

Farmer mental health bill sent to Washington governor

Counseling to be over phone, online

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Farmers and farmworkers will receive free and bilingual mental health counseling over the phone or online under a bill passed by the Washington Legislature.

The legislation, backed by \$485,000 from the general fund, passed the Senate and House unanimously and has been sent to Gov. Jay Inslee to sign.

Rep. J.T. Wilcox, R-Yelm, said he introduced the bill

after reading a newspaper article about the high rate of suicide among farmers.

A study released in 2016 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention looked at suicide rates by occupation. The study combined farming, forestry and fishing. The suicide rate of 84.5 deaths per 100,000 workers was the highest among 22 occupational categories. The next highest was construction and extraction industries, with a rate of 53.3 suicides.

The study was based on about 12,300 suicides in 17 states in 2012. The states included Oregon. Washington was not among the states.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

The Washington Legislature has allocated \$485,000 to support a bill that will provide free bilingual mental health counseling to farmers and farmworkers.

The study speculated that losses, unwillingness to seek social isolation, financial help and access to lethal

means contributed to the high rate of suicide among farmers.

The bill had the support of farm groups and mental health organizations. Bill supporters told lawmakers at hearings that farmers face unusual pressures to sustain family businesses.

Tierney Creech, a co-founder of the Washington Young Farmers Coalition, told a House committee that the suicide of one of the group's members focused attention on the problem.

"Since then we have been inspired to raise awareness of farmer mental health and to seek out and publicize the mental health of resour-

ces available to farmers, she said.

The Department of Health will convene a task force made up of state agencies, farm groups and counselors.

The task force will look at how to provide counseling.

The state will use the task force's recommendations to contract with counselors for a "pilot project" to provide bilingual beginning next March. The bill also calls for providing farms with information suicide prevention.

A report from the task force on expanding the program will be due to the Legislature on Dec. 1, 2020.



Center for Biological Diversity

Environmental groups filed a petition Monday with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add the Siskiyou Mountains salamander to the endangered species list.

Four environmental groups seeking protections for S. Oregon salamander

Petition filed Monday for new ESA listing

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

Increased logging of old-growth forests is threatening the survival of a unique species of salamander that lives in the Klamath-Siskiyou region of southern Oregon and northern California, according to a federal petition filed Monday by four environmental groups.

The organizations, including Cascadia Wildlands, the Center for Biological Diversity, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center and Environmental Protection Information Center, are asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add the Siskiyou Mountains salamander to the endangered species list, which would trigger protections for the amphibians and their habitat.

"This highly specialized animal can't adapt to logging, so it will be pushed to the brink of extinction without Endangered Species Act protections," said Jeff Miller, conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The salamander is a unique indicator species of forest health in the Siskiyou Mountains. It deserves immediate pro-

tection in the face of accelerated logging."

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander is described as a long-bodied, short-limbed terrestrial salamander and is brown with white speckles. It lives only in isolated locations along the Klamath River, on stabilized rock talus in old-growth forests covered with thick moss.

Conservationists previously petitioned for ESA protections for the salamander in 2004. While the species was not listed, the USFWS did conduct a status review in 2006 and later developed a conservation strategy working with the Bureau of Land Management, which was intended to protect habitat for 110 salamander sub-populations on federal lands in the Applegate River watershed in southwest Oregon.

However, the BLM adopted its Western Oregon Plan Revision for 2.5 million acres of forestland in 2016, which environmental groups argue will substantially increase logging in the region and undermine protections for the salamander.

Josh Laughlin, executive director of Cascadia Wildlands based in Eugene, Ore., said the BLM's decision shrinks buffers in half for logging along streams, and

does away with the policy of "survey and manage," which required timber planners to look for salamanders before cutting in their habitat.

"It's clearly going to have a detrimental effect on the remaining population of Siskiyou salamanders," Laughlin said.

Cascadia Wildlands, along with five other groups, already filed a complaint in late summer 2016 against the BLM, asking for an injunction against the agency's Western Oregon Plan Revision. Laughlin said he expects oral arguments in the case this summer.

The ESA petition filed Monday claims the survival of the salamander depends less on overall abundance than it does on habitat protections. The groups go on to argue that "very few populations are secure from habitat destruction and alteration" related to increased logging.

The Oregon Forest Industries Council and American Forest Resource Council, meanwhile, issued a joint statement against the petition, calling it politically motivated and accusing the groups of overwhelming federal agencies with petitions and litigation instead of working collaboratively with scientists and stakeholders to produce supportive research.

WAFLA announces new CEO, staff changes

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — An executive of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development in Doha, Qatar, has been hired as the new chief executive officer of the Washington farm labor association, WAFLA.

Mohamed Dobashi will start work March 19 at the WAFLA office in Lacey, Wash., and handle daily operations, including WAFLA's flagship program of hiring H-2A-visa foreign guest-workers for Washington orchards and farms, said Kim Bresler, WAFLA spokeswoman.

Dan Fazio, who has been director and CEO, will continue in the top position as director overseeing the CEO, Bresler said.

WAFLA announced the hiring of Dobashi and four other new management employees and the departure of three managers in its March 6 newsletter.

WAFLA Board Chairman Stacy Gilmore, marketing director of Cameron Nursery north of Pasco, did not return a Capital Press call seeking comment.

According to Bloomberg and StrateSphere, a business development firm of which



Mohamed Dobashi

Dobashi is a partner, Dobashi has been chief operations officer of Am-lak Holding, a subsidiary of the Qatar Foundation.

He was responsible for finance, administration, legal, information technology and human resources.

He has also been chief operations officer of Al-Faisal Holding Co. responsible for its subsidiaries, business development and local investments.

Dobashi was also an associate professor and associate dean at Carnegie Mellon University's Qatar Campus.

Dobashi has a law degree from Northwestern University in Chicago, a master's degree in business administration from Thunderbird School of Global Management, which is part of Arizona State University, and a double bachelor's degree in economics and international business from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash.

WAFLA used a professional recruiter to advertise its position and Dobashi responded, Bresler said, adding

that he was well vetted.

According to the newsletter, Dobashi will assume some of the duties of former COO George Zanatta, who left on Feb. 28 to start a business in Mexico to train workers for the H-2A program.

Rick Anderson, special projects director, retired at the end of January, and Heri Chapula, Kennewick field services director, is leaving about March 15 to work for a Tri-Cities-area agricultural employer.

Chapula is replaced by David Guzman, who started Feb. 1 as Kennewick field services manager. Guzman will manage WAFLA's Kennewick training center and run a new program training workers on pesticide standards. Guzman previously worked for WAFLA and most recently worked for Mar-Jon Labor, an Othello, Wash., labor contractor.

Jeff McLean started March 1 in a new position as WAFLA Wenatchee Field Services Director.

He has more than 35 years in orchard and agricultural management.

Steve Davis, WAFLA's certified public accountant and auditor since WAFLA's inception in 2007, on Dec. 1 became the chief financial officer.



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