



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

André-Denis Wright, the new dean of Washington State University's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, speaks to farmers June 14 during the field day at WSU's dryland research station in Lind, Wash.

## New WSU ag dean: 'I hope this is my forever home'

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

LIND, Wash. — Eastern Washington farmers heard from the new dean of Washington State University's agriculture college for the first time as he spoke at the university's dryland research station field day June 14.

André-Denis Wright took over June 1 as dean of WSU's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences.

"The university and especially ... CAHNRS is an envy to most agricultural colleges across this country," he said.

WSU is the number-one college funded by USDA, Wright said.

"The stakeholders, you folks are amazing," he told farmers. "You're the envy of the rest of the country."

The National Science Foundation's Higher Education Research and Development Survey in March found WSU researchers received \$42.8 million in USDA research and development funding in the 2016 fiscal year, leading the list of 350 universities nationwide.

"Not to say they weren't supportive in the other places I've been, but there's a lot more opportunity here, and I think people here really understand and appreciate the value and importance of agriculture," Wright said. "That's something I think a lot of people across the country have lost sight of."

Wright was born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a province known for lobsters and fishing. It was also the blueberry and apple capital of Canada at the time.

Visiting earlier in the week with farmers and researchers about the various crops Washington produces and seeing apple orchards and blueberries, Wright said he felt as though he was back home.

Wright worked nearly 20 years to increase the efficiency of nutrient utilization in livestock and raise the level of sustainable food production. Much of his effort focused on reducing the enteric methane produced by cattle as they digest feed.

He spent 12 years in Australia, working for the government as a research scientist. That's where he met his wife-to-be and they married and had a daughter.

He became head of the Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences at the University of Vermont, a position he held for five years, and then was approached to lead a new school, as director of the School of Animal and Comparative Biomedical Sciences at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He held the position for three years.

Wright joked that he'd gotten rid of his University of Arizona clothing. His daughter asked if she could still wear Arizona apparel when UA's Wildcats play WSU's Cougars in November. He told her "No," he said with a smile as the audience laughed.

Wright said he hopes to have his wife and daughter in attendance at the Lind Field Day next year.

"I am very happy to be here," he said. "I hope this is my forever home. We'll raise our daughter here and become part of the community."

# Appeals court rules firebreak lawful

## 'Community protection line' created in response to Wolverine fire

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

An environmental group has failed to convince a federal appeals court that forest managers unlawfully created a firebreak in Washington's Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

The 20-mile-long "community protection line" was created by the U.S. Forest Service in 2015 in response to the Wolverine Fire, which burned roughly 65,000 acres near Lake Chelan.

Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, a nonprofit environmental



U.S. Forest Service

The Wolverine Fire in 2015 burned some 65,000 acres near Lake Chelan in Central Washington. An environmental group's lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service for building a fire line to protect rural hamlets has been thrown out.

group, filed a lawsuit claiming the agency acted unlawfully by cutting the 300-foot-wide swath and allegedly removing 100 acres of northern spotted owl habitat.

A federal judge dismissed the complaint last year, ruling that Forest Service managers acted according to emergen-

cy regulations in creating the firebreak, but the plaintiff challenged that decision before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The 9th Circuit has now found the judge didn't abuse his discretion by throwing out the lawsuit because the Forest Service properly used its "emergency rule" even though

wildfires are a regular occurrence in the West.

"While it is true that fires happen every year, it defies plain language and common sense to conclude that no individual fire — or its course, intensity, or duration — could be unforeseeable," the 9th Circuit said. "It is unreasonable to

argue that forest fires can never present emergency situations when viewed at the time the fire is raging."

The environmental group had argued the firebreak was "simply an improperly implemented timber sale, and serves no fire suppression purpose," as evidenced by the fire never coming within six miles of the line.

Establishing the firebreak was "indistinguishable from commercial logging," created the same soil disturbance and other negative effects that should have been reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act, the complaint said. The lawsuit sought to require the Forest Service to conduct an environmental analysis of the firebreak, mitigate adverse impacts and enjoin the agency from using the emergency regulations until the review was finished.

## Idaho tax commission weighs hops equipment exemption

By **BRAD CARLSON**  
Capital Press

The Idaho State Tax Commission is considering the impact of a new state law that guarantees hop growers won't have to pay local property tax on production equipment.

The commission's Property Tax Rules Committee on June 12 stopped short of initiating a rule-making process tied to the new law for now, and instead formed a separate committee to study the law as it relates not only to hops, but also to the definition of "production" in other types of agriculture.

Hops equipment taxation emerged as an issue in the 2018 Idaho Legislature after some growers received assessments. Since 2000 the state has exempted from property tax any equipment used in agricultural production. But several counties want to tax dryers and other types of equipment that isn't used in the hop yards.

The Legislature on March 22 passed House Bill 594, which amends the property tax law to ensure the agricultural equipment exemption from property tax includes hops equipment. The law will expire after two years, giving the property committee time to sort out the issue.

For growers of hops and some other crops, the first "sellable unit" is often created off the field. Hops, for example, require drying before they can be sold.

Alan Dornfest, the com-

mission's property tax bureau chief, said more work needs to be done to clarify the meaning and application of "production" in applying the state's exemption on property tax for agriculture equipment. That's what the new committee, headed by commission Tax Policy Specialist Rick Anderson, will aim to do.

"Where does 'production' stop?" Dornfest said in an interview. "Now we say it's only in the field, but that is not in rule — it's only an interpretation."

He said the new law's reference to "production" should be clarified given that a food processing plant may argue its equipment should be exempt from property tax because it is needed to make the first sellable product.

Canyon County Chief Deputy Assessor Joe Cox said the southwest Idaho county early this year sent assessment notices to hop farmers. Members of the commission's Property Tax Rules Committee said Boundary County, in north Idaho, also wants to tax hops equipment.

Cox said it's a county assessor's responsibility to tax all property unless it is explicitly exempted. Canyon County traditionally viewed the ag equipment exemption as ending "once the crop hits the road" for processing or storage, he said.

Hop growers say off-field steps such as separating the cones from vines and cleaning and drying them are required before shipment-ready bales are produced.

## Competition for water demands foresight, Idaho House speaker says

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY — Idaho leads the nation in state economic performance, job growth and per-capita earnings, and it's on every list of desired travel destinations.

"It's exciting on one level but also presents a lot of challenges," Scott Bedke, Idaho's speaker of the House, told the Idaho Water Users water law conference.

With that growth comes competition for scarce resources. The challenge over the next decade will be managing the growth and inevitable conflicts over limited resources, he said.

"Financially, the state is in good shape. It's going to be on us to manage this growth properly," he said.

Water issues were at the top of the list when he was first elected to the Idaho Legislature 18 years ago and they continue to "dog" communities, he said.

"It's incumbent upon us to put into place measures we can live with into the future," he said.

In the last legislative session, lawmakers reviewed

their commitment to water projects in the state aimed at infrastructure and aquifer recharge.

There's not a lot of money in the state's budgets, but lawmakers continued to support long-term commitment to those projects, he said.

This last season, the state recharged more than 500,000 acre-feet of water in the eastern Snake Plain Aquifer.

Over the last three years, it has put 1 million acre-feet back into the ground, he said.

Some people might argue that was due to big water years. But there's been big water years before with zero water recharged, he said.

The state's effort on recharge is working. Sentinel wells show significant improvement, and aquifer levels are beginning to improve, he said.

"We've stopped the drop," he said.

The landmark agreement between surface water and groundwater users to reduce consumptive use by groundwater pumpers is no small part of that, he said.



Farmworkers set up strings that will train emerging hop plants in a field near Wilder, Idaho. The industry requires specialized equipment before and after harvest, and a state committee is trying to determine how it fits into the property tax exemption for agricultural production equipment.

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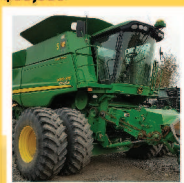
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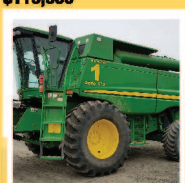
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