



UNDER

DON JENKINS/Capital Press
An American flag waves over the Temple of Justice in Olympia. A Washington Supreme Court ruling last May opened the door to dozens of class action lawsuits over piece rate pay for orchard workers.

PRESSURE

Washington State Supreme Court **ruling opens door for dozens of lawsuits** challenging how orchard workers are paid

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press



ROBERTO CASTILLO

YAKIMA, Wash. — A Washington Supreme Court ruling on regarding piece-rate pay last spring unleashed an avalanche of lawsuits against most of the state’s tree fruit companies. More than 50 class-action lawsuits have been filed against individual companies. Most companies of any size have been targeted. Claims for double-pay go back three years, and damages and attorney fees range into the millions of dollars. The ruling — and the lawsuits it spawned — make the future of piece-rate pay in the state uncertain.

Piece rate refers to paying workers for how much fruit they pick instead of paying them by the hour. It’s been used for decades. Workers say they like it because they make more money. Growers like it because they say it’s the most economical pay method. They say the loss of it would

increase their costs.

“It’s been around a long time because it has worked. It’s a problem when rules of the road get changed by court action that’s retroactive and of immediate effect

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“I’M A SUPERVISOR, BUS DRIVER AND TRACTOR DRIVER NOW DURING HARVEST, SO I GET \$15 AN HOUR. I USED TO PICK APPLES AND CHERRIES AND PREFER PIECE RATE BECAUSE IT’S MORE MONEY.”

Roberto Castillo, orchard worker for 27 years.

Dairies deal with blizzard losses

Blizzard-killed cows top 1,800

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

SUNNYSIDE, Wash. — Most of the carcasses of 1,810 dairy cows that died in a Feb. 9 blizzard have been dealt with but owners will be coping with financial losses for months to come. “It will take some guys months to recover because some of them were already operating at break-even,” said Steve George, Yakima area issues manager for the Washington State Dairy

Federation. He said he hasn’t heard of any going out of business, yet.

An initial estimate was 1,677 dead cows but the final tally is approximately 1,810 with probably several hundred others being sold for beef because of frozen udders and extremities, George said. Effects from that can take up to a month to be known, he said.

At \$2,000 per head, total cow loss will be around \$4 million, and that doesn’t count lost milk production.

George said he doesn’t know of anyone

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Courtesy of Jason Sheehan

Cows rest comfortably at Jason Sheehan’s dairy near Sunnyside, Wash., on Feb. 11. Blizzard conditions Feb. 9 caused the deaths of more than 1,800 dairy cows in the area.

Canola debate spills into legislative arena

Bill would extend 500-acre limit on planting crop

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Negotiations over canola restrictions in Oregon’s Willamette Valley have spilled into the legislative arena with the introduction of a bill limiting annual plantings to 500 acres.

Canola acreage in the valley was capped at 500 acres by lawmakers in 2013 after a dispute over how the crop should be regulated, but that limit was set to expire this year.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is currently planning to implement new rules for canola production before the 500-acre

limit ends in July.

The agency had submitted options for regulating canola in the region to lawmakers last November based on a study by Oregon State University, which found the crop didn’t pose greater risks than related species grown for specialty seed.

While some of those regulatory alternatives would have required new legal authority for ODA —

such as creating a public “pinning” system to avoid cross-pollination — the agency isn’t pursuing such proposals during the 2019 legislative session.

During a Feb. 19 legislative hearing, the House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use introduced a bill that would extend the 500-acre limit indefinitely while

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