



Oregon Blueberry Commission

The 2018 Oregon blueberry crop may be headed for a record.

## Largest-ever Oregon blueberry crop predicted

By MITCH LIES  
For the Capital Press

As the 2018 Oregon blueberry harvest season heads toward its peak, all signs point to a record crop and high-quality fruit.

"We should see a pretty big jump this year from a roughly 107 million-pound harvest in 2017 to projections in 2018 of 125, 130 or possibly even beyond 130 million pounds," said Bryan Ostlund, administrator of the Oregon Blueberry Commission. "This absolutely should be a record crop."

The current record, harvested in 2016, is 116 million pounds.

The one big factor growers mention when speaking of this year's blueberry crop is cooperating weather, which has contributed to good quality fruit.

"The mild weather has brought the fruit on slow, which has contributed to good quality fruit, and the dry weather has kept that quality up," said grower Doug Krahrmer of Berries Northwest.

"The cool weather has helped us out quite a bit," said Jeff Malensky of Oregon Berry Packing in Hillsboro.

Yields, both growers agreed, are well above last year when high summer temperatures hurt yield and quality, and slightly above average.

"We ended up with a short crop in 2017, and usually when you have a short crop, those plants come back in a vigorous way with heavy fruit

set, and that is exactly what we have seen this year," Ostlund said.

"This mild weather also has helped the labor situation, because it gives you a bigger window to get the fruit harvested," Krahrmer said. "I have not heard of any labor-shortage issues."

"We haven't been behind in fields," Malensky said, "in large part because of the cool weather, and also because there is more labor available than folks originally thought."

Even the price for fresh blueberries has been good to date, growers said, but that could change with the British Columbia crop now coming onto the market.

Still, there is some good news on that front in that early projections of a big crop in British Columbia have been scaled back. Current projections are for an average crop. The bad news, however, as Krahrmer put it: "An average crop in B.C. is still a lot of fruit."

Growers to date have no news on the frozen price for the 2018 crop.

"It is a little early," Malensky said on July 6. "We are just at the front end of the processed fruit starting to come in, so we will get a better idea in the next 10 days how the processed price is looking."

Asked to summarize the season to date, Malensky said: "Overall, things are pretty good. Could they be better? Yes. Could they be a lot worse? Yes."

## Ag secretary meets with E. Oregon farmers

### Sonny Perdue makes trip to Sherman County

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
Capital Press

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said wherever he travels across the country farmers want to know the latest about trade uncertainty, labor and the status of the 2018 Farm Bill.

His July 3 stop among the rolling wheat fields of Eastern Oregon was no different.

Perdue arrived at Martin Farms in Rufus, Ore., as part of his "Back to our Roots" tour featuring stops around the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.

Flanked by Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., he took a brief tour of the farm before arriving back in the shop, where about 50 local farmers and county officials waited for a meet-and-greet that quickly became an impromptu town hall.

After shaking hands and posing for photographs, Perdue focused his comments first on the administration's trade war with China. Starting July 6, the U.S. imposed a 25 percent tariff on roughly \$50 billion worth of Chinese goods. In turn, China has pledged retaliatory tariffs on 545 American products — especially targeting agriculture.

As one farmer pointed out, cash bids for hard red winter wheat have dropped from around \$7 per bushel to \$6 per bushel amid the turmoil. Between 85 and 90 percent of Northwest wheat is exported.

"I'm well aware of what percentage of crop here in the Northwest goes overseas," Perdue said. "We are mindful of that, not only in your wheat crop but in your specialty crops."

Perdue added that U.S. soybeans have taken a 20 percent hit over the last few weeks. Other farm imports subject to increased Chinese tariffs include everything



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue talks with Alan Von Borstel, vice president of the Oregon Wheat Growers League. At right is Clint Carlson, secretary-treasurer of the organization. Perdue visited a farm outside Rufus, Ore., last week.

from fresh fruit to beef and pork.

Perdue said the USDA is working on "some sort of compensatory mitigation strategy" for farmers, but did not offer specifics.

"(Trump) knows that you all are great patriots. He knows that you stand behind him when he calls out China for cheating for years," Perdue said. "But he also knows the bank is going to need more than patriotism to pay the bills."

Perdue said he is more optimistic about passing a new farm bill before the current package expires Oct. 1.

Both the House and Senate have passed their own versions of the bill, and though there are differences between the two, Perdue said he believes they can be resolved.

Sherman County farmers also spoke up for changes in regulations they would like to see, including provisions in the National Organic Program requiring organic farmers to comply with all state and local weed ordinances.

That request stems from an incident last year between Azure Farms, a 2,000-acre organic operation near Moro, Ore., and neighboring wheat farms. Growers had complained for years about weeds blowing into their fields from Azure Farms, prompting the county to intervene.

Alan von Borstel, a wheat farmer near Grass Valley, Ore., and vice president of the Oregon Wheat Growers League, asked Perdue about the USDA Transition Incentives Program, which is designed to help get new farmers started while also taking land out of the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, and putting it back into production.

The program works by paying retiring farmers or ranchers two more years on their CRP contracts, on the condition they sell or rent the land to a beginning grower — someone who has not been a farm or ranch operator for more than 10 years.

However, the transition cannot be made between direct family members, such as father to son, which von Borstel criticized as being discriminatory.

"They want these guys to succeed, yet they build this kind of wall between family members," von Borstel said.

Logan Padgett, a neighboring Grass Valley wheat farmer and member of the Oregon Farm Bureau's Young Farmers & Ranchers committee, said he got his start in farming thanks to the Transition Incentives Program, taking on a neighbor's former CRP ground.

The program is a valuable risk management tool, Padgett said, especially since it takes two years for a grow-

er to harvest that first wheat crop in a dryland fallow rotation.

"I'd like to see that same opportunity if it arose with my own family," Padgett said.

For his part, Perdue said he is not convinced the program's rules are discriminatory, but would be open to further discussions.

Jenny Freeborn, whose family farms in the Mid-Wilamette Valley, said she would like to see more of a safety net to accommodate Oregon's diverse specialty crops.

"How you do that, I don't know," said Freeborn, chairwoman of the Oregon Young Farmers & Ranchers. "But I do know, as a member of a family farm, I've barely followed the farm bill at times because it's not going to have an impact on our farm."

Perdue said it is his job to make sure these ideas and concerns are heard back in Washington, D.C.

"I'm not (Henry) Kissinger, but I want to be an unapologetic advocate for American agriculture, farmers and ranchers to the president's administration," he said.

Later on Tuesday, Perdue visited the site of the Eagle Creek fire in the Columbia River Gorge with Walden, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and local officials.

His tour wraps up Thursday in Alaska with Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski.

## WDFW collars wolves, fills tracking gap

### Collar introduced to Togo pack

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Two wolves were captured and fitted with radio collars in June to help wildlife managers track packs in areas where wolves have a history of attacking cattle, according to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

An adult male in the Togo pack was collared, as was an adult male traveling in the territory formerly occupied by the Profanity Peak pack. The collars fill gaps the department had in monitoring wolves in northeast Washington.

The Togo pack has attacked at least three calves in Ferry County since early November. The most recent attack was May 20. The department says the pack has two known members and neither was wearing a collar previously.

The Profanity Peak pack in Ferry County ceased to exist in 2017, according to the department, but wolves are in the area.

The department killed seven wolves in the Profanity Peak pack in 2016 to stop attacks on livestock. A surviving adult female traveled north into Canada in 2017.

The department also reported Tuesday in a monthly report on wolf activities that biologists tried to collar wolves in the Huckleberry, Lookout Mountain and Grouse Flats packs, but did not succeed. The department plans to try to collar wolves in the next few weeks in the Beaver Creek, Five Sisters and Leadpoint packs.



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