

Washington adopts pesticide safety rules

State follows EPA's standards

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

New rules for using pesticides, modeled after federal worker-protection standards, will take effect in Washington on Jan. 13.

Agriculture Director Derek Sandison signed the rules Wednesday. They will bring state regulations in line with rules that are being phased in by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The regulations cover such subjects as training applicators, posting safety information, decontaminating workers and providing medical care.

"The worker-protection standards cover a lot of areas," Sandison said in a written statement. "It's critical that agricultural employees learn and understand what's being required to comply and protect their workers and their communities."

The EPA adopted new standards in 2015. Most went effect last year, while more are scheduled to take effect next year. States can adopt more stringent standards, but must at least meet federal rules.



Washington State Department of Agriculture

Ofelio Borges of the Washington State Department of Agriculture trains farmworkers to handle pesticides in 2014. The department on Dec. 13 finalized new worker-protection standards for handling pesticides. The rules, which match federal regulations, go into affect Jan. 13.

In some ways, the new EPA rules will bring the federal standards to those already followed in Washington, according to WSDA. The state and federal rules will now be essentially identical, according to the department.

WSDA says it will work with growers to understand the new rules and won't enforce them until EPA-approved training materials

are available.

The EPA has issued a manual on complying with the regulations.

The new requirements include:

- Workers must undergo annual training in handling pesticides. Previously, training was required every five years. Also, employers must keep training records for two years.
- Information about pes-

ticide safety and current applications must be posted for workers to see. The rules provide specific instructions on what must be posted, and when and where.

Employers must keep everyone except trained workers out of the area while pesticides are applied. The distances range from 100 feet to 25 feet depending on the type of equipment used to spray the pesticide.

WSDA received three written comments on the rules. The most extensive comments were from Columbia Legal Services, a nonprofit law firm, and Community To Community Development, a Bellingham-based organization whose stated goals include ending capitalism.

WSDA rejected several proposals by both groups. Columbia Legal Services advocated barring applications within a quarter-mile of housing. Community to Community proposed prohibiting pesticide applications within 1.5 miles of a school or farm-worker housing.

WSDA said the proposals were outside the purpose of the rules, which are to protect workers and pesticide applicators. WSDA noted that it investigates pesticides drifting off farms and issues fines.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Bruce Huffaker, left, president of North American Potato Market News, talks with American Falls grower Greg Paul during the University of Idaho Ag Outlook seminar in Burley on Dec. 6.

Russet potato supplies shrink

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

BURLEY, Idaho — While potato production nationwide in 2017 fell less than 1 percent, things were different in the Pacific Northwest.

Combined production in Idaho, Washington and Oregon this year fell 6.3 percent on 21,000 fewer planted acres, according to the December crop production report by USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

In 2016, PNW production accounted for 60.9 percent of national production. That dropped to 57.5 percent in 2017, Bruce Huffaker, a potato market analyst, told growers attending the University of Idaho's annual Idaho Ag Outlook.

The decline is significant as the region produces 78 percent of all potatoes processed in the U.S. and 61 percent of fresh russets produced in the U.S. While there's no hard data, Huffaker would guess russets make up about 85 percent of the PNW crop.

"I think we're coming up to a situation with russet potatoes where we're going to run into crunch time on supply," he said.

PNW stocks on Dec. 1 are estimated to be down 9 percent year over year. Processing usage June through November was up slightly and fresh usage was down only 0.8 percent — meaning the crunch is ahead.

"We did not cut back on usage during the first six months; all that (shortfall) has to come in the next six months," he said.

Processors and fresh buyers are going to be competing with each other for supply. Fryers have locked in most of what they need, so the competition will be between fresh buyers and dehydrators, he said.

He's expecting PNW stocks to be 31.4 million on May 31, down 16.7 percent

year over year. There could be as much as a 22 percent decline in fresh shipments December through June but with processing flat, he's expecting fresh buyers to pull some supply out of processing channels.

But there's no way to make up for all of the shortfall on table potatoes. Fresh shipments aren't going to be anywhere near what Idaho shipped last year, he said.

Markets are already reacting to the tight supply, boosting russet prices more than 50 percent compared to a year ago. Prices in Idaho for Russet Burbanks for the fresh market are averaging \$18.57 a hundredweight, and Russet Norkotahs are running \$17.34. Prices to growers are close to \$9 a hundredweight, compared to about \$4 this time last year, he said.

Production is down nearly 8 million hundredweight and 5.7 percent in Idaho, 6.6 million hundredweight and 6.3 percent in Washington and 2.2 million hundredweight and 9.4 percent in Oregon, NASS reported.

Last spring, after five years of prices below the cost of production, growers — especially those who produce table potatoes — faced tough planting decisions.

In Idaho, there was also a lot of uncertainty with a large processing operation in eastern Idaho changing hands, Huffaker said.

While prices on competing crops were weak, the situation decreased planted acreage. In addition, yields weren't as high as they had been, he said.

Growers planted 15,000 fewer acres in Idaho, 5,000 fewer acres in Washington and 1,000 fewer acres in Oregon. Yields per acre were down 5 hundredweight in Idaho, 25 hundredweight in Washington and 40 hundredweight in Oregon, NASS reported.

Company adding two barges to transport wheat

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

PORTLAND — One of the two companies that haul grain on the Columbia and Snake rivers will add two new barges to its fleet next year.

That will bring Shaver Transportation's total number of grain barges to 20, said Ken Ritter, vice president of the company's grain division.

In August, the company will tow the two 4,000-ton barges from Indiana down the Mississippi River system to the Gulf of Mexico, through the Panama Canal and up the West Coast to Portland. The cost of that operation is about 20 percent less than if the barges were built in Portland, said Rob Rich, vice president of marine services for Shaver.

The barges are 300 feet long and each carry 4,200 tons of wheat, or 140,000 bushels.

The company is adding the barges because a customer has more grain coming in, and in anticipation of a rail-to-barge transfer station at the Port of Morrow in Boardman, Ore.

"When that comes online, that will be a new source of wheat coming to the river from the Midwest transferring from rail to barge," Rich said. "It just makes sense to have equipment in place for not only the additional customer need, but the additional wheat coming to the river."

Unit trains of wheat normally destined for the Portland market will instead go to Boardman, where the wheat



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Rob Rich, vice president of marine services at Shaver Transportation, addresses a Washington Grain Commission export tour on board a tugboat Nov. 30 in Portland.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Rob Rich, center, addresses a tour before boarding a tugboat in Portland. The company is adding two new barges to its fleet on the Columbia-Snake River system.

will be loaded onto barges. Shaver's barges vary in size. The average tonnage is 3,400 tons, Rich said.

The company averages 110 tows a year, but this year it has had 125 to 130 tows in eight months. That's a record for the company, Ritter said, even though the river system was closed for lock maintenance until March.

Farmers send their grain

from the field to grain elevators. Barges then bring the grain down the Columbia-Snake River system to one of seven export grain elevators, which ship the grain overseas.

Producers use trucking for short-haul shipping to Portland, or rail or barge for long-haul shipping.

Ritter said 13 barge lines used to operate on the river sys-

tem. Today, only two remain, Shaver and Tidewater.

The two companies move 150 million bushels of wheat down the river system each year, Ritter said. Tidewater used to move 100 million and Shaver 50 million, but more recently Shaver has increased to 60 million and Tidewater was down to 90 million, he said.

Tidewater has 63 barges, Rich said.

While the two companies are competitors, they work together occasionally, Rich said.

"The goal is to get the barged wheat down the river, not to create an issue for barged wheat to not get down the river," he said.

About 40 percent of wheat exported from the Columbia River Basin is moved by barge, with railroads hauling 60 percent.

Rich and Ritter spoke to a Washington Grain Commission wheat export tour Nov. 30.

Washington state delegation meets with White House about Columbia Basin Project

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

A delegation of officials, farmers and lawmakers from Washington state met with White House and Department of Interior officials last week to educate them about the need for funding to replace shrinking groundwater supplies in the Odessa subarea with Columbia River water.

Meeting with Ray Starling, special assistant to President Donald Trump on agriculture and agricultural trade, were farmers Randy and Michele Kiesz of Ritzville and Clark Kagele of Odessa, state Department of Agriculture director Derek Sandison, state Rep. Mary Dye, state Sen. Mark Schoesler and U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse.

They also met with representatives of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Michele Kiesz is a landowner near the first pumping station in the Odessa groundwater replacement project slated to receive river water.



Courtesy of ZimmComm New Media

Ray Starling, President Trump's special assistant on agriculture, met last week with a contingent of officials and farmers about the Columbia Basin Project.

She estimates the total cost to her farm would be more than \$300 per acre per year for 30 years.

"We can't afford to grow anything to come close to that," she said.

Kiesz and other landowners spoke to Schoesler, Dye and state Sen. Judy Warnick seeking assistance in filling

the gap between what they can afford and what's needed.

"We told them the pumping plants are being put onto the shoulders of the landowners, and we just can't afford it," Kiesz said. "Unless we get help, we're going to go away. We're not going to be out there any more. The big companies are going to come in and they're going to take over this, or farming will go completely away in Eastern Washington. It's going to be horrific if this area goes dry, and we're headed that way."

The legislature put \$15 million in the state capital budget to help fund the project, which would reduce pumping station construction costs by \$8 per acre, Kiesz said.

Every little bit helps, she said.

That budget is being held up by Senate Republicans, who refuse to pass it until the Legislature passes a fix to the state Supreme Court's Hirst decision, which limits the development of rural wells.

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