

Rain gives Christmas trees boost before harvest

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Willamette Valley trees have benefited from several days of rain going into harvest, just what Bob Schaefer, general manager of Noble Mountain Tree Farm near Salem, Ore., likes to see.

“Harvestable trees will hang on through the toughest of weather conditions, but it’s nice to have all our needles plumped and fresh going out,” Schaefer said.

Noble Mountain farms 4,000 acres and produces 1 million trees every year.

With California its No. 1 market, the farm stocks the big chain stores prior to Thanksgiving, when Black Friday weekend draws 2 percent of retail sales.

Though the industry has predicted a shortage the last few years, Schaefer believes there are enough trees this year.

Customers wanting to pay less go with shorter trees and faster-growing species, especially Douglas fir.

“You can probably get a 5- or 6-foot Doug fir for under \$30,” Schaefer said. “I’ve seen retail lots charging \$18-20 a foot for the bigger Noble firs and selling them like hotcakes. The average price for a 9- to 10-foot Noble tree in L.A. is about \$160.”

Natural Christmas trees still have a special attraction for families, he said.

“A lot of times people are buying that Christmas tree smell,” Schaefer said.



Noble Mountain Tree Farm

Harvest commences at Noble Mountain Tree Farm near Salem, Ore. California is the Pacific Northwest’s No. 1 Christmas tree customer, buying 45 percent of the annual crop.

“Millennials starting families want to develop traditions. Some were raised with artificial trees but are now into whole foods and a clean environment and they’re jumping onto the real tree bandwagon.”

Grand fir is the most fragrant Christmas tree, but Douglas and Frazier firs hold up longer, making them the choice farther afield, where customers can enjoy them for upwards of a month and a half.

Due to a higher production of Douglas fir this year Noble Mountain is increasing its shipments to Mexico.

However, Helmut Rogg of the Oregon Department of Agriculture says the overall number of trees sold in Mexico is on a downturn due to high freight costs, exchange rates, prohibitive require-

ments and political machinations. From 1 million trees two years ago, last year Oregon sent 600,000 to Mexico.

During the past few years ODA has worked with its counterparts in Mexico to eliminate a longstanding pesticide requirement to protect Oregon’s much-preferred integrated pest management strategy.

“Due to some internal political issues I’m not privy to, the review has not been finalized so unfortunately again this year we have to spray our trees three to six weeks prior to cutting,” Rogg said. “This is a big bummer to us because spraying pesticides in a field disrupts our growers’ integrated pest management approach.”

Not only is it impossible for growers to confine spraying to Mexico-bound trees in

the field, the pesticides don’t discriminate between good and bad insects and, with their natural enemies wiped out, spider mites and aphids often flare up the following season.

Hawaii continues to be a major market for Oregon and works closely with the ODA to keep out foreign slug and snail species and yellow jackets. “I’ve heard horror stories of the sugar cane fields having yellow jackets’ nests as big as Volkswagens,” Schaefer said.

Oregon growers use several weapons to get rid of any hitchhikers bound for Hawaii.

“We end up taking leaf blowers and blowing them twice, shaking them for 30-40 seconds and once that has been done they never hit the ground again,” Schaefer said.

About 45 percent of Pacific Northwest trees go to California and 10 percent to other Western states. Gulf states comprise 9 percent of the market and about 16 percent go to Mexico. About 4 percent go to Atlantic states with the rest going as far afield as Japan, China, Hong Kong, Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico and Dubai.

Oregon produces about 5.2 million trees a year, followed by North Carolina’s 3.5 million, Michigan’s 3 million, Pennsylvania’s 2.3 million and Washington state’s 1.5 million.

Of the country’s 350,000 acres of Christmas trees, 42,000 acres are in Oregon.

Washington restarts removal of Old Profanity wolfpack

Last two wolves in pack targeted

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The last two wolves in a pack that has been attacking cattle in the Kettle River Range in northeast Washington have been targeted for lethal removal by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Fish and Wildlife Director Kelly Susewind authorized the department to restart an operation to remove wolves in the Old Profanity Territory in Ferry County.

The department shot an adult wolf and a juvenile wolf there in September.

Attacks on livestock, however, have continued. Fish and Wildlife documented two attacks on calves on a Forest Service grazing allotment between Oct. 5 and 7.

On Tuesday, the department verified another wolf depredation on a calf. All together, Fish and Wildlife has linked the pack to 16 attacks on cattle since early September.

Fish and Wildlife’s policy calls for the department to consider killing one or two wolves after three attacks on livestock within 30 days or four within 10 months and then evaluating whether to remove more wolves. The department went into a wait-and-see period Sept. 28 after shooting a second wolf



WDFW

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife said Oct. 26 it will kill the last two wolves in a pack attacking cattle in northeastern Washington.

in the pack.

Fish and Wildlife held off restarting lethal removal after the two attacks in early October. The department says it looked at the non-lethal measures taken to protect cattle to make sure they were as effective as possible.

The grazing season is coming to a close in the Colville National Forest, but it may take several more weeks to round up all the cattle in the densely timbered and rugged terrain, according to Fish and Wildlife.

The pack’s territory covers several grazing allotments and private grazing lands west of the Kettle Crest area, according to the department.

Major Northwest hop broker accused of contract violation

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

A major Northwest hop broker is accused of violating a contract by refusing to sell hops to an Australian brewery supplier after a competitor bought a stake in the company.

Bintani Australia of Melbourne, Australia, has filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington seeking an injunc-

tion prohibiting Yakima Chief Hops of Yakima, Wash., from breaching the agreement.

Capital Press was unable to reach a representative of Yakima Chief Hops as of press time.

If Yakima Chief Hops terminates its exclusive distributor arrangement with Bintani as announced, the alleged breach “will result in damages in excess of \$20 million to Bintani and approximately \$245 million to the Australian brewing

market as a whole,” the complaint said.

Bintani has bought hops from the Washington company for 15 years and it now represents 71 percent of the Australian firm’s hop volume and 85 percent of its hop sales, according to the complaint.

The complaint alleges that the leadership of Yakima Chief Hops was motivated to pull out of the supply agreement by “animosity” toward the Brew-

ers Supply Group, “one of its competitors in North America” that’s taken an ownership interest in Bintani.

Yakima Chief Hops was “genuinely disappointed” to learn of Bintani’s decision to sell a portion of its business to a competitor, as it considers distributors to be “loyal partners,” according to a letter from Ryan Hopkins, the company’s vice president of North American sales, attached to the complaint.

“Not only has confidentiality been violated, but the agreement also stipulates that there shall be no assignment of rights under the agreement without our prior written approval,” Hopkins said in the letter.

Bintani counters that it remains the counterpart to the contract and didn’t “assign, sell or otherwise transfer” distribution rights under its deal with the Brewers Supply Group, whose parent company, Rahr, was re-

quired to sign a confidentiality deed as part of the merger and acquisition transaction.

“As a current owner in Bintani through certain of its subsidiaries, Rahr and these subsidiaries are entitled to receive the information disclosed,” the complaint said. “The information was not improperly disclosed and was always maintained as confidential, so there was no breach and, furthermore, no harm or prejudice to YCH.”

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