. The department expects to have fines in place by June.

The rule-writing was occasioned by the Legislature this year removing hemp from the state's list of controlled substances, a move that WSDA warned could cause confusion by casting doubt on the department's authority to stop unlicensed hemp cultivation, which would violate federal law.

Lawmakers followed up by directing the department to develop penalties for the unlicensed growing of hemp.

A WSDA spokesman said the department doesn't know of any unlicensed hemp farming or processing taking place.

Four licensed growers planted 180 acres of hemp this summer, the first year of legal plantings, according to WSDA.

WSDA has issued seven hemp-related licenses, including two to Washington State Univer-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

Hemp licensed by the Washington State Department of Agriculture is planted June 6 in Central Washington. The department is starting to develop penalties for growing hemp without a license.

sity researchers. The licenses include strict requirements meant to keep the state program within federal law.

Congress authorized state-supervised hemp programs in the 2014 Farm Bill, but has not removed hemp from the federal list of controlled substances. The Drug

Enforcement Administration gave WSDA permission to bring hemp seeds into the state to plant.

The department has collected about \$8,100 from licenses and fees. The department has requested \$287,000 in general taxes to support the fledgling program for two more years.

Current federal law does not distinguish between hemp and marijuana. Legislation to legalize hemp has been before Congress for more than a decade. Another bill introduced this year would allow hemp farmers to irrigate with federal water. Neither bill has received a hearing yet.

New Shepherd's Grain general manager aims to boost sales

Swenson also promises more transparency to farmer-owners

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Mark Swenson, the new general manager of Shepherd's Grain, says his primary job is increasing flour sales at the niche company.

Swenson began in his new position Oct. 23.

Shepherd's Grain is owned by Northwest wheat farmers and focuses on no-till farming practices. It uses the cost of production to set its prices.



Mark Swenson

"I think my biggest priority is to move flour," Swenson told the Capital Press. "The company in the last several years has been fairly level with the amount of flour we've sold. The concept and culture of sustainability is not going away. I think the opportunity is great to go out hard, hit the road and sell flour."

Art Schultheis, chairman of the Shepherd's Grain board of directors and a Colton, Wash., wheat farmer, agreed that sales were flat, which is the reason for the leadership change.

"We think he will bring a wealth of experience, not only on the management side, but the contacts he has throughout the industry," Schultheis said of Swenson.

Swenson previously was corporate director of purchasing initiatives and western regional vice president for Bon Appetit Management Co., where he worked for 27 years.

He also served on the board of directors for the voluntary certification program Food Alliance for more than 12 years. The alliance bases certification on sustainable agricultural practices. All Shepherd's Grain farmers are certified, he said.

"It is one of the toughest certifications to attain," he said.

Swenson was familiar with Shepherd's Grain, as Bon Appetit focused on supporting local, family farms and sustainability. Bon Appetit was one of the wheat company's first customers, he said.

"It made so much sense for us to support that program in every way," he said.

When Shepherd's Grain co-founder Karl Kupers asked him to recommend someone for the job, Swenson expressed interest.

Swenson also plans to provide more direct communication with the company's farmer-owners.

"I was in charge of about \$100 million worth of business at Bon Appetit in my region, and you can't do that without being transparent," he said.

Schultheis said Shepherd's Grain aims to bring in more farmers, but first must ensure its existing owner-growers are maximizing their production. When the demand exceeds farmers' ability to produce, it will expand membership, he said.

Thirty-five family farmers make up Shepherd's Grain's grower base, primarily in eastern Washington and northern Idaho.

Online

<http://www.shepherdsgrain.com/>

Washington farmer to pay \$80,000 to settle with Ecology

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A northwest Washington farmer has agreed to pay \$80,000 to settle allegations he illegally watered raspberries and failed to supply accurate irrigation records for his blueberries, the Department of Ecology says.

Gurjant "George" Sandhu also must install meters that will automatically transmit to Ecology his water use and allow officials to inspect his property for the next three years, according to Ecology.

The settlement reduces the \$102,000 fine that Ecology levied against the Whatcom County farmer in December. The settlement will save Ecology time and money and achieve more than a fine alone, Ecology watermaster Kasey Cykler said.

"Farmers in Whatcom County work hard to obtain legal water rights. It's our responsibility



Washington State University

Red raspberries hang from the vine. Washington berry farmer Gurjant "George" Sandhu has agreed to pay an \$80,000 fine and install water meters to settle allegations that he illegally irrigated red raspberries.

to keep a level playing field," Cykler said in a written statement.

Efforts to contact Sandhu or

his attorney for comment were unsuccessful.

Ecology said Sandhu, doing business as Crystal View

Raspberry Farm, irrigated most of a 220-acre raspberry farm near Bellingham for at least two years, though he had water rights to irrigate only 35 acres.

Ecology also said Sandhu failed to submit accurate water-use data for a 120-acre blueberry farm near Ferndale, despite being required to by an earlier settlement.

Sandhu appealed the fine to the Pollution Control Hearings Board, which has accepted the new settlement with Ecology.

If Sandhu violates the terms of the settlement in the next three years, he will be required to pay the original fine and could face additional penalties, according to Ecology.

Sandhu is working to secure water rights for his raspberry farm, according to Ecology.

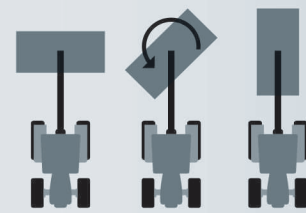
The meters must be installed prior to the 2018 irrigation season, according to the settlement.



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