

Washington cherry crop looks to be light in south

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MATTAWA, Wash. — A light cherry crop is setting in southcentral Washington. The question is how light and whether it will be adequate.

“It’s a poor set. A light crop. We’re still hopeful to be able to pick, but it’s surely not a good crop,” said John Doebler, a grower north of Mattawa who usually has the first fruit ready for harvest. He grows Chelans, an early variety.

Charles Lyall, a larger grower south of Mattawa, said his Chelans and Tietons are light — with a lot of singles or two cherries per cluster instead of a normal two to five. His Rainier and Bing are a little better, he said, but he expects widespread light volume in lowland regions from Mattawa southward.

Fruit will be large and high quality, which should bring good prices but “there just won’t be enough of it to make it a bang-up year,” he said.

The culprit was cool, wet weather during a prolonged bloom that hampered honeybees from the best pollination. Bees collect pollen from blossoms to feed their young. As they do, they spread pollen from tree to tree. Growers take advantage of that by planting pollenizers — a scattering of a different variety of the same tree fruit — throughout their orchards so the bees cross pollinate, increasing fruit size and yield.

Warm weather aids good pollination and a large crop.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Andrew Handley, 26, says this is a good set of Bing cherries in his father's East Wenatchee, Wash., orchard on May 1. Growers are reporting a light set in southern parts of the state.

Cool weather, rain and wind keep bees in their hives and diminish pollination. It’s also harder in cool weather for pollen to descend the tube, or style, of the flower pistil to fertilize the ovary to set fruit.

Andy Handley, a grower with cherries in East Wenatchee, Quincy and Mattawa, said his fruit set is good in Mattawa and East Wenatchee. Quincy, being later, he said, is hard to tell.

He attributed his good Mattawa set to being a couple hundred feet higher in elevation than Doebler and Lyall, who are farther from the Columbia River, and being on Gisela rootstock.

“Gisela always gives a lot of bloom. Normally, we have to hand thin blossoms. We did just a little on the tops of

trees this year on Rainier and Bing,” he said.

Jim Kelley, a grower and fieldman in Finley south of Pasco, said the Finley district has an adequate crop. Foreseeing cool bloom weather, Kelley advised growers to triple or quadruple their order of bee hives so bees would work in greater force during the fewer hours of good weather.

“Some of us had eight hives per acre (instead of a normal two). I think that’s what paid off this year,” Kelley said.

He said the area of Finley and south Pasco and south Kennewick should have 4 to 7 tons per acre of cherries versus a full crop of 7 to 8 tons per acre.

“It’s not heavy but ade-

quate. We could have a later drop but what appears to be sizing now looks to be a great start. It should be enough to entice labor to come pick and big cherries for the marketplace. There’s more sunshine than last year so hopefully taste will match up,” he said.

Harvest usually starts in early June, as California cherries are finishing, and lasts into August. California has a light crop, which along with a light crop in southcentral Washington may help sustain good prices for the benefit of growers from Quincy and Wenatchee northward, Lyall said.

“That would be logical,” Kelley said, “but logic doesn’t always work with cherries.”

Controversial Tillamook power transmission line wins initial approval

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A controversial electrical transmission line proposal in Oregon’s Tillamook County has won a key initial approval, but opponents hope it won’t pass muster with elected officials.

On April 26, the county’s planning commission voted in favor of the project, which would run 8.6 miles between the city of Tillamook and the community of Oceanside.

The Tillamook Public Utility District argues that 3,000 properties in Oceanside are currently three times more likely to sustain power outages because they’re served by a single distribution line that’s prone to disruption from car accidents and weather events.



Capital Press graphic

The 115-kilovolt transmission line would improve the reliability of Oceanside’s power service and allow for the community’s eventual growth, since the existing distribution line is at 90-95 percent of its electrical load capacity, according to the utility district.

Farmers, foresters and other landowners whose properties the transmission line would cross have objected to the project, claiming it’s not justified by actual demand for electricity and could be sited along a less intrusive path, among other complaints.

A citizen advisory group convened by the utility district to consult on the line’s course wasn’t allowed to consider whether the project should even be built, which is “at the heart of the whole thing,” said Cameron La Follette, executive director of the Oregon Coast Alliance conservation group.

“That’s not true public involvement and exploration of alternatives,” she said. “They have steadfastly refused to sit down with anyone and explore options.”

La Follette said she’s not surprised that Tillamook County’s planning commission has approved the project application, given the extensive research

conducted by the utility district.

However, the approval is soon likely to be challenged before the county’s Board of Commissioners, which is composed of elected officials who may be more responsive to community concerns, she said.

Such a reversal would not be unprecedented — a different transmission line route was previously approved by the City of Tillamook’s planning commission, only to be rejected by the city council.

Oregon’s Land Use Board of Appeals upheld that rejection in 2014, leading to the currently proposed transmission line route.

“It’s equally controversial as in 2014, just a slightly different group of people,” La Follette said.

A decision on the transmission line by Tillamook County’s Board of Commissioners is likely within about six months, she said.

Until then, another key regulatory process for the project has been postponed.

Oregon’s Public Utility Commission — which must decide whether to grant the utility district the power of eminent domain to foreclose on property — won’t make that decision until the county’s land use process is complete.

Bankruptcy forestalls Oregon dairy auction

Lost Valley Farm of Boardman, Ore., was set to sell 14,500 cattle

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
and GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

A controversial Oregon dairy filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection Thursday night, blocking an auction Friday to sell off its 14,500 cattle herd in Boardman, Ore.

The liquidation of Lost Valley Farm’s 10,500 cows and 4,000 replacement heifers was ordered in Oregon state court at the behest of Rabobank, a major farm lender seeking repayment for \$60 million in defaulted loans.

However, the bankruptcy petition filed by Greg te Velde, the dairy’s owner, in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of California automatically stays all foreclosure actions by creditors, including the auction scheduled for April 27 at 11 a.m.

Under Chapter 11 bankruptcy, companies typically develop reorganization plans to restructure their debt. Te Velde declined to comment on the bankruptcy case.

Aside from Lost Valley Farm in Oregon, te Velde’s bankruptcy also encompasses his California dairy operations, Pacific Rim Dairy in Corcoran and GJ te Velde Dairy in Tipton.

Together, the dairies have more than 40,000 cattle that are listed as potential “hazard property” that poses a safety threat or requires immediate attention.



Courtesy Paloma Ayala, with aerial support from LightHawk. This 2016 file photo shows an aerial view of Lost Valley Ranch.

Te Velde’s companies owe between \$100 million and \$500 million to fewer than 1,000 creditors and have between \$100 million and \$500 million in assets, according to the bankruptcy petition.

A more complete accounting of his financial affairs is due in bankruptcy court by May 10.

Overland Stockyard, a dairy livestock auction in Hanford, Calif., is listed as te Velde’s largest unsecured creditor with a claim of \$3 million, followed by Conway Hay Sales of Goshen, Calif., with a \$2.9 million claim and Valmont Northwest, an irrigation equipment dealer in Pasco, Wash., with a \$2.3 million claim.

An attorney for Overland said the company is actually a secured creditor and disputed the amount of the claim.

Joe VanLeuven, an attorney representing Rabobank, said he is still evaluating the bankruptcy effect on Rabobank’s state court action and the financial recovery for Lost Valley Farm.

A receiver was appointed to oversee the Oregon dairy’s finances and protect Rabobank’s collateral at the same time that an Oregon judge ordered the company to co-

operate with the planned auction earlier this month.

VanLeuven said he would not comment on Rabobank’s disposition toward a reorganization plan for te Velde’s companies. It is unclear what the immediate effects of the bankruptcy will be, though the immediate impact is the automatic stay, he said.

“The upshot is our auction is not happening today,” VanLeuven said.

Riley Walter, te Velde’s lawyer based in Fresno, Calif., said the bankruptcy filing means receivership of the dairy transfers back to te Velde. Walter said they are in discussions with Rabobank to protect the bank’s interests, but he is not certain what they will decide.

Walter said Lost Valley Farm could undergo a com-

plete reorganization or partial liquidation moving forward, but that also has not been determined.

“The debtor has the sole right to propose a plan for the first 180 days of the case,” Walter said. “As we sit here today, the decision has not been made yet what we will do going forward.”

The auctioneer, Toppenish Livestock, sent several staff members on the hundred-mile trip to Boardman to inform bidders of the latest development. Owner John Top said the company spent three weeks preparing for the auction.

“It’s the height of inconvenience,” Top said.

Aside from its financial troubles, Lost Valley Farm has repeatedly run into regulatory problems in 2018.

Unauthorized discharge of manure and other violations of its confined animal feeding operation, or CAFO, permit prompted the Oregon Department of Agriculture to fine the dairy more than \$10,000.

Continued wastewater issues were cited in a lawsuit filed by ODA seeking to stop all discharges from the dairy, which would effectively shut it down. That case was settled, allowing Lost Valley Farm to continue operating under certain conditions.

Idaho Ag Department collecting unusable pesticides

Capital Press

The Idaho Department of Agriculture in May will collect unusable pesticides at four sites.

Collections, slated from 9 a.m to 1 p.m. local time May 7-10, target pesticides including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and rodenticides.

No fertilizers, micronutrients, solvents, paints or motor oil will be accepted.

Pesticides become unusable for reasons including potency loss, exposure to extreme temperatures, government suspension or cancellation, or growers’ decisions to change cropping rotations or practices, Victor Mason II, the department’s Agricultural Resources Division administrator, said in a release.

The department has collected and disposed of more than 2 million pounds of unusable pesticides since starting the program 25 years ago.

Collections will be:

- May 7 at Pickles Butte Landfill, 15500 Missouri Ave., Nampa.
- May 8 at the Idaho Transportation Department maintenance yard, 550 Indian Head Road, Weiser.
- May 9 at Nez Perce County Fairgrounds, 1229 Burrell Ave., Lewiston.
- May 10 at Coeur d’Alene Transfer Station, 3650 Ramsey Road, Coeur d’Alene.

Participants are asked to register total pounds of pesticide they want to dispose by calling department headquarters or field offices.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture contacts are Joey Carter at (208) 743-0415 for Lewiston and Chuck Hawley at (208) 762-9586 for Coeur d’Alene. Nampa and Weiser contacts are Daniel Sandoval at (208) 366-5157, Brandon Smith at (208) 550-1462, Doug Chan at (208) 332-8661 and Mason at (208) 332-8628.

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Weekly fieldwork report

	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
Item/description (Source: USDA, NASS; NOAA)				
• Days suitable for fieldwork (As of May 1)	6	6	6.3	7
• Topsoil moisture, surplus	10%	8%	14%	5%
• Topsoil moisture, percent short	21%	11%	17%	45%
• Subsoil moisture, surplus	8%	6%	15%	5%
• Subsoil moisture, percent short	36%	16%	14%	35%
• Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of May 1)	33% below/ Normal (East)	Normal	Normal/ 33% above	33-40% below/ Normal (South)

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