



SEED & ROW CROPS SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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Boom, bust, break even — AND REPEAT

Vicious dairy cycle tests farmers' ability to survive

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Pete Wiersma's dairy legacy stretches back to 17th century Holland. He grew up on a dairy in California and now milks 1,400 cows on his farm near Buhl, Idaho. He started his own operation in 1991. Milking cows is in his blood.

He likes the lifestyle and working where he lives, and he likes the idea of producing wholesome food people need.

He doesn't, however, always like the prices he receives for the milk he produces.

"Milk prices are really lousy right now. They're projected to get somewhat better through the course of the year, get up to break-even maybe," he said.

Like most of the 40,219 dairy farmers in the country, he's been operating at a loss following three years of low prices. For example, the Class III price for milk to make cheese in regulated federal marketing orders was \$13.40 per hundredweight in February. They were comparable elsewhere, such as Idaho, where the average cost of production is about \$17.50.

Turn to DAIRY, Page 10



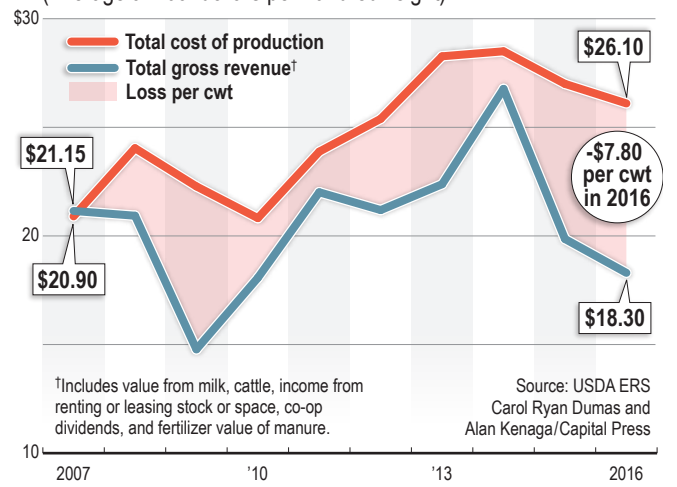
Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Pete Wiersma looks out at his cows at Fairview Dairy near Buhl, Idaho, on Feb. 28.

"Sometimes, it doesn't seem worthwhile. Other times, it's profitable again."

Pete Wiersma, dairy farmer

U.S. milk production costs, loss

(Average annual dollars per hundredweight)



Washington social justice groups carry on fight for carbon fee

Energy tax stalls in state Legislature

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Labor, environmental and social justice groups are picking up the campaign to tax carbon emissions in Washington.

The coalition, operating under the banner Clean Air Clean Energy Washington, filed an initiative March 2, the same day the Senate formally shelved a carbon tax bill. The proponents will have until July 6 to gather at least 259,622

signatures to qualify their proposal for a statewide vote.

For the first time, a carbon tax advanced through the Senate environmental and budget committees. But as in previous sessions, the policy failed to have majority support in either the Senate or House.

As promised, activists were ready with their own proposal to put a \$15

per metric ton fee on the carbon content of fuels. The tax would increase by \$2 a year plus inflation annually, with no cap unless the state gets on course to meet ambitious carbon-reduction goals.

Based on previous proposals, the tax could be expected to raise gasoline prices by 15 cents a gallon at first.

Washington State Labor Council is one of the main proponents of the initiative. Its president, Jeff Johnson, said Wednesday in an interview that higher fuel costs will be less economically damaging than climate change. "The cost of doing nothing is greater to the average citizen," he said.

Turn to CARBON, Page 10

USDA farm loans vulnerable to environmental lawsuits

Environmental analysis can be challenged as weak, attorneys say

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Federal loans to "concentrated animal feeding operations" may be vulnerable to lawsuits opposing the construction of "factory farms," according to environmental attorneys.

Public policy — rather

than the free market's "invisible hand" — has spurred the proliferation of CAFOs in the U.S., said Tarah Heinen, an attorney with the Food & Water Watch environmental group.

Filing lawsuits can affect which facilities are funded by USDA's Farm Service Agency and how they're construct-

ed, Heinen said.

"We want to cut out the root cause of this, which is the FSA lending in a way that's not in the public interest," she said.

The possibility of using federal statutes to influence USDA lending to CAFOs was discussed by attorneys during the recent Public Interest En-

vironmental Law Conference in Eugene, Ore.

The USDA's environmental review of such loans can be challenged as cursory and insufficient under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The agency can also be faulted for failing to properly consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about the effect of such loans on protected species, as required under

the Endangered Species Act.

"We're looking for more robust, substantive analysis," said Kevin Cassidy, an attorney with Earthrise Law Center.

Cassidy said one serious problem is the USDA looks at CAFOs in a "piecemeal" fashion rather than examining the full impact of multiple operations.

Turn to LOANS, Page 10



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