Livestock Hall of Fame celebrates newest inductees

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

This year's inductees into the Southern Idaho Livestock Hall of Fame at the induction banquet in Twin Falls on April 10. Front row from left are Wade and Gwenna Prescott, Dean and LaDeane Brown and Jim and Barb Baker. Back row from left are Scott and Sarah Bedke and Flora and Harry Bokma.

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The Southern Idaho Livestock Hall of Fame honored its newest inductees Tuesday evening at its 59th annual banquet.

This year's inductees were cattle ranchers Scott and Sarah Bedke of Oakley; dairy producers Harry and Flora Bokma of Buhl; long-time Bureau of Land Management supervisor Dean Brown and his wife, LaDeane, of Jerome; cattle ranchers Wade and Gwenna Prescott of Carey; cattle ranchers Jim and Barb Baker of Filer; and sheep and cattle ranchers Ed and Emily Baker (posthumously) of Filer.

Scott Bedke is a fourth-generation rancher, and he and his brother Eric are the principal owners of Winecup Inc., the cattle ranching operation formed by their father. They raise cattle south and west of Oakley and in Elko County, Nev. They run about 1,400 mother cows and farm in the Oakley area. The Bedkes strive to be good stewards of the land, leaving things better than they found them.

Scott Bedke has also been elected to eight terms in the Idaho House of Representatives and is serving his third term as speaker of the House, where he has had significant influence in natural resources issues.

The Prescotts started their cattle operation in 1979 with a modest 20 head of stock cows. Over the next couple of decades they farmed across the Magic Valley, raising feed for their own livestock, and built their herd to 500 mother cows.

In the late 2000s, they purchased a run-down 68,000-acre ranch in Arizona, moving their herd and growing the ranch's carrying capacity to 700 head plus yearlings. They later returned to Idaho and purchased another run-down ranch in Carey, where they run two herds of stock cows and background feeder cattle.

Dean Brown began his career with the Bureau of Land Management in 1971 as a wildland firefighter in the Shoshone field office. In 1974, he moved to BLM's range department, where his primary duties were livestock use supervision and rangeland resource monitoring. At times, he monitored the grazing use of more than 80 bands of sheep and 25,000 head of cattle.

Throughout his career, he was involved in numerous rangeland projects to improve livestock grazing distribution. He was also instrumental in fire rehabilitation and restoration seeding projects.

Originally from California, the Bokmas moved to Buhl and started a dairy with 22 cows in 1974. Over the years, they've grown the herd to 2,000 cows, several farms and another dairy farm in Hagerman. Their two sons have joined them in the business, and they have 17 full-time employees.

Jim and Barb Baker started buying the ranch operation from Jim's parents in the 1980s, doubling it to 700 mother cows. They have been instrumental in improving rangeland health on public lands in south-central Idaho and have been practicing adaptive management for years.

They have improved resource conditions, including riparian and habitat conditions, while maintaining their level of grazing. Those improvements have benefited sage grouse and a variety of livestock, and they were instrumental in forming Idaho's first local sage-grouse working groups.

Jim Baker's parents, Ed and Emily Baker, were also honored posthumously for their years in the sheep and cattle business and stewardship of natural resources.

Oyster growers criticize Ecology's 'politics'

Permission to spray for pest denied

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

Washington oyster farmers inspect shellfish beds May 11, 2015, in Willapa Bay. The Department of Ecology has denied permission to spray the beds with a pesticide to kill burrowing shrimp that churn up the beds and suffocate oysters.

Washington oyster growers denounced the state Department of Ecology for denying them permission Monday to spray a pesticide at Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor to kill burrowing shrimp.

The denial prevents 12 growers from applying the only effective means of removing a pest that plows up shellfish beds and causes oysters to sink and suffocate.

The growers charged Ecology with being driven by public hostility to spraying, rather than science. Ecology maintained it was guided by the potential harm to other creatures.

"We based our decision off the scientific data we have," Ecology spokeswoman Jessica Payne said. "This pesticide was too risky to be used."

Ecology's stance reverses a decision it made in 2015 to let growers spray imidacloprid, a neonicotinoid pesticide widely used on land crops. Ecology initially defended the spraying as ecologically sound. However, consumer, activist and media disapproval pressured growers and Ecology into backing off.

Growers scaled back plans, proposing to spray 500 acres instead of 2,000 acres, and reapplied for a permit in 2016. Ecology reported receiving more than 8,000 comments on the application. On Monday, it announced that it was denying the permit and cited new research for its change of view.

Washington State University scientist Kim Patten, who has researched eradicating burrowing shrimp in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor for many years, disputed Ecology's assertion. Patten, based in Long Beach, said little new has emerged since 2015.

"I'm disappointed that politics got in the way of science," Patten said. "It's politics because spraying chemicals in Willapa Bay is not a popular sentiment. It doesn't sound good."

Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor shellfish farmers grow about 25 percent of the oysters harvested in the U.S. Left unchecked, the shrimp will reduce the harvest by 10 percent a year, Patten estimated.

For decades growers controlled the inedible burrowing shrimp with carbaryl. Imidacloprid was proposed by Patten and growers as a less toxic alternative.

The pesticide has not been used in the U.S. in the manner proposed by the oyster growers. Ecology water quality manager Rich Doenges said tests in Willapa Bay showed that imidacloprid reduced the population of some sediment-dwelling creatures by more than half, potentially disrupting the food chain.

He said that Ecology also was influenced by a 2017 EPA study that assessed how imidacloprid running off farm fields affected aquatic life.

The assessment found imidaclorpid posed a low direct risk to fish, but could pose an indirect risk by harming insects that fish eat.

Rep. Brian Blake, an Aberdeen Democrat whose district includes Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor, said he was disappointed by Ecology's decision.

"I'm worried many of the growers may not survive," said Blake, chairman of the House agriculture committee. "It's not new science that killed the permit, it's new politics."

The oyster growers' association issued a press release through the public relations firm Strategies 360 condemning the decision. "To us, it seems like Ecology has been laying in the weeds, delaying action on our permit application, and politicizing the future of our farms," association President Ken Wiegardt said in a written statement.

More interest expected in dark northern spring wheat

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Washington wheat farmers are planting 35,000 more acres of spring wheat this year than they did last year.

A good portion of those acres may be devoted to dark northern spring wheat, said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission, although he doesn't have firm numbers or an estimate of how much.

But it makes sense, Squires said.

Dark northern spring wheat prices range from $7.21 to $8.19 per bushel, depending on the protein percentage.

Prices for soft white wheat range from $5.75 to $5.90 per bushel, below the cost of production.

Soft white wheat is used in "weak-gluten" products, such as sponge cakes or crackers. DNS is for high-protein breads and rolls, "strong gluten" products. High protein is not desirable in soft white wheat.

Squires expects interest from growers who feel confident that they can reach a higher protein.

With the price spread, most spring wheat will likely be DNS, said Dana Herron, co-owner of Tri-State Seed in Connell. Some farmers in the areas north of Highway 2 are likely to remain with soft white wheat, he said.

"In the southern part of the state, though, down here, it's 100 percent red," he said.

DNS and hard red spring are the same class, Herron said.

In some areas where winter conditions aren't as severe, farmers plant DNS in the fall and harvest it in the spring. That's not a new practice, Squires said, although it may be increasing with the higher prices.

Doing so can lead to a higher yield and increased moisture, Squires said. It gives the wheat a bit of a head start over spring wheat.

Herron said the yield boost is at least 10 to 15 percent, the same differential between a winter wheat yield and a spring wheat yield.

"The winter wheat is more well-established and has a greater, bigger root system," he said. "There's always about a 20 to 25 bushel advantage."

The wheat class typically yields about 115 to 120 bushels per acre for spring wheat, Herron said.

"Last year's spring-planted DNS surprised us all and did very well, in the neighborhood of 140 bushels per acre," he said.

Most farmers likely have already secured their dark northern spring wheat seed, Herron said.

"There's no shortage of soft white, but DNS is getting awfully tight," he said.

For farmers who haven't already gotten their seed?

"I have two words — good luck," Herron said.

Herron shipped in several loads of DNS wheat from Montana and Idaho just to keep up with demand.

Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

Red Delicious apples are packed at Olympic Fruit in Moxee, Wash. The state Apple Commission worries that Indonesia's continued blockage of agricultural crops and products will hurt U.S. exports.

Indonesia still frustrates apple shippers

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — In October there was hope that Indonesia would drop its restrictions on imports of agricultural goods, but five months later they remain in place, much to the consternation of Washington apple shippers under pressure to move a big 2017 crop.

From September through March 26, Washington apple shippers shipped 566,298, 40-pound boxes of apples to Indonesia, down 26.6 percent from the same point a year ago, says Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission.

Mark Powers, president of the Northwest Horticultural Council, raised the issue at a March 22 Apple Commission meeting in Yakima, saying Indonesia has not yet complied with a December 2016 World Trade Organization ruling against its trade restrictions, or the WTO's reiteration of its ruling in November 2017 rejecting Indonesia's appeal.

"For some of you this has been a real problem. It's gotten worse in the 2017 crop season," Powers said to commissioners, some of whom are shippers.

WTO has to determine how much time Indonesia has to come into compliance and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative will have to decide what to do if Indonesia doesn't, Powers said. It could mean U.S. tariffs on Indonesian goods, he later said.

"We're losing money. It's one of our critical markets, in the top six or seven, so it's been disappointing," Fryhover said.

To protect its industries, Indonesia has been restricting agricultural imports from the U.S. and other countries since 2012 through permit and licensing regimes. There's a 5 percent tariff but the permits are the real hammer, Powers said.

U.S. fruit, vegetables, flowers, juices, cattle, beef, poultry and other animal products have also been impacted. It cost U.S. exporters about $170 million in 2016, the trade representative has said. Even with restrictions, the U.S. exported $2.6 billion in agricultural products to Indonesia in 2016 and imported $2.8 billion in agricultural products from Indonesia.

Indonesia claims its local apple producers need protection from some imports, Powers said. It bans imports for a few months each year while it considers new permits, he said. Apples were banned in December, January and early February and possibly will be again in August, September and October, he said. That means shippers must quit shipping at the end of June because ocean shipping takes a month, he said.

"Indonesia typically focuses on Red Delicious and 138s (138 apples per 40-pound box) and smaller sizes. This disruption takes away opportunity to ship consistently," Fryhover said.

At least one shipper has stopped packing 2 1/4-inch diameter apples, which are ideal for Indonesia, due to oversupply and limited sales, he said.

Washington sold 1.5 million boxes of apples to Indonesia from the 2016 crop, a typical level since 2012. Previously, it was 2.7 million and in 1996 is was 4 million. It could easily be 2.5 million to 3 million without restrictions, Fryhover has said.

U.S. pulse plantings projected to decline

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

U.S. farmers are expected to reduce the number of acres they planted to pulse crops this year — in some cases, significantly.

Acreage planted to lentils and Austrian winter peas will be down 28 percent compared to last year, to 791,000 acres and 19,000 acres, respectively.

Dry edible pea acres are expected to be down 20 percent to 908,000 acres, according to the prospective plantings report by USDA National Agricultural Statistic Service.

The declines follow a 13 percent increase in lentil plantings from 2016 to 2017, a 17 percent decrease in dry edible peas and a 32 percent decrease in Austrian winter peas.

Dry edible bean plantings are also expected to be down in 2018, by 3 percent to 2.03 million acres. The category includes chick peas, also known as garbanzo beans, which are projected to be up 7 percent to 665,000 acres. Other than chickpeas, dry edible bean acres are expected to be down 7.3 percent to 1.37 million acres.

But the year-to-year reduction comes after significant increases in plantings from 2016 to 2017, a 12 percent increase in total dry bean plantings and a 53 percent increase in chickpea plantings.

While any change is notable, there's nothing surprising or unexpected in the dry bean prospective acreage report, Rebecca Bratter, executive director of the U.S. Dry Bean Council, said.

It's not a huge decrease, and acreage is still up from where it was two years ago, she said.

Like any other crop, plantings respond to the global supply-and-demand equation, she said.

"We're very tied to what happens in the world," she said.

And it's not just in dry beans. All the crops are tied together, she said. What's happening in the world with soybeans, corn, wheat or other crops could also affect plantings of those crops, which can affect plantings of dry beans, she said.