



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Cattlemen's Association President Tyler Cox, right, walks with state Farm Bureau associate director of government relations Mark Streuli on Jan. 23 on the Capitol Campus in Olympia. Cox told a House committee that wolves are a growing problem for ranchers in southeast Washington.

Southeast Washington ranchers warn of increasing wolf conflicts

Lawmakers hear cattlemen's worries

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Southeast Washington ranchers told state lawmakers Tuesday that they have problems with wolves, too.

Cattlemen Sam Ledgerwood, who ranches in Asotin and Garfield counties, said wolves attacked a cow and calf this summer, a first for his operation. He said that he's heard from northeast ranchers to brace for depredations to get worse.

"We are dealing directly with wolves — the financial burden of that ... and the safety of it," Ledgerwood told the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. "Having our family work with us in a stressful and dangerous situation is always a concern of any father, for sure."

The committee heard from the Washington Cattlemen's Association about industry issues, including wolves. The association's president, Walla Walla rancher Tyler Cox, thanked legislators for passing a Hirst bill to reopen rural Washington to new wells. "That was on top of our list," he said, before moving turning to issues he called "perennial favorites."

"Wolves will be a perennial favorite," he said.

There is no bill advancing in the Legislature to alter the state's wolf policies.

Wolves are on the state's protected-species list, though WDFW culls packs to stop chronic attacks on livestock. The department has resorted to killing wolves several times in northeast Washington, but never in southeast Washington. Attacks on livestock there have not reached the threshold for WDFW to consider lethal removal.

Nevertheless, southeast Washington ranchers said

the predators are affecting their operations in an area where the Department of Fish and Wildlife has so far documented relatively few wolves.

Most Washington wolves roam in 17 packs in four northeast counties, according to WDFW. Southeast Washington has two documented packs. The Tucan-non pack had four members and the Touchet pack had two members as of the end of 2016, the last official count by WDFW. By comparison, the Dirty Shirt pack alone, then the state's largest, had 13 wolves in Stevens County.

Southeast Washington, however, borders northeast Oregon. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife counted 16 known wolf territories in the region at the end of 2016.

"We're sharing wolves with Oregon," Cox said. "It's on the rise. We're getting more attention from the game department."

WDFW reported last summer that it had agreements with 16 ranchers in the Blue Mountains to share the costs of using non-lethal measures to stop wolves from attacking livestock.

WDFW confirmed that wolves attacked Ledgerwood's cattle. He said he's employed range riders and other non-lethal measures. "I'm absolutely concerned for the safety of the crew," he said.

Wolves in the eastern one-third of Washington are not on the federal endangered or threatened species list. Wolves are numerous enough in the eastern one-third of Washington to meet the state's population goals. Under the current policy, wolves will remain a state-protected species until they at least colonize the Cascades.

WDFW projects that could happen as early as 2021 and has indicated it has started thinking about how to manage wolves after that.

Growers follow wheat from farm to market

Annual field trip organized by Oregon Wheat Commission

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — The end of harvest is just the beginning of the story for Oregon wheat, as farmers from around the state learned Jan. 18-19 at the Oregon Wheat Commission's 2018 grower workshop in Portland.

A group of 15 people gathered at the commission offices in the historic Albers Mill overlooking the Willamette River. From there, they met with experts and toured facilities to witness firsthand what happens to their crop once it leaves the farm.

Oregon farmers typically grow 50 million to 70 million bushels of wheat every year, with a total economic output averaging more than \$815 million. Tana Simpson, OWC associate administrator, said the commission assesses 5 cents per bushel, which pays for programs such as export market development, grower services and university research.

The annual workshop is intended to show farmers the value they get in return for their investment, Simpson said.

"These are your dollars that you're going to see over the next few days," she said.

The group made its first stop at the nonprofit Wheat Marketing Center, which does quality and product testing using wheat samples from across the Northwest. Janice Cooper, managing director at the center, said they also do



George Plaven/Capital Press

Gary Hou, technical director and wheat foods specialist at the Wheat Marketing Center, makes crackers in the nonprofit center's food innovation kitchen.

hands-on training for overseas customers making products such as crackers, noodles and tortillas.

"Most of the work we do is with Asian and Latin American trade teams that come here," Cooper said.

Laboratory supervisor Bon Lee demonstrated some of the high-tech equipment he uses to measure things such as gluten and starch content in dough. Lee explained in depth how he performs what is known as the "falling numbers" test, which checks for sprout damage in grain.

Low falling numbers has

plagued parts of Washington and Idaho in recent years due to pre-harvest rains, Lee said.

"When it rains before harvest ... the sprouting process starts," Lee said. "Even if you dry it, it's too late."

The vast majority of Oregon wheat — 85 to 90 percent — is shipped overseas. The U.S. Wheat Associates is the industry's promotion arm, developing export markets in more than 100 countries.

Shawn Campbell, deputy director of the organization in Portland, said the most important thing farmers can do is maintain high quality,

especially as the global marketplace for wheat becomes more competitive.

Countries such as Japan are particularly interested in buying high-quality soft white wheat from the Pacific Northwest, Campbell said, and consumers there have the income to pay for it.

"If we didn't give our overseas customers what they wanted, they'd go elsewhere and find it there," Campbell said.

Next, the group traveled to the Pacific Export Terminal at the Port of Portland, where employees work around the clock loading and unloading wheat shipments from around the region. The terminal is capable of moving 900 metric tons of wheat per hour, while also providing another layer of quality testing on site through the USDA.

Kim Harper, quality assurance specialist, showed how he pulls samples from wheat shipments and combs over each individual grain looking for things such as mold, insect and sprout damage.

"We're seeing wheat come from across the West and Midwest," Harper said. "We have to keep up on all that."

The group wrapped up day one with a stop at a downtown Portland bakery, and spent day two aboard a river tugboat and chatting about the latest wheat research with Oregon State University scientists.

Blake Rowe, CEO of both the Oregon Wheat Commission and Oregon Wheat Growers League, said the workshops are designed to give farmers a feel for what happens off their farm.

"They'll actually get an appreciation of what a customer is looking for," Rowe said. "I think that is something that is helpful to them."

New hazelnut variety named for industry official

PollyO cultivar's early maturing nuts are suitable for kernel market

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — A new hazelnut cultivar geared toward the kernel market will soon be released by Oregon State University and named in honor of longtime industry official Polly Owen.

The variety, to be dubbed PollyO, is the latest hazelnut tree developed by OSU breeder Shawn Mehlenbacher that is resistant to Eastern Filbert Blight, a fungal pathogen.

"We've had a lot of disease pressure in our field with no cankers on these trees," Mehlenbacher said during the Nut Growers So-



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Polly Owen, a longtime hazelnut industry official, will have a new hazelnut tree variety named after her. The PollyO variety is resistant to Eastern Filbert Blight and suitable for the kernel market.

ciety's annual meeting.

Polly Owen became the director of the Hazelnut Industry Office in 1995 after previously working for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and the National Livestock and

Meat Board.

She also raised sheep and cattle after graduating from OSU with a bachelor's degree in food science and technology in 1970.

Geoff Horning, formerly the head of Oregon Aglink, replaced Owen as the hazelnut organization's chief last year, but she remains involved in the group.

PollyO hazelnuts mature up to two weeks earlier than Barcelona, the popular variety grown in Oregon's Willamette Valley. The nuts blanch well, meaning they easily shed the skin or pellicle around the kernel that's undesirable due to bitter compounds.

With an average of about 64.8 pounds of nuts per tree, the PollyO variety is higher yielding than the popular cultivar Jefferson, which produces 54.7 pounds per tree, and Yamhill, which produces 58.4 pounds per tree.

However, PollyO trees are larger than those other varieties, which means the variety produces fewer tons per acre.

The new cultivar is compatible with the McDonald, Wepster and York varieties for pollination.

Typically, farmers tried to minimize the number of "pollinizer" varieties in an orchard because they weren't as high yielding, Mehlenbacher said.

Now, many new varieties are sexually compatible and generate decent yields and high-quality nuts, allowing growers to plant multiple cultivars in an orchard, he said.

Farmers who don't like the small, spreading trees of the Yamhill variety can choose PollyO as an alternative, as both varieties are suited to the kernel market, Mehlenbacher said. Varieties such as Barcelona and Jefferson are typically sold in the in-shell market.

Winter wheat seedings up slightly in NW, down slightly across U.S.

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Winter wheat seedings are up slightly in the Northwest, but down slightly across the country, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Northwest wheat farmers seeded 3.14 million acres of winter wheat for the 2018 crop, up 0.64 percent from 3.12 million acres in 2017, and down 1.6 percent from 3.19 million acres in 2016.

Idaho wheat farmers seeded 730,000 acres of winter wheat for the 2018 crop, up 1 percent from 720,000 acres in 2017, but down 5 percent from 770,000 acres in 2016.

Oregon farmers planted 710,000 acres, up 1 percent from 700,000 acres for the 2017 crop and down 1 percent from 720,000 acres 2016.

Washington farmers seeded an estimated 1.7 million acres of winter wheat, unchanged from the area seeded in 2017 and 2016, according to the report.

Farmers are keeping wheat in their rotations despite low prices, said Glen Squires, CEO

of the Washington Grain Commission.

"Prices certainly need to strengthen," he said.

Nationally, the planted winter wheat acreage for 2018 is 32.6 million acres, down 0.27 percent from 32.7 million in 2017 and down 9.8 percent from 36.2 million acres in 2016.

According to NASS, this is the second-lowest U.S. acreage on record.

According to the NASS annual crop summary:

- All wheat planted in Idaho in 2017 totaled 1.17 million acres, down 2 percent from 2016. Wheat production totaled 90.7 million bushels, down 12 percent from 102.8 million bushels the previous year. Yield was estimated at 82.2 bushels per acre, down 10.1 percent from 91.4 bushels per acre in 2016.

- All wheat planted in Oregon in 2017 totaled 775,000 acres, down 4 percent from the previous year. Wheat production totaled 48.1 million bushels, up 20 percent from the previous year. Yield is estimated at 63 bushels per acre, up 25.7 percent from 50.1 bushels per acre in 2016.

- All wheat planted in Washington in 2017 totaled 2.2 million acres, down 2 percent from 2016. Production totaled 143 million bushels, down 9 percent from 2016. Yield is estimated at 66.6 bushels per acre, down 6.9 percent from 71.5 bushels per acre in 2016.

- All wheat planted in the U.S. totaled 46 million acres, down 8.19 percent from 50.1 million acres in 2016. Production totaled 1.74 billion bushels, down from 2.31 billion bushels. Yield is estimated at 46.3 bushels per acre, down 12.1 percent from 52.7 bushels per acre.

- White winter wheat seeding in 2018 totals 3.56 million acres, up 1 percent from 2017. Planting in the Pacific Northwest got off to a normal start, but progress was behind the five-year average pace throughout the planting season. Seeding was virtually complete by Nov. 5.

- Hard red winter wheat seeding is expected to total 23.1 million acres, down 2 percent from 2017. The largest declines are estimated in Colorado, Montana, Nebraska and Oklahoma. Record low acreage was seeded in Nebraska and Utah.

Oregon cattlemen urge changes to BLM sage grouse management plan

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

While the Trump administration has reopened western sage protections for further review, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association is renewing its call for more grazing and rancher-friendly provisions on the range.

In a letter sent Jan. 10 to Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, OCA President Nathan Jackson and Executive Director Jerome Rosa said the Bureau of Land Management ignored key local findings when it approved the 2015 Oregon Greater Sage Grouse Resource Management Plan.

Specifically, they argue the BLM eliminated grazing from many research natural areas and neglected how grazing can actually improve the landscape for sage grouse — namely reducing wildfire fuels and controlling invasive weeds.

Rosa said the letter also reiterates that Oregonians want to see changes in the plan, despite seemingly contrary public comments from



USFWS

A greater sage grouse struts for a female at a lek, or mating ground. The Oregon Cattlemen's Association is asking the Bureau of Land Management to include in its plan how grazing can improve the landscape for sage grouse.

Gov. Kate Brown.

"There is some confusion in Washington, D.C., that Oregon is the only western state that is not supportive of amendments to the sage grouse plan, which is tremendously worrisome," Rosa said.

Brown has said in a statement last October that the decision to reconsider sage grouse plans last year was "reckless," adding the administration "is playing fast and loose with two things that make Oregon special — proud rural communities and

diverse wildlife."

The OCA speculates, however, whether Brown understands that the BLM did not adopt Oregon's own sage grouse assessment, which was adopted by the Department of Fish & Wildlife in 2011.

"With all due respect to our governor, unfortunately, she appears to have been misinformed that the BLM (plan) adopted the ODFW Oregon sage grouse strategy. It did not," the OCA states in its letter to Zinke.

The BLM plan needs to be amended to harmonize with the state strategy, the letter continues.

"The ODFW Oregon sage grouse strategy was state driven, Oregon-based, and was an outgrowth of collaboration that considered the unique conditions in Oregon," the OCA writes.

According to the ODFW strategy, "ranching as a land use generally supported greater biodiversity as measured by native plant species and shrub/grassland nesting birds than exurban developments or reserves."