

State board passes rules for Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Lawmakers will pursue \$10 million to fund grants

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

CANNON BEACH, Ore. — The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board has approved new administrative rules for a voluntary state grant program to protect and preserve working farms and ranches.

Established by lawmakers in 2017, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program was conceived to address the increasing fragmentation and conversion of farmland — an issue that simultaneously threatens natural resources such as fish and wildlife habitat supported by agriculture, officials say.

An 11-person Agricultural Heritage Commission met six times in 2018 to write the program rules, setting in place grants to help pay for conservation planning, easements, succession planning and technical assis-



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program has taken another step toward helping farmers and ranchers plan for future generations.

tance. OWEB approved the rules at a board meeting Jan. 16 in Cannon Beach, Ore.

Nellie McAdams, Farm Preservation Program director for the nonprofit Rogue Farm Corps, worked with the Agricultural Heritage Commission to coordinate membership and meetings.

She said farm preservation is one of the biggest challenges facing rural Oregon economies.

“At this point, we are seeing a major transition of agricultural lands,” McAdams said. “This would provide the funding to help with that planning, and hand off

viable farmland to the next generation.”

The average age of Oregon farmers is now 60, up from 55 in 2002, according to a 2016 study by Oregon State University and Portland State University. As older farmers start to retire, more than 10 million acres,

or 64 percent, of Oregon’s agricultural lands are poised to change ownership over the next two decades.

The Agricultural Heritage Program is Oregon’s first attempt at awarding grants to keep working lands in production, which in turn benefits the fish and wildlife habitat they support.

“(The commission) sees it as integrating agriculture and natural resource benefits,” McAdams said. “They don’t see them as competing. They see them as helping each other.”

The program is supported by a broad coalition of farm and natural resources advocacy groups, including the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, Sustainable Northwest, The Nature Conservancy, 1000 Friends of Oregon, the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts and Oregon Association of Conservation Districts.

The next step is for the Oregon Legislature to approve funding for the program. State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, will co-sponsor a bill seeking \$10

million to fully implement the program.

“Oregon’s working lands are a critical economic driver for the state and it’s important that we preserve our irreplaceable natural resources,” Hansell said in a statement. “I am pleased that OWEB approved these rules so that we are ready to help farmers and ranchers preserve working landscapes and promote resilient rural communities.”

With broad bipartisan support from lawmakers, McAdams said she is optimistic about the bill passing, even as the state faces a budget crunch in 2019.

If the funding passes, OWEB will then decide when to release applications for the grants. McAdams said the program would also help farmers and ranchers secure matching federal dollars for agricultural easements and conservation through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“We have a huge opportunity,” she said. “This would be a way to leverage a small amount of funds from a state program to bring in a large amount of federal funds.”



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Stevens County, Wash., Commissioner Don Dashiell says the county has posted a public safety warning about wolves getting near populated areas.

Washington county warns residents about wolves near Colville

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Wolves have come “very close to homes” near Colville in northeast Washington, according to Stevens County commissioners, who issued a public safety announcement Jan. 8 warning residents to protect their pets and livestock.

Wolves have been attacking cattle and sheep in the county for many years, but this is the first time the county has issued an alert to residents, county Commissioner Don Dashiell said Jan. 11. The county has not received any reports of anyone being threatened by wolves, he said.

“I think we’d feel lacking in our response if we waited until wolves came and jerked somebody’s dog off the lease and ate it,” Dashiell said. “It’s not out in the middle of nowhere, it’s two miles west of Colville.”

Colville, the county seat, is the largest town in Stevens County, with a population of 4,745, according to the state’s latest estimate.

The county monitors the movement of wolves fitted by the Department of Fish and Wildlife with radio collars. A sheriff’s wildlife deputy also has confirmed the presence of wolves, according to commissioners.

Dashiell, a member of Fish and Wildlife’s Wolf Advisory Group, said the department hasn’t collared enough wolves to closely track packs, but the information available shows wolves are staying in areas near Colville.

“We have enough information to tell us when things are not good,” he said.

The county commissioners posted the warning on the sheriff’s office Facebook page. It has been shared hundreds of time.

Dashiell said commis-

sioners took the initiative to alert the public because Fish and Wildlife has not warned residents in the past about wolf activity. The county did not ask the department to issue a notice in this case, he said.

“We’re not going to ask the department to do something they’re either unable or unwilling to do,” he said.

Efforts to reach Fish and Wildlife for comment Friday were unsuccessful.

Commissioners cautioned residents to be careful about leaving out feed that attracts predators. They said residents should be particularly aware of wolves in the Orin Rice, Seigel Hill Road, Mingo Mountain, Valley Westside and Crystal Falls areas.

China cherry tariff damage revised

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — A soon-to-be-released Washington State University study will show the Pacific Northwest cherry industry lost an estimated \$106 million due to Chinese tariffs last year, says B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers in Yakima.

Thurlby made that comment to several hundred growers at the WSU North-central Washington Stone Fruit Day at the Wenatchee Convention Center, Jan. 15.

The loss was estimated at \$86 million by the Northwest Horticultural Council, in Yakima, last summer. At that time, Thurlby said that number was low.

The Northwest sold 1.7 million, 20-pound boxes of fresh sweet cherries to China in 2018, down from 3 million boxes in 2017. The 2018 sales could have easily been 3 million boxes without the tariff but the difference was sold in other markets and pressured all prices downward, Thurlby said.

China claims the total tariff is 50 percent, but it’s really 63 percent, he said.

Total value of the 2018 crop is not available. But the 26.4-million-box 2017 crop was valued at \$1 billion with \$399 million of that being export, according to NHC.

The 25.3-million-box 2018 crop, the industry’s second largest, may well be followed by an equally large crop this year and



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Orondo Ruby cherries at harvest in Orondo, Wash., last June. A new estimate pegs Pacific Northwest industry loss at \$106 million from Chinese tariffs on cherries last year.

continued decline or loss of the China market is a big concern, Thurlby said.

Northwest Cherry Growers, the industry’s promotional organization, plans to spend \$500,000 in China promotions this year, mostly in incentives to retailers when they promote product, that can be switched elsewhere if they don’t buy, Thurlby said.

“People ask me what the number one issue is with cherries and I say Little Cherry Disease and Western X (cherry virus) but No. 2 is losing China,” he said. “We’ve spent a lot building it up and this (tariff) is allowing other countries a foothold in what we built.”

Kazakhstan, Turkey and Chile are among those.

“The best thing that could happen is for this thing (Chinese tariffs) to go away before this season. But I don’t see that. I see

one more year and then we work things out,” he said. “We don’t want to lose this market.”

Even with the tariff damage in 2018, China was 26.3 percent of PNW cherry exports, topped only by Canada at 33.3 percent. South Korea was 14.6 percent and Taiwan was 10 percent.

Southeast Asia was 6.1 percent and, next to China, is a key target for growth. India could be a good market but is held back because importers want produce shipped across oceans,

rather than flown, which doesn’t work well with fumigation requirements, Thurlby said.

About 30 percent of the PNW cherry crop is exported annually.

California may have a better cherry crop this year because growers there are reporting better winter chilling temperatures, Thurlby said.

Other data from 2018 that he shared:

- PNW shipped 9 million boxes of cherries in June, 13 million in July and 2 million in August.

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