



WSDA

The label affixed to organic products in Washington includes an image of George Washington.

WSDA eyes new organic fees, logo

George's image on chopping block

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington's organic fees and logo are due for an overhaul, according to the state Department of Agriculture.

The department is in the early stages of revising rates to collect more money from the 1,100 organic producers, handlers and processors it inspects, certifies and advises.

The department also plans to adopt a new label for the state's organic products, replacing George Washington's image with something more distinctively organic, said Brenda Book, organic program supervisor.

"We want people to want to use the logo," she said. "We want to make it a little more modern and up-to-date."

The department has not proposed specific fees or announced a new logo, but hopes to have both in place by the beginning of next year. Book said the department needs to take in more money to keep the program self-supporting and build a cushion, though some businesses may not see their fees rise.

"We don't anticipate increases across the board," she said.

A new-look label, different than the USDA organic logo, should help market the state's products, Book said. The department has been working with a graphic designer, she said. "None of the draft concepts include (Washington's) head anywhere."

The department certifies that organic products meet USDA standards. Annual fees range from \$200 for growers with less than \$15,000 in sales to \$2,200 plus 0.11 percent of gross sales for growers with sales of more than \$75,000.

The department has a separate list of fees for handlers and processors.

The department's current budget estimates the department will collect \$6.5 million in fees over two years to support the equivalent of 35.5 full-time positions.

The department is not ready to say how much more money it wants to collect. A detailed proposal will be due in the fall. In the meantime, the department will meet with organic producers, Book said. "We're still determining what's that magic number we want to get to," she said.

Fees last had a major overhaul more than 15 years ago.

"Salaries and benefits are at a different amount than 15 years ago," Book said. "We held off as long as we could, to the point we really need to do it now."

The state agriculture department does not have a monopoly on organic certification in Washington. Some 15 other USDA-accredited organizations based outside the state are willing to certify organic farms in Washington, according to a USDA's National Organic Program database.

Oregon wheat farmers reeling from massive blaze

Substation fire mostly contained after burning 80,000 acres

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

Farmers in north-central Oregon are counting their losses after a massive 80,000-acre wildfire ripped through Wasco and Sherman counties, torching up to a quarter of the local wheat crop.

The Substation fire started July 17 on private land southeast of The Dalles and spread quickly, fanned by high winds and fueled by drought. Gov. Kate Brown declared the fire a conflagration as it jumped the Deschutes River, prompting hundreds of evacuation orders.

The blaze is now largely contained, though an estimated 1 million to 2 million bushels of unharvested wheat went up in flames, crushing what was expected to be a bumper crop in some areas. Tana Simpson, associate administrator of the Oregon Wheat Commission, said Wasco and Sherman counties typically produce around 8 million bushels annually.

"Certainly, this is a disappointing loss for our growers," Simpson said.

The fire also took a deadly turn, killing 64-year-old John Ruby, who was found near a burned tractor. Authorities say Ruby, a longtime Wasco



Associated Press

A fast-moving wildfire rages across Wasco County southeast of The Dalles, Ore. A 64-year-old man was killed in the fire.

County resident and farmer, died while trying to protect his neighbor's property by digging a firebreak.

The Wasco County Sheriff's Office is leading an investigation into the cause of the fire, which it described as "incendiary in nature." Anyone with information should call the Oregon State Police tip line at 1-800-452-7888.

Brian Tuck, dryland crops specialist for Oregon State University Extension Service in Wasco and Sherman counties, said wheat harvest had just begun when the Substation fire ignited, bringing normal operations to a standstill while growers raced to defend their fields.

To make matters worse, yields were expected to be higher than usual thanks to timely spring rains, Tuck

said, from 55-60 bushels per acre to 80-90 bushels per acre in many areas.

"Unfortunately, a lot of that crop is just being burned up here," Tuck said.

Darren Padgett, a wheat farmer near Grass Valley and member of the Oregon Wheat Commission, said firefighting is a normal part of the job for farmers and ranchers in central and Eastern Oregon, but the Substation fire was the biggest and baddest blaze they had seen in years.

"We'll be talking about this for a long, long time to come," Padgett said.

When a fire starts, Padgett said the first thing farmers do is hook up a disc plow to their tractors and dig fire lines to slow the spread of flames. The Substation fire, however, jumped fire lines

like they weren't even there, Padgett said, and kicked up so much smoke he could barely see his hand in front of his face.

"We didn't know what the right move was, at times," he said.

Alan von Borstel, a fellow Grass Valley farmer, told the Associated Press they experienced day after day of horrendous winds on the fire line, and the inferno also started to create its own wind.

"As the fire gets closer, you actually start to feel threatened, and if it gets too close, we realize we can't do it, (and) we get the hell out of Dodge," von Borstel said.

Without farmers, von Borstel said the fire would not have been stopped as soon as it was.

Judge hears oral arguments in Klamath Tribes lawsuit

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

A federal judge in San Francisco heard oral arguments July 20 in a case filed by the Klamath Tribes of southern Oregon seeking greater protections for endangered sucker fish in Upper Klamath Lake.

The lawsuit, which names the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service as defendants, requests an injunction to hold more water in the lake for shortnose and Lost River suckers, a culturally significant food for the tribes.

Farmers and ranchers, however, worry the injunction would essentially shut off surface water irrigation in the Klamath Project, costing roughly \$400 million in lost annual economic value.

District Judge William Orrick did not issue a ruling from the bench, and is considering a motion to transfer the case to a different court. He did not give a timetable for his decision.

Mark Johnson, deputy director of the Klamath Water Users Association, said the non-ruling means irrigators in the Klamath Project will be allowed to continue watering their crops — for now.

"Things are looking pretty promising in the short-term," Johnson said.

The KWUA, Sunnyside Irrigation District and California farmer Ben DuVal filed to intervene in the tribes' lawsuit. They argue an injunction would have a devastating effect on local agriculture, and claim there is no scientific evidence linking higher water levels in Upper Klamath Lake with healthier sucker populations.

"It's all across the board. A lot of it is weather-driven, regardless of lake levels," Johnson said. "Overall, lake levels to play into it, but they're not a huge driving factor."

Both the shortnose and Lost River suckers — known to the tribes as C'waam and Koptu — were listed as endangered in 1988. Tribal harvests decreased from more than 10,000 fish in 1968 to 687 in 1985, and today just two suckers are kept every year for ceremonial purposes.

The Bureau of Reclamation manages lake levels for the benefit of suckers under a 2013 biological opinion, or BiOp, along with water deliveries to the Klamath Project for irrigation. The agency must also keep enough water in stream for salmon and steelhead in the lower Klamath River.

The tribes' lawsuit, filed in May, claims the bureau continues to operate the Klamath Project "in a manner inimical to the continued existence and ultimate recovery of the C'waam and Koptu and in direct violation of the (Endangered Species Act)."

According to the lawsuit, "Dramatic changes to the Klamath River Basin's hydrology and the rise of agricultural activity within the area since the Project's

inception have caused (Upper Klamath Lake) to change from eutrophic to hypereutrophic, that is, from a lake with high nutrient levels to one that is excessively rich in them."

Don Gentry, tribal chairman, said the intent is not to harm agriculture, but to do what is necessary to protect the fish.

We're just backed into a very serious situation," Gentry said. "If we don't do whatever we can to protect the fish, and the fish go extinct, they're gone forever."

Gentry said Orrick made it clear during the hearing that he would not dismiss the case. Regardless of venue, Gentry said the tribes will be prepared to proceed.

Orrick is no stranger to water disputes in the Klamath Basin. Last year, he ruled that more water was needed in the Klamath River to flush away a deadly salmon-killing parasite known as C. shasta. The bureau released 38,425 acre-feet of water April 6-15 and 50,000 acre-feet May 7-28 to comply with the order, delaying the water allocation for irrigators until June.

If the Klamath Tribes succeed with their injunction for more water in Upper Klamath Lake, Johnson said it would essentially shut down surface water irrigation for 230,000 acres in the project.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Cows graze July 19 in southwest Washington. The U.S. Drought Monitor reports that 26 percent of the state, including the southwest, is in a moderate drought. The National Weather Service says the odds favor warmer and drier than usual weather for several more months.

Drought expands in Oregon, Washington

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Drought conditions are spreading across Oregon and Washington, and an El Nino forming in the Pacific Ocean will tilt the odds in favor of more warm and dry months ahead, federal officials report.

The percentage of Oregon in moderate or severe drought was up to 80 percent from 68 percent from the week before, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Meanwhile, a moderate drought in Washington expanded to 26 percent from 17 percent of the state.

Conditions in Idaho and California were unchanged, with 6 percent of Idaho and 44 percent of California in some degree of drought. The Drought Monitor has four stages of drought, ranging from moderate to exceptional.

Also the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center reported that the odds favor above-average tempera-

tures in the four states during August, September and October.

Looking further ahead, the center puts the chances that an El Nino will form in the Pacific Ocean by November at 70 percent. An El Nino, a warming of equatorial sea-surface temperatures, usually leads to warmer and drier winters in the Pacific Northwest.

Forecasts of an El Nino have missed the mark before. A large amount of warm water below the surface makes forecasters slightly more confident this time, according to the center.

Drought conditions in Oregon are most severe east of the Cascades, where 25 percent of the state has fallen into a "severe" drought, the level above "moderate."

In Washington, the moderate drought conditions are mostly west of the mountains, though drought conditions extend up the Columbia Gorge as far east as Benton County.

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Weekly fieldwork report

Item/description (Source: USDA, NASS; NOAA)	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Days suitable for fieldwork (As of July 22)	6.8	6.9	6.9	7
• Topsoil moisture, surplus	0	0	11%	1
• Topsoil moisture, percent short	78%	43%	41%	72%
• Subsoil moisture, surplus	0	1%	11%	0
• Subsoil moisture, percent short	77%	35%	39%	75%
• Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of July 24)	40-50% Below	40% Below/ Normal	40% Below/ Normal	40% Below/ Normal

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