

ODA keep close eye on deceptive swine virus



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

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Cases may resemble more serious foot-and-mouth disease

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

Reports of Seneca Valley Virus are on the rise in Oregon swine, and though the virus itself is relatively harmless, it is the resemblance to a much more pernicious foreign disease that has animal health officials on guard.

Brad LeaMaster, state veterinarian for the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said more than 50 cases of Seneca Valley Virus have been recorded since September, all from pigs imported to a slaughterhouse near Klamath Falls.

Animals infected by the virus may develop telltale lesions on their feet and snouts, but otherwise heal within a few days, LeaMaster said. The symptoms, however, look exactly like the highly contagious and sometimes fatal foot-and-mouth disease, which could have a devastating effect on the livestock industry.

"For each case, every time we have an animal that breaks with this, then we have to investigate," LeaMaster said. "Really, how do we know? What we don't want is to become complacent."

Foot-and-mouth disease

is widespread around the world, but has not been documented in the U.S. since 1929. Ironically, it is in the same family of viruses as Seneca Valley Virus, which makes differentiating the two a challenge.

"We want to be diligent and encourage producers, as well as veterinarians, to call us right away if they see the vesicular lesions," LeaMaster said. "We'll send someone out to do the laboratory testing immediately to determine if it's Seneca Valley Virus and rule out foot-and-mouth disease."

Seneca Valley Virus was first isolated by scientists in 2002, but it wasn't until 2015 when cases began to gain attention in Oregon, LeaMaster said.

"It's one of those emerging-type diseases," he said. "It's not a big deal in terms of the disease it causes initially."

Foot-and-mouth disease, however, is a very big deal. As a field veterinarian for ODA in 2001, LeaMaster experienced firsthand a large outbreak of the disease in the United Kingdom, which resulted in animals needing to be slaughtered to contain its spread.

LeaMaster said foot-and-mouth is one of the most contagious diseases on the planet, affecting cloven-hoofed animals including pigs, cattle, sheep and goats. It can kill young animals, while adults never regain their peak production.

State eyes oyster plats in dairy pollution lawsuit

Attorneys for state make counterclaim against Hayes Oyster Co.

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

An oysterman would forfeit his oyster plats in Tillamook Bay if he prevails in a lawsuit alleging inadequate regulation of dairy pollution, according to Oregon's attorneys.

Jesse Hayes, president of the Hayes Oyster Co., filed a complaint accusing the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality of allowing dairy pollution to effectively shut down oyster harvests in the bay.

The lawsuit seeks \$100,000 for lost profits and reduced property value, as well as an order for DEQ to regulate pollution more strictly in the region.

The State of Oregon denies taking the plaintiff's property by sanctioning pol-

lution, but if he's successful in this claim, ownership of the affected oyster beds should go to DEQ, according to the state's attorneys.

The title to the oyster bed lease would "vest" to the agency because Hayes is pursuing a claim of "inverse condemnation," under which a government action is alleged to take property without compensation, the state's attorneys said in a counterclaim against Hayes.

Hayes objects to the state government's argument because the lawsuit's goal is to "regain economically viable use of its oyster plats" rather than being forced to sell them to DEQ "for a disputed price so that the pollution easement can continue indefinitely," according to a letter sent by his attorney, Thomas Benke.

"If nothing else, public policy should preclude DEQ from extinguishing a 'beneficial use' that is mandated by law to protect," Benke said in the letter to Tillamook County Circuit Judge Mari Garric Trevino.

Cosmic Crisp marketing plan in works

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Developing a marketing plan and funding for it are among the tasks remaining as the Washington apple industry prepares for the first sales of Cosmic Crisp apples in two years.

Kevin Brandt, vice president of Proprietary Variety Management in Yakima, Wash., was asked about the marketing budget for Cosmic Crisp at the Washington State Tree Fruit Association annual meeting in Kennewick.

"We don't know at this point. We understand it needs to be a large roll-out. We know that takes money. We're looking at grants," Brandt replied.

His father, Lynnell Brandt, president of PVM, which was hired by Washington State University to help manage commercialization of the new state apple, said a marketing advisory committee is working "toward consensus" for a marketing plan and that all options, except probably new grower assessments, are being looked at for funding.

Money is needed for the first few years of the launch but as sales volumes increase companies will have revenues to augment marketing, Lynnell Brandt said.

Five marketing entities that handle 80 percent or more of the state's apple marketing are working well together on the committee despite being competitors, committee chairman Robert Kershaw, president of Domex Superfresh Growers in Yakima, has said.

With 629,000 Cosmic Crisp trees planted in the spring of 2017, 5.8 million ready for planting in the spring of 2018 and 5.2 million to be planted in 2019, Brandt estimates 200,000, 40-pound boxes of Cosmic Crisp will go to stores from the 2019 crop, 1.9 million in 2020, 5 million in 2021 and 9 million in 2022. Production may reach 15 million boxes in 10 years.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

A Cosmic Crisp apple from the 2015 WSU field trials. Tiny yellow specks in the skin are lenticels, or pores. That they look like little stars is the basis for the Cosmic Crisp name.



Courtesy of PVM

A logo designed by Blind Renaissance Inc. of East Wenatchee, Wash., for the new Cosmic Crisp apple. An official logo has not yet been chosen.

PVM will help develop and coordinate the marketing plan with advice from the advisory committee, Brandt said. The first major crop in 2020 is the target date for having a plan in place, he said.

A subcommittee is working on grading standards that may be adjusted after the first few years of juvenile fruit.

Cosmic Crisp was bred from Enterprise and Honeycrisp apples 20 years ago by WSU apple breeder Bruce Barrant at the WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee. It rates high in flavor, color, storage and resistance to disease and dis-

orders. The industry believes consumers will like its sweet, tangy flavor more than that of Honeycrisp.

Such an aggressive ramp-up of a new variety has never been tried before.

The planting of 12 million trees in three years has been estimated as a collective industry investment of \$275 million to \$550 million. A 10 million-box crop of Cosmic Crisp could gross \$300 million to \$500 million annually.

Costco likes Cosmic Crisp and has a "spot open on the spread sheet for it," Keith Neal, a Costco buyer, told growers at the meeting.

Chris Willett, quality control and packing manager for T&G Global in Wenatchee, told growers the anticipated, unprecedented ramp-up is "daunting," that it is "difficult" to launch marketing that quickly and that consumption will only grow so fast.

"The question is will other varieties move away fast enough. Quality has to be there — and the right price," he said.

Brandt said good branding is vital because it increases revenues.

"Branding is a name, a term, a design or symbol that differentiates a product. It can be a picture or name recognition. Strong brands drive consumer traffic and deliver a promise," he said.

Consumers are willing to pay more for a branded product because it guarantees consistent quality, he said. The Nike shoe symbol is an example, he said.

PVM has trademarked the name Cosmic Crisp and is applying for a logo trademark. It likes a logo developed by Blind Renaissance Inc. in East Wenatchee showing the name in a galaxy of stars but has not made a final decision.

H-2A ag worker minimum wages hiked

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

OROVILLE, Wash. — As the minimum wage for H-2A-visa foreign agricultural workers goes up 74 cents per hour in Washington and Oregon, a small tree fruit grower in this U.S.-Canadian border town says it's just one more factor jeopardizing his survival.

"I'm filling out my H-2A application for next year right now as we speak. It has me nervous. I don't know when it ends. It's a minimum so I have to reward workers with experience and better skills by paying them more than that," says Dave Taber, owner-operator of about 275 acres of apples, pears and cherries.

The H-2A minimum wage in 2018 for Washington and Oregon is \$14.12 per hour, up 5.53 percent from \$13.38 this year. The two states fall from highest to second highest in the nation. Hawaii is the new No. 1 at \$14.37 per hour.

Taber hired 30 H-2A workers last year and this year plans to have 45. For the first time, he's hiring some for winter pruning and spring planting.

"It's just making our cost of labor go up and it's that much more difficult to get returns to cover that. You'd better have the right varieties, quality, yields and warehouses to stay in business and I'm not sure if I do or not," Taber said.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Dave Taber's fruit stand and cherry orchard just north of Oroville, Wash., in the off season last April. He says the increasing minimum wage for H-2A-visa foreign workers makes it harder for him to stay in business.

The U.S. Department of Labor on Dec. 21, released the Adverse Effect Wage Rates (AEWRs) for all regions of the country for 2018. They are the same as what USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service released in November based on a survey of prevailing wages of field and livestock workers by region across the nation.

They are minimum hourly rates for H-2A-visa workers, usually above state minimum wages, and intended to be high enough that the pay of

domestic workers is not adversely affected.

An employer who hires H-2A workers is required to pay a minimum of the AEWR to any domestic workers also under his or her employ.

AEWR increases push all wages up, increasing costs, growers say.

California goes up 4.85 percent, from \$12.57 to \$13.38.

Idaho and Wyoming wages go down 3 cents from \$11.66 to \$11.63. Nevada and Colorado go down 2.82 percent from \$11 to \$10.69 and Arizona is down 4.47 percent from \$10.95 to \$10.46.

Washington tree fruit growers pay piece rates for harvest that generally run the equivalent of \$20 per hour and more for fast pickers.

Dan Fazio, executive director of the farm labor association WAFLA, said expense is a major grower complaint about H-2A. Some vegetable farmers have quit using it because they can't afford it, he said.

Beside the high minimum

wage, employers have to provide worker housing and pay transportation for the workers from and back to their country of origin, predominantly Mexico.

Labor shortages are driving up wages but not creating more workers, he said.

"Now that H-2A is a significant component of the workforce in Washington it is causing wages to increase across the board. It helps employers attract more domestics," he said. "The pressure right now is on employers to get very productive workers."

DOL approved 200,049 H-2A workers for U.S. farms in 2017, up 20.7 percent from 2016 and about 10 percent of the nation's more than 2 million seasonal ag workers, according to the National Council of Agricultural Employers in Washington, D.C.

DOL approved 18,535 H-2A workers for Washington state in 2017, up 9.3 percent. California was at 15,232, up 7.6 percent. Oregon and Idaho were not available but have far fewer.

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