

Hermiston Farm Fair highlights latest ag research and trends

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

HERMISTON, Ore. — Heading into its second year at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, the Hermiston Farm Fair continues to add new lectures and seminars highlighting previously overlooked aspects of Columbia Basin agriculture.

Historically speaking, the Farm Fair has focused on the latest developments in potato production — the signature crop supported by Oregon State University’s Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

The 44th annual event, however, introduced several new presentations Thursday covering topics such as organic crops, precision irrigation and pollinators.

Phil Hamm, station director at HAREC, said he did not know the exact attendance, but estimated it was in the hundreds.

“What we’re trying to do is (reach) as many of our stakeholders as possible in our region,” Hamm said.

Last year’s move to EOTEC from the Hermiston Conference Center has certainly helped, Hamm said, providing a larger venue to bring in more presenters and hold more sessions. This year’s trade show featured 48 different vendors, including multiple farm suppliers, Energy Trust of Oregon and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency.

Attendees filled the room for a morning seminar on pollinators, which discussed the importance of bees and bee habitat in agricultural systems. Andony Melathopoulos, of OSU’s Pollinator Health Extension Program, said Oregon is home to more species of bees than there are east of the Mississippi River.

“It’s a hotbed of diversity,” Melathopoulos said. “People are just amazed by them.”

Melathopoulos went on to explain how farmers can treat their crops for weeds and pests while taking care not to harm pollinators. He ran through a litany of available products, demonstrating how to properly read labels and determine if and when a grower should apply certain chemicals in the field.

“Without a doubt, pollination is very important for the production of many crops,” Melathopoulos said. “I hope people came out of this session knowing pest control is possible and compatible with pollinators.”

For the first time, the Hermiston Farm Fair also organized a seminar dedicated specifically to growing organic crops. It takes three years before a farm can be certified organic, and growers must adopt a strict set of approved standards.

Local organic production is on the rise, said Alexandra Stone, a former organic farmer and cropping system specialist for OSU. In eastern Washington, Stone said organic sales grew six-fold at



Ron Halbakken, factory sales manager for Legacy Steel Buildings, talks on his cell phone in front of his booth at the Hermiston Farm Fair.

the farm gate between 2005 and 2015, from \$100 million to \$600 million.

“There’s already a lot of organic production out here,” she said.

Yet demand for organics is still outpacing production in the U.S., with imports exceeding exports by \$1.1 billion, Stone said. With that in mind, she led a survey among 20 farmers in the room to determine what they want and need from the university to tap into the organic marketplace.

Of those polled, 79 percent said they expect demand for organics will continue to increase, yet 40 percent said they did not have the tools to control pests and disease. The vast majority of farmers said they would benefit from some kind of technical training through OSU, with more than half favoring a hybrid online undergraduate and professional development certificate program.

Later in the afternoon, Clinton Shock of the OSU Malheur Experiment Station detailed how precision irrigation can optimize yields and save farmers money, all while protecting the environment.

“We really want high and stable production of horticulture and crops,” Shock said. “Precision irrigation is really the key.”

Shock said researchers are working to determine a set of criteria known as the soil-water tension for different crops, which essentially describes the amount of energy a plant must expend to suck up water in the ground. If the tension is too high, a plant may shut down. If the tension is too low, water may leach away nutrients, leading to waste.

But if a grower knows the soil property, Shock said they can find the sweet spot. That means healthier crops for less money.

Plus, as a side benefit, he said the more efficiently nitrogen is used, the more it protects groundwater quality.

“A lot of the public thinks growers are not innovative, or stuck in the mud,” Shock said. “That just isn’t so.”

The Hermiston Farm Fair continued through noon Dec. 1 at EOTEC.



Guests mingle with vendors during the Hermiston Farm Fair on Thursday at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.



Hank Stahl, of Stahl Farms, and Cyd Bothum, of Hermiston Foods, shoot baskets at the Simplot booth at the Hermiston Farm Fair. This was the 44th year for the annual event.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Oregon wildlife officials say a wolf is likely responsible for the death of a llama on private pasture in Union County.

Dead llama ruled ‘probable’ wolf attack

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

Wolves may very well be responsible for killing a 250-pound adult llama on a private forested pasture in northeast Oregon, though the state Department of Fish and Wildlife stopped short of confirming the incident as a wolf attack.

Investigators instead ruled it a “probable” wolf attack, taking place just 10 miles from where wolves with the Meacham pack preyed on cattle at Cunningham Sheep Company this summer.

The landowner found the dead llama Friday, Nov. 24, about 200 yards from the residence.

The carcass was mostly intact, except most of the hide and muscle tissue along the right rear leg above the hock and around the anus had been consumed.

ODFW arrived the next day, and according to the agency’s investigation report, the llama likely died sometime between late Wednes-

day, Nov. 22, and before dark Thursday, Nov. 23. At least two sets of wolf tracks were seen in the mud about 20 yards away that were one to two days old. Investigators also documented trail camera photos taken about 300 yards from the carcass, showing a wolf moving toward the area on Nov. 23.

However, wounds to the llama were not consistent with extensive wolf-caused injuries, the report stated. Taking all evidence into consideration, the agency determined that “there was sufficient evidence to confirm predation on the llama by a large predator, but not enough evidence to confirm which predator.”

The same landowner also reported another dead llama earlier in the month, which had been largely consumed except for its neck, head and left shoulder. ODFW investigated Nov. 14, and determined there was no evidence of a predator attack at the scene. The cause of death is unknown.



SAGE Fact #147

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