# Threemile Canyon GM reappointed to Oregon Ag Board

## Environmental groups criticize selection in letter to governor

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

SALEM — The general manager of Oregon's largest dairy has been reappointed to the state Board of Agriculture, drawing the ire of environmental groups over concerns about pollution and sustainability.

Gov. Kate Brown appointed Marty Myers, of Threemile Canyon Farms, to serve a second term on the 10-member board, which makes policy recommendations for the state Department of Agriculture.

Threemile Canyon Farms is a 93,000-acre operation about 15 miles west of Boardman. It includes three dairies with a combined 33,000 milking cows, producing 1.4 million pounds of milk each day sold to Tillamook Cheese at the Port of Morrow.


Marty Myers

Total livestock, including calves and heifers, is 68,840 animals. The farm also grows 39,500 acres of irrigated crops, and has 23,000 acres set aside for wildlife conservation.

A coalition of advocacy groups wrote a letter to Brown on Sept. 12, condemning Myers' reappointment and criticizing the process as rushed and lacking transparency.

"Instead of welcoming participation from legitimate stakeholders, your office and your agency deliberately thwarted it," the groups wrote in the letter.

The coalition includes Columbia Riverkeeper, Friends of Family Farmers, Humane Voters Oregon, Factory Farming Awareness Coalition, Farm Forward, Food & Water Watch, Center for Food Safety, Humane Society of the United States, Center for Biological Diversity and Animal Legal Defense Fund.

State law requires seven


Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

members of the Board of Agriculture to be farmers and ranchers. Two members must represent consumers, and the 10th member is the chair of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Members serve four-year terms.

Several groups expressed similar disappointment when Myers was first appointed to the board in 2015. They argued Threemile Canyon Farms is a significant source of pollution, emitting up to 5.6 million pounds of ammonia gas from manure annually.

Meanwhile, smaller dairy farms continue to struggle, according to the coalition, which said that between 2002 and 2007, the state lost nearly half of its dairy farms.

Shari Sirkin, executive director of Friends of Family Farmers, said that by reappointing Myers to the Board of Agriculture, Brown demonstrated "her continued allegiance to industrialized dairy in Oregon."

"It would have been far better to appoint a real family farmer to this board, but once again, Governor Brown chose Oregon's mega-dairies over its small, independent farms," Sirkin said.

The groups also cited Lost Valley Farm, a failed 30,000-cow dairy in Morrow County, as reason to reform Oregon's confined animal feeding operations. Lost Valley racked up more than 200 wastewater permit violations almost immediately after opening in 2017 and declared bankruptcy earlier this year.

Easterday Farms, of Pasco, Wash., is now working to reopen the facility.

"Allowing Myers, a mega-dairy operator, to continue to influence the Department of Agriculture as it considers permitting yet another mega-dairy at the Lost Valley site does not bode well for Eastern Oregon or our environment," said Tarah Heinzen, senior attorney for Food & Water Watch.

Myers defended his record on the board, saying he will continue to represent the interests of farms of all sizes. During this year's legislative session, Myers supported provisions in House Bill 2020 — the cap and trade proposal — that would have allowed small farms to collectively market their carbon assets, making them competitive with larger operations.

In a 2011 study of air quality in the Columbia River Gorge, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality praised Threemile Canyon Farms for "continuously addressing its air emissions by applying new technologies and adaptively managing its dairies with best management practices."

In particular, DEQ said the farm recycles cow manure as a fertilizer for growing crops and built a methane digester in 2009 to capture emissions, generating 4.8 megawatts of electricity. Regulators approved a permit allowing Threemile Canyon Farms to expand the digester this year, and convert methane into "pipeline quality" natural gas. Myers said he believes the objections raised by environmental groups are politically motivated, rather than based in science.

"We have a continuous improvement operation and we're always looking for new technologies for efficiency in agriculture and being good with the environment and our animals," Myers said.

A spokesman for Brown did not speak directly about Myers' reappointment, but said the governor seeks a wide diversity of backgrounds and experiences in her board appointments. If that member is active and thoughtfully engaged in policy, he said Brown generally will appoint them to another term.

Alexis Taylor, director of the state Department of Agriculture, said the Board of Agriculture should reflect diversity in commodities, size, scale and production systems.

"Oregon is not a one-size-fits-all," Taylor said in a statement. "Board members volunteer countless hours in this advisory role and I want to thank them for their dedication and unique contributions."

Taylor said ODA is committed to transparency, and welcomes further discussion about how the state can ensure diverse voices are represented at the table.

# Idaho farmers dig in for $1B potato harvest

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Farmers say some potatoes are a bit smaller but the quality is high as they harvest Idaho's signature $1 billion crop.

In the state's western region, farmer Doug Gross of Wilder, Idaho, said companywide yields so far exceed the five-year average.

His potatoes so far have smaller size profiles; the cool spring caused a heavy set that resulted in more potatoes — each of which was smaller than usual — per plant, he said. "Quality is quite good."

Idaho's crop was worth $1.03 billion last year, up 5% from 2017, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. About 315,000 acres were planted to potatoes and yielded an average of 450 hundredweight per acre, up from the previous two years. Total production was 141 million cwt.

Brett Jensen, who farms in the Idaho Falls-Hamer area in the east, plans to start harvest Sept. 23.


Brad Carlson/Capital Press
Doug Gross Farms personnel harvest potatoes northwest of Wilder, Idaho, on Sept. 12.

"I expect yield to be down from last year, but I think quality will be very good," the Idaho Potato Commission board member said.

Jensen said a lack of extreme summer heat helped quality. Lower yields are likely, largely a result of three June frosts that dragged on the crop.

As for potato size profiles, "we're not sure until we get into it," he said. "There are always some surprises."

Kevin Stanger, president of Wada Farms in the Idaho Falls area, on Sept. 13 said harvest is on or slightly behind schedule after rain delayed planting in spots.

Potato sizing recently looks closer to average after being off a bit in the first couple weeks of harvest, he said.

"A few guys will let the crop grow a little bit longer to see if they could get some size," Stanger said.

"Quality generally looks pretty good coming out of the field," Stanger said. "The key will be how the potatoes will store and how they will hold up (in storage). We are just getting started into heavy harvest."

With three to four weeks of harvesting left this year, "based on normal fall conditions, things look pretty good," he said. "But you just never know if Mother Nature is going to throw you a curveball."

# U.S. cranberry growers face another big harvest

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

U.S. cranberry growers expect to reap another large crop and as an unwelcome result start rebuilding a price-depressing surplus the industry spent the past two years reducing.

The USDA predicts farmers will harvest 904 million pounds of cranberries, only the second time the crop has topped 900 million pounds.

The Cranberry Marketing Committee has a lower estimate, 884 million pounds. The committee, nevertheless, projects the surplus will grow to 57% from 50% of annual sales.

The over supply was 100% two years ago. Farmers and handlers halved the surplus by withholding berries in 2017 and 2018.

The marketing committee, made up of growers and handlers, voted against asking the USDA to renew volume controls for this year and next. Without controls, the surplus is expected to resume its upward trajectory.

Washington cranberry farmer Malcolm McPhail said volume controls reduced the surplus, but the sacrifice was uneven. The USDA exempted a majority of handlers from withholding requirements because they took in too few berries.

"It makes no sense in doing withholding because it only affects Ocean Spray," said McPhail, a member of the Ocean Spray cooperative.

The cranberry industry has been plagued by too many berries for many years. Domestic consumption has been flat, while U.S. cranberry growers, led by Wisconsin farmers, have become more productive. Canada, particularly Quebec, has grown over the past decade into a major producer. Chile also grows cranberries.

Cranberries also are a frequent target for retaliatory tariffs.

A tariff imposed more than a year ago has nearly wiped out gains the industry made the previous year in selling dried cranberries in China, said Terry Humfeld, executive director of the Cranberry Institute, a trade association.

"There was a lot of momentum created in building that China market," he said Monday. "It's only going to get worse."

About 100 million pounds of cranberries were diverted from the marketplace by volume controls in 2018, according to the marketing committee.

Even with fewer berries, the average price dropped to 25 cents a pound from an already low 30 cents a pound, according to the USDA.

The value of the 2018 U.S. crop was $222.4 million, compared to $252 million in 2017 and $292.2 million in 2016, according to the USDA.

Foreign sales were essentially flat in 2018, but they had been on an upward trend.

The European Union has put a retaliatory tariff on cranberry juice. Through the first six months of this year, U.S. exports were 82% lower than the same period last year, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service.

China makes up about 5% of the foreign market, but the country has been the focus of the industry's overseas promotions.

The industry has started investing in cultivating demand in India, but it's a tiny portion of overall exports.

"It's the next huge market that's going to be tapped," Humfeld said. "That's going to take years."

Cranberry growers are eligible for tariff relief under the Trump administration's Market Facilitation Program.

The USDA calculated in August the cranberry industry has lost $28 million because of retaliatory tariffs. Payouts equal 3 cents a pound, and the maximum a farmer can receive is $250,000.



# E. Snake aquifer management still on target

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Recharge of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer is making headway faster than anticipated, according to a preliminary analysis.

The ESPA has been a concern to water users and water managers for decades. No one knows how much water is in the vast underground reservoir, but hydrologists have tracked water levels since 1912.

Early irrigation practices went a long way in boosting water volume in the aquifer, but losses between 1952 and 2015 averaged 215,000 acre-feet annually for a total decline of 13 million acre-feet.

The Comprehensive Aquifer Management Plan — known as CAMP — was established in 2009 to manage and stabilize the aquifer with a goal of increasing its water level by 600,000 acre-feet.

The plan to achieve those goals included managed recharge, demand reduction, groundwater-to-surface water conversions and cloud seeding.

In May, Idaho House Speaker Scott Bedke requested a 10-year review of CAMP actions and implementation, and the preliminary results are positive.

Brian Patton, planning bureau chief for the Idaho Department of Water Resources, gave a sneak peak of the review during last week's meeting of the Idaho Legislature natural resources interim committee.

Major management actions proposed in CAMP have been completed, although they might be a little different than first conceived, he said.

The Idaho Water Resource Board is implementing a program to recharge 250,000 acre-feet annually, averaging wet years with dry years.

Groundwater users have agreed to reduce use by 240,000 acre-feet through the 2015 settlement agreement with surface water users.

Groundwater-to-surface water conversions are also taking place. Some of those projects counted toward groundwater users' reduction commitment, but separate projects account for an additional 93,000 acre-feet of water, he said.

The reductions and conversions are "maybe not quite as we thought it was going to happen … but they're being put into place," he said.

Cloud seeding is being done through a joint venture between Idaho Power, the state and water users in the Upper Snake and Wood River basins.

Other agreements with the Surface Water Coalition, irrigation districts, cities and processors provide additional water for recharge, he said.

"If you add all those things up, it's close to that 600,000 (acre-feet)," he said.

CAMP estimated it would take 30 years to raise the aquifer 600,000 acre-feet, he said.