

Grass seed market strong heading into 2018

DLF Pickseed CEO says prices to remain healthy

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM, Ore. — Grass seed farmers are heading into 2018 on a strong footing, as world supply is largely balanced with demand, according to a global seed marketing executive.

“We don’t have to worry about prices dropping dramatically this year or next year,” said Claus Ikjaer, president and CEO of DLF Pickseed.

The market outlook is positive despite the strong U.S. dollar, which generally hinders exports of U.S. products, Ikjaer said. For the same amount of money, foreign buyers can now purchase about 80 pounds of U.S. seed compared to 100 pounds in 2011.

Traditionally, strong grass seed prices would spur more production, but that largely didn’t happen when other commodity prices were healthy and those crops were competing for acreage, he said.

“Production is really not going up as it used to do,” Ikjaer said Dec. 5 during the Oregon Seed Growers League annual conference.

Now that commodity crop prices are weak, grass seed



Grass seed is harvested from an Oregon field. Claus Ikjaer, president and CEO of DLF Pickseed, sees stable grass seed prices heading into 2018.

growers can be expected to respond by expanding acreage, he said. However, in Oregon, farmers have increasingly dedicated land to hazelnuts.

It’s estimated that Oregon’s grass seed acreage dropped from 525,000 acres in 2006 to about 375,000 acres in 2010, when prices were suffering due to the housing downturn and financial crisis, he said.

Grass seed production has since recovered to about 400,000 acres in 2017 and will likely remain flat next year, Ikjaer said.

In the U.S., three years of lower grass seed yields have depleted stocks of certain species, leaving dealers struggling to meet demand, he said. “That’s starting to create some issues for us.”

High prices are increasingly driving companies to use seed coatings, Ikjaer said.

Such coatings add weight to seed but they can also improve germination by retaining water and making nutrients readily available.

Annual ryegrass is the most commonly exported species, representing nearly 46 percent of the export market, and China is the top destination for grass seed.

“China is by far the most important market for us at the moment,” Ikjaer said.

While Europe is the second major destination for grass seed, the continent is largely self-sufficient and it’s been importing less seed in recent years, he said.

For example, exports of

U.S. annual ryegrass to Europe have dropped more than a third since the 2013-2014 marketing year.

Poland’s production of the species has compensated for the decline, since U.S. prices are too high to fill the demand, Ikjaer said.

Ikjaer urged the U.S. industry to more accurately monitor its grass seed acreage, which would help better project available supplies.

In Denmark and Poland, for example, farmers are required to report acreage to the government, but in the U.S., surveys are voluntary and therefore not as dependable, he said.

“We don’t have reliable data,” Ikjaer said.

Hemp on hiatus as WSDA asks for money

House ag chairman: Simplify program

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington’s hemp program, not yet a year old, has stopped issuing licenses because of a budget deficit.

Restarting the program for a second growing season may depend on whether state lawmakers are willing to invest \$287,000 into nurturing a hemp industry that faces high regulatory costs.

“Without the additional appropriations, we would need to shut down the program,” state Department of Agriculture spokesman Hector Castro said. “Without the funding, it’s not a sustainable program.”

The program’s costs are largely driven by the fact that hemp, according to federal law, is a federally controlled substance and can be legally grown and processed only under state supervision. Oversight varies from state to state. Washington chose a high level of control, intended to build a sturdy hemp industry not vulnerable to federal intervention.

The cost of closely regulating hemp, however, has far surpassed the fees collected from growers and processors. While some other states, including Oregon, have registered hundreds of hemp businesses, Washington has issued only seven licenses, collecting \$8,139 in fees and spending \$146,000 on oversight. The licenses must be renewed annually.

WSDA says the \$287,000 in general tax funds would restart the program and see it through a second summer. WSDA receives relatively little money from the general fund. Many of its programs are supported by fees paid by growers. “To increase fees to a level to sustain the program would not be feasible for an industry this young,” Castro said.

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Brian Blake, D-Aberdeen, said that he would be interested in simply treating hemp like any other crop, eliminating the need for growers to support a state program.

“Let’s make this as least complicated as possible and let people farm. I don’t think I’m worried about the federal government. I’m worried about innovating and growing this opportunity for Washington farmers,” he said.

“This is not marijuana. It’s an ag crop,” Blake said. “At some point, somebody needs to go tell the feds to go pound sand.”

Some 33 states have approved licensed hemp cultivation, but no state has gone as far as simply allowing it to be grown without any state supervision, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Congress authorized state-supervised hemp in the 2014 Farm Bill, but has not approved wide-open hemp cultivation.

Washington hemp entrepreneur Cory Sharp, whose license expires in June, said he had welcomed the state’s involvement because WSDA approval added credibility to the new industry.

But he said the program is too expensive. Hemp nationwide has picked up so much momentum that he’s not worried about federal intervention if the state program ends, he said.

“The cat’s out of the bag,” Sharp said. “It’s happening with or without the Department of Agriculture.”

Hemp remains subject to state-by-state interpretations of federal law. Some states, for example, have banned oil extracted from hemp leaves, but it’s widely available for consumption in other states.

The Washington Legislature this year removed hemp plants from the state’s controlled substance list then promptly directed WSDA to write rules to fine anyone growing unlicensed hemp.

Trump takes step to reduce national monuments

By CATHERINE LUCEY and DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — President Donald Trump on Monday took the unusual step of scaling back two sprawling national monuments in Utah, declaring that “public lands will once again be for public use,” in a move cheered by Republican leaders who had lobbied him to undo protections they considered overly broad.

The decision marks the first time in a half century that a president has undone these types of land protections. Tribal and environmental groups oppose the decision and are expected to go to court in a bid to preserve the designations.

Trump made the plan official during a speech at the State Capitol, where he signed proclamations to shrink the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments.

Both monuments encompass millions of acres.

State officials said the protections were overly broad and closed off the area to energy development and other access.

Environmental and tribal groups plan to sue, saying the designations are needed to protect important archaeological and cultural resources,



President Donald Trump shows off a proclamation he signed to shrink the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante national monuments Dec. 4 in Salt Lake City.

especially the more than 1.3 million-acre (2,030-square-mile) Bears Ears site featuring thousands of Native American artifacts, including ancient cliff dwellings and petroglyphs.

Trump argued that the people of Utah know best how to care for their land.

“Some people think that the natural resources of Utah should be controlled by a small handful of very distant bureaucrats located in Washington,” Trump said. “And guess what? They’re wrong.”

Roughly 3,000 demonstrators lined up near the State Capitol to protest Trump’s announcement. Some held signs that said, “Keep your tiny hands off our public lands,” and they chanted, “Lock him up!”

A smaller group gathered in support of Trump’s decision, including some who said they favor potential drilling or mining there that could create

new jobs.

“Your timeless bond with the outdoors should not be replaced with the whims of regulators thousands and thousands of miles away,” Trump said. “I’ve come to Utah to take a very historic action to reverse federal overreach and restore the rights of this land to your citizens.”

Bears Ears, created last December by President Barack Obama, will be reduced by about 85 percent, to 201,876 acres (315 square miles).

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, designated in 1996 by President Bill Clinton, will be reduced from nearly 1.9 million acres (nearly 3,000 square miles) to 1,003,863 acres (1,569 square miles).

Both were among a group of 27 monuments that Trump ordered Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review this year.

Zinke accompanied Trump

aboard Air Force One, as did Utah’s Republican U.S. senators, Orrin Hatch and Mike Lee.

Hatch and other Utah Republican leaders pushed Trump to launch the review, saying the monuments locked up too much federal land.

Trump framed the decision as returning power to the state, saying, “You know and love this land the best and you know the best how to take care of your land.” He said the decision would “give back your voice.”

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