

Marijuana grower smells chance to gain farm status

Hearings board to take a look at issue

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

An appeals panel will tour a Western Washington farm in January to help it decide whether smells from harvesting marijuana should be treated with the same leniency as odors from raising livestock and other agricultural activities.

Green Freedom owner Justin Wildhaber, appealing fines issued by a clean-air agency, said Friday that he hopes his case will set a precedent and move marijuana farmers closer to being regulated like other producers.

"Hopefully, it will be a big win for the industry," he said.

Five years after Washington legalized recreational marijuana, cannabis growers operate under different rules than other farmers. Wildhaber's appeal to the Pollution Control Hearings Board poses the question whether marijuana should be exempted from the state's Clean Air Act as an agricultural activity,



Washington State Department of Agriculture
Marijuana grows in a greenhouse in Washington. A marijuana grower there argues his farm is an agricultural activity and should be exempt from the state's Clean Air Act.

The exemption gives limited protection to farms, ranches and feedlots from being fined for odors and dust. The hearings board took up the issue of whether marijuana farms qualify for the exemp-

tion in 2017. In that case, however, the board found the farm was too small, less than 5 acres, to meet the definition of "agricultural land."

The three-member hearings board will tour Wild-

haber's farm in Elma on Jan. 18. The board will then head to Tumwater for a two-day hearing on whether Green Freedom should have been fined \$1,000 twice by the Olympic Region Clean Air

Agency. Investigators reported smelling marijuana on a neighbor's property on two occasions.

Lara Kaminsky, executive director of The Cannabis Alliance, an advocacy group, said the case could be a landmark. Odors are often an opening for local governments to regulate marijuana farms over other issues such as light pollution or traffic, she said.

"We need to get clear direction from the state on this issue," she said. "It is legal. It's a legal crop. It should have the same rules and regulations as other crops."

The House Agriculture Committee advanced during the 2017 session a bill that would have added marijuana to Washington's right-to-farm law. The law shields agriculture from nuisance complaints.

The legislation didn't come up for a vote by the full House. If it had, Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, would have proposed an amendment to exclude Eastern Washington from the bill.

Dent said Friday that he opposes classifying marijuana as a farm product. Federal wa-

ter managers may take note, he said. "It opens another can of worms."

He also said marijuana odors should not be equated with other farm smells. "It's not like anything else," he said. "There's something in marijuana that can affect your nervous system."

According to hearings board records, a neighbor has made dozens of complaints about smells from Green Freedom. The air agency has conducted many investigations. Twice, on harvest days, inspectors sniffed and gave the odor a "2" on a scale of 0-4. A "2" means the smell was "distinct and recognizable." A "4" means the smell caused a physical reaction.

The air agency argues growing marijuana can't be considered an agricultural activity because it is still covered by the state's controlled substances act and is not taxed like an agricultural product. The agency also claims that Green Freedom's greenhouses and other farm operations cover only 3.2 acres, falling short of the 5-acre threshold. Wildhaber says the farm covers 5.7 acres.

Research shows how organic blueberries can compete

Raised beds, weed mat and low nitrogen key for growers

By **GEORGE PLAIVEN**
Capital Press

Organic blueberry growers can improve their bottom line by planting in raised beds, using a plastic weed mat for mulching and lower rates of fertilizer, according to research from Oregon State University.

Bernadine Strik, OSU berry crops professor, led a 10-year study to determine best management practices for organic blueberries, which was recently published in the journal HortScience.

More than half of all organic blueberries grown in the U.S. come from Oregon and Washington, Strik said. The Oregon Blueberry Commission initially funded her project in 2006, looking for additional support in organic production.

"The market is very strong for organic fruit specifically from the Pacific Northwest," Strik said. "We have such a good climate for growing organic blueberries."

At the time, just 2 percent of the region's blueberries were certified organic. The total now is as high as 20 percent, making the Northwest the largest producer of organic blueberries in the world.

"I don't see that changing," Strik said. "I think that's a real advantage to our region."



OSU

Bernadine Strik, Oregon State University Extension berry specialist, inspects organic blueberries in a test plot at OSU's North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, Ore.

Strik conducted her study at the university's North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, planting two varieties of blueberries — Duke, an early season berry, and Liberty, which ripens later in the year.

Strik also had the 1-acre field certified by Oregon Tilth, ensuring she would face the same challenges as organic growers with record keeping and inspection.

"This was my first certified organic study," Strik said. "And it's still the only certified organic blueberry research trial in the world."

Over the course of a decade, Strik found that Liberty blueberries yielded 22 percent higher in raised beds versus flat ground, which has proven to be a no-brainer move for organic and conventional growers alike.

As for weed control, Strik looked at a few different options for organic growers, including sawdust mulch, yard debris topped with sawdust and a black plastic weed mat.

Though it did carry some

drawbacks, such as increased soil temperature and field mice, the mat proved to be the lowest cost option. Sawdust mulch cost nearly twice as much, Strik said, and the sawdust and yard debris combination cost almost three times as much.

"The higher cost was because there were more weeds that needed to be pulled," Strik said.

Finally, the study looked at organic fertilizers, which can cost 10 to 20 times as much as conventional products. Strik applied both a feather meal and liquid fish at rates ranging from 25 to 65 pounds per acre on the low end, and 50 to 125 pounds per acre on the high end.

Liberty berries showed little difference between the low and high rates of fertilizer, Strik said, indicating a huge cost savings to organic growers. Duke berries, meanwhile, fared best with higher levels of cheaper feather meal, and were especially sensitive to liquid fish. Strik suspects that has to do with higher levels of potassium.

Price outlook for U.S. dairy

Item	Dollars per pound					
	Q3 '17	Q4 '17*	Q1 '18*	Q2 '18*	Q3 '18*	Q4 '18*
Nonfat dry milk	\$0.88	0.79	0.68	0.71	0.74	0.77
AA butter	2.60	2.34	2.04	2.09	2.27	2.36
Block cheddar	1.67	1.73	1.54	1.57	1.63	1.78
Whey powder	0.43	0.37	0.27	0.28	0.33	0.45
Dollars per hundredweight						
Class III milk	\$16.34	17.02	13.99	14.35	15.34	17.44
Class IV milk	16.37	14.51	12.34	12.79	13.81	14.44

Sources: USDA; Rabobank

*Estimated or forecast

Capital Press graphic

Global dairy surplus weighs on prices

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Milk producers have a tough road ahead in 2018, as global exportable surpluses of dairy products continue to expand.

Milk prices are expected to fall below break-even and not recover until late in 2018, Rabobank analysts said in their latest Dairy Quarterly report.

The analysts forecast Class III milk prices in the U.S. to drop about \$3 per hundredweight to \$13.99 in the first quarter of the year. Class IV prices are forecast at \$12.34 per hundredweight.

Growth in global milk supply accelerated in the third quarter of 2017, increasing 2.2 percent year over year, and began to take a toll on commodity prices — including butterfat prices, which had been defying gravity.

"Exportable supply fundamentals will keep pressure on prices through Q2 2018, leading to further downward pressure on the dairy complex," the analysts stated.

Combining production in the fourth quarter of 2017 and first quarter of 2018, the global market will confront a wave of exportable

surplus that is equivalent to 3.2 billion liters (3.3 million metric tons) of milk above year-earlier levels, the analyst said.

The first signs of weaker milk prices have emerged in a number of export regions and pressure will build, squeezing farmers' margins, the analysts reported.

"Buoyant dairy demand, particularly for cheese and butterfat, in the northern hemisphere has been a feature on dairy markets in recent times. However, demand growth is starting to moderate following a period of robust growth," the analysts stated.

On the bright side, import purchasing in China, Southeast Asia and parts of North Africa is forecast to remain active through 2018, and cheese imports in Japan and China are providing support for cheese markets.

Whey prices, however, continue to be weighed down by strong production and growing stocks. And the possibility of intervention stocks of skim milk powder in the European Union entering the animal-feed market could add to that pressure.

In the U.S., there was a modest slowdown in milk production in September

and October, but production year to date to December was 1.5 percent higher than a year earlier.

"Looking forward, continuing global supply pressure will trickle down to U.S. farmgate prices, putting downward pressure on margins — seeing many fall back below break-even," the analysts said.

As a result, the analysts are forecasting a noticeable slowdown in U.S. supply growth in 2018, with increases hovering around 1.2 percent higher year over year in 2018.

Growth in domestic demand in the U.S. is expected to moderate in 2018 after two years of exceptional growth, resulting in sizable volumes of potential exports.

One thing to keep an eye on is the North American Free Trade Agreement negotiations, with two more rounds scheduled for early in the year, the analysts said.

"Risk of a U.S. exit from NAFTA has increased after five rounds of 'modernizing' the agreement have failed to advance amendments to the existing agreement. If NAFTA fails, market impacts could severely upset U.S. and global dairy prices," the analysts said.

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