

Onion crop looks good in SE Oregon, SW Idaho

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Craig Froerer likes what he sees in his onion fields outside Nyssa, Ore.

"All the stars aligned for a great crop this year," he said.

The large onion crop of southeastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho looks good as growers head toward harvest. Some early varieties are getting harvest-ready. Fields appear to be in fine shape and noticeably farther along than they were at this point in the slow-starting 2017 season.

"We have had very mild, even temperatures, so it is going to be a great crop," said Froerer, of Froerer Farms. "We have had great

weather all the time, and no really high temperatures," he said July 20. "The crop is deciding what it is going to do and it is going to be a great crop. We are starting to harvest today."

Some early-to-mature varieties are approaching harvest-readiness, said Oregon State University Malheur County Extension Agent Stuart Reitz, based in Ontario.

Early varieties and transplants — which are planted as small onions and have a head start on the directly seeded crop — typically bypass long-term storage and go directly to customers. This effectively extends the period over which onions can be shipped and gives customers more options.



Onions and onion fields in the area look good in general, Reitz said July 20.

"Last year was a bit of a difficult year with the weather and late planting. But right

now, everything across the (Treasure) Valley is looking pretty good," he said. "Stands look good, and plants have been doing well. It has been hot the last few days, but not excessively."

Growers this time of year want to see closed-over rows of plants that have uniform height and size. A good-looking stand has the crop uniformly spread across the field, rather than showing an abundance of onions in one area and sparse conditions in another.

"We will see how it all turns out, but now most of the fields are in pretty good shape," Reitz said.

Idaho Onion Growers Association President Dell

Winegar, who farms south of Fruitland, Idaho, said it appears onions are building heft.

"Some of the ones we are going to be doing early are getting some size," he said. "The overall quality looks good to me."

Winegar said he expects some thin stands in the area, a result of heavy winds earlier in the year. "That doesn't go away. There will be some," he said. "But overall size should be good."

The season is at least a week to 10 days ahead of year-earlier conditions — so onions will be better-cured when they go into storage, and more will be ideal in size if current conditions hold, he said. Temperatures that

get too high for too long can make onions mature too early; tops can fall over, and the onions don't reach ideal size, he said.

Paul Skeen, president of the Malheur County Onion Growers Association, said he expects "an average good, healthy crop" this year. Excess heat so far has not been an issue, he said.

Skeen, who farms near Nyssa, expects to start harvesting early varieties Aug. 10 or so, he said. The onion crop in the area should be better than last year's, he said.

"It's not perfect," Skeen said, citing some impacts from heavy wind last spring, "but overall it is looking good."

New public cultivar aims to 'Triumph' in hop market

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A cross between two hop plants made 18 years ago will likely debut this October as "Triumph," a new public variety resulting from the cooperative breeding efforts of USDA and Northwest growers.

Unlike cultivars owned by private companies, Triumph can be grown and propagated without paying license fees to the developer, said John Henning, a research geneticist with USDA who developed the variety.

"It's all publicly handled and that dramatically decreases the cost of production to the grower," Henning said.

The variety's name springs from its repeated "triumph" over other cultivars during single-hop brewing trials, as well as Henning's favorite brand of motorcycle.

Aroma-style hops generally yield about eight to 10 bales per acre, while Triumph has produced 12 or more in field trials, he said.

"We don't want to over-hype it because it's a small plot," said Doug Weathers, a hop farmer who tested the variety on 2 acres near Salem, Ore.

Weathers said he appreciates that Triumph is "on the front end of harvest," which means he can begin using picking and processing machinery before most other hop cultivars are ready.

"It picks really nice and dries really nice," he said. "It's fairly non-problematic to grow."

Agronomic benefits are



Participants in a recent field tour examine hop plants of the Triumph cultivar, which is expected to be publicly released after 18 years of breeding and trials by USDA and Northwest farmers.



Doug Weathers

important but flavor ultimately determines whether a new hop variety will catch on, experts say.

Brewers have described Triumph as having notes of "pink Bazooka bubble-gum" and "peach stone fruit," Weathers said. "That's the feedback we're getting from them."

The hops are well-suited for use in pale ales, amber ales and pilsners, he said. "It's a little lighter profile."

New hop varieties typically need a "long runway" to gain popularity, said Pete Venegas, procurement manager at Yakima Chief-Hopunion, a hop supplier.

"You need to be persistent

and keep promoting it," Venegas said.

Becoming a key ingredient in a popular beer can greatly boost demand for a hop variety, particularly for a brew that racks up awards, he said. "It's really up to the consumer."

Triumph is tentatively planned for public release in October after undergoing years of greenhouse and field trials, with the final step being the 2-acre plot at Weathers' farm.

Henning said Triumph is his first new hop variety in about a decade but he's got two other varieties ready to jump to the final testing stage.

The cultivar is joining a crowded hop market. This spring, the national inventory of hops hit a record 169 million pounds, up 20 percent from the previous year and the highest level in decades.

No vote for ag labor bill before recess

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

An agricultural labor bill that has divided agricultural groups will not be voted on in the U.S. House before its August recess begins Friday, but proponents and others say they will keep working on the issue.

The Ag and Legal Workforce Act, HR 6417, that would replace the H-2A-visa guestworker program with a less costly H-2C program, had bipartisan support but apparently not the 218 votes to pass. It also would impose mandatory E-verify, electronic verification of employment eligibility.

The bill was supported by more than 200 agricultural groups including the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Western Growers Association, Irvine, Calif., and the California Farm Bureau Federation lobbied strongly against it, saying E-verify could devastate California's ag labor workforce without better transition to legal status for the 50 to 70 percent of illegal immigrant workers. California has more ag workers than any other state and the most labor-intensive crops.

But Paul Schlegel, managing director of public policy and economics for the American Farm Bureau Federation, said people are upset that Western Growers and CFBF would work to stop a vote rather than further improve the bill in the House or Senate.

"There are a lot of people bewildered that ag groups would try to shut down the best chance we've had in years. I talked to a dairy guy in upstate New York today who is very frustrated.

Dairy can't use H-2A. I'm starting to tell people if they lose workers to call Western Growers. Maybe they can get them workers," Schlegel said.

Ag labor often is a component of larger immigration bills but this was a stand-alone ag labor bill sponsored by House Judiciary Chairman Robert Goodlatte, R-Va., and co-sponsored by six Republicans and two Democrats. It was supported by the chairs of the moderate Republican Tuesday Group and the conservative Freedom Caucus and Republican Study Committee.

The last time ag labor was seriously debated was in 2013 and before that 2007 and before that in the 1990s, Schlegel said.

"The acuteness and gravity of the problem (labor shortage) means we should work together. The bill may not be perfect but it's a darn sight better than what may exist in the figment of someone's imagination," he said.

AFBF knows legal status for current workers is the central issue to work on, he said. "But you can't work on it, if you don't have the legislative process in full gear and that's why we want to keep it moving," he said.

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., a co-sponsor of the bill, said he is "disappointed the timeline for a vote has shifted," but pledged to continue to work to bring the bill to the floor vote that House leadership promised him and other members.

Michael Marsh, president and CEO of the National Council for Agricultural Employers, in Washington, D.C., said he thinks House leadership delayed a vote out of concern of having enough

votes and didn't want a third immigration-related measure to fail within two months. Leadership also was under pressure from non-agricultural groups opposed to E-verify, he said.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., had promised a vote on an ag labor bill before recess.

But McCarthy came under heavy pressure from his home-state constituents to scrap the vote. McCarthy's office issued a statement saying there will be a vote but that more work needs to be done to gather support needed for passage.

The bill would allow illegal workers to obtain H-2C visas, "touchout" to another country briefly or for up to a year and return on the visa as H-2C workers. Western Growers says that leaves workers' spouses open to deportation.

"Our growers tell us that workers tell them they would rather continue living in the shadows than convert to H-2C. So we can't support a bill that would cause us to lose our workforce," Tom Nassif, Western Growers president and CEO, said recently.

"We support an expanded guestworker program and a path to legal status for individuals currently working in agriculture. Unfortunately, the bill falls far short of a solution for our farmers and employees. We are calling upon our congressional delegation to oppose bringing this bill to the floor for a vote," the California Farm Bureau said in a statement urging its members to lobby against the bill.

Feds seizing Oregon mega-dairy citing owner's behavior

SALEM (AP) — The U.S. Department of Justice has asked a judge to appoint a federal trustee to take over an embattled Oregon mega-dairy, citing the owner's drug use, gambling, out-of-control spending and pending criminal charges.

Lost Valley Farm, located near Boardman, supplies milk to the Tillamook County Creamery Association,

which produces Tillamook Cheese, the Statesman Journal reported.

The 11-square mile dairy has had issues including financial and regulatory problems since it opened over a year ago. The Justice Department is handling owner Greg te Velde's Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which was filed in April to stall a bank-foreclosure sale of his cattle.

Since then, te Velde admitted he continued to use methamphetamine and gamble at a California casino once or twice a week, U.S. Trustee Tracy Hope Davis wrote in a July 13 motion.

Davis asked a judge to either appoint a separate trustee to manage the dairy's finances and operations on behalf of creditors, or to dismiss the

bankruptcy case.

Te Velde is also facing criminal charges in California for possession of methamphetamine and trying to bribe an officer.

He declined to comment last Thursday.

Davis wrote that te Velde is accused of violating bankruptcy procedures when he moved more than \$660,000

into a newly opened personal checking account less than a month before he declared bankruptcy. Te Velde has declined to say where the money came from.

He also has another violation for taking out a \$205,000 loan without notifying the bankruptcy court.

Lost Valley Farm is the second-largest dairy in the state.



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