

Growers hope for wage injunction

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — U.S. District Judge Salvador Mendoza Jr. is expected to rule soon on a request from tree fruit growers for a preliminary injunction to halt an increase in the minimum wage for tree fruit workers.

During the Oct. 9 arguments, the judge said he understands harvest is underway and that a decision is needed quickly, said Peter Spadoni, a Wenatchee attorney representing McDougall & Sons Inc. and Columbia Fruit Packers Inc., both of Wenatchee, and Evans Fruit Co., of Cowiche.

He may rule on the injunction within a week, Spadoni said.

“I feel Judge Mendoza was well prepared, understood the issues and is seriously trying to arrive at the correct answer,” Spadoni said.

On July 24, the U.S. Department of Labor notified growers using H-2A-visa foreign guestworkers of a 97-cent increase in the minimum wage for H-2A and domestic workers in the same orchards. The higher wage went into effect July 23.

The minimum wage was increased from \$15.03 to \$16 per hour based on a state Employment Security Department survey of 2018 prevailing wages.

“ESD took an unreasonably small sampling of a minority of apple harvester employers, then used fuzzy math to extrapolate unrealistic numbers and for many more employers and farmworkers, in an effort to artificially inflate the pool of survey respondents and thereby endeavor to satisfy the requirements...,” states the lawsuit, which the tree fruit companies filed Sept. 3.

The higher wage will cause “irreparable harm” in labor costs in 2019 and into the future, the lawsuit states.

In court Oct. 9, Spadoni and his law partner, Sally Harmeling, presented declarations from growers of more than 75% of the 2018 tonnage showing they paid \$14.12 per hour for most of the tonnage picked and \$16 or above for only 1.5% of the tonnage.

“Unfortunately, just proving \$16 could not have been the prevailing and most commonly paid rate isn’t sufficient. We have to show DOL was arbitrary or capricious in their method of establishing the rate,” Spadoni said.

Statistician Stephen Bronars submitted a declaration that the increase was arbitrary and capricious because ESD did not follow regulations, did not survey enough employers or workers and did not use reliable extrapolation methodologies.

Mendoza, the judge, already granted a temporary injunction halting a 50% wage increase for blueberry pickers in a similar case on Sept. 9.

REAL Oregon announces third class

Thirty natural resource professionals selected from across the state

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

SALEM — A program dedicated to developing new leaders in Oregon’s diverse agriculture and natural resources economy is set to return for a third year.

REAL Oregon, which stands for Resource Education and Agricultural Leadership, announced its latest class for 2019-20, including professionals in farming, forestry, agribusiness and state government.

The class will hold its first three-day session Nov. 4-7 in Klamath Falls, followed by sessions Dec. 10-12 in Roseburg, Jan. 14-16 in Newport, Feb. 10-13 in Salem and March 17-19 in Boardman.

Each meeting will spotlight local industries — from coastal fisheries to irrigated farms and ranches — while focusing on professional development, such as networking and public speaking.

“I am very excited to get this group together and watch them grow as



Greg Addington, director of REAL Oregon, has announced the members of its third class, which begins in November.

leaders,” said Greg Addington, REAL Oregon executive director. “This class will build upon the solid foundation established by our first two cohorts. We are continuing to fulfill the industry’s vision of building a solid, practical network of agriculture and natural resource leaders.”

Established in 2017, REAL Oregon is modeled after similar programs in other states, including Washington and Idaho. Classes of 30 participants travel around the state to get a fuller picture of natural resource-based industries, and how they are shaped

by policies at the state level.

Bill Buhrig, an agronomist for Simplot Food Group in Ontario, Ore., and board chairman for REAL Oregon, said it is a proven model for developing new leaders while helping to bridge the urban-rural divide.

“We had a great response to the program this year,” Buhrig said. “The quality and diversity of applicants was outstanding and touched all corners of the state.”

Members of REAL Oregon’s third class are broken down by region, including:

- **Northwest/Willamette Valley:** Randi Bural, Northwest Farm Credit Services, Salem; Tricia Chastain, Northwest Farm Credit Services, Gervais; Allison Cloo, Oregon Aglink, Sandy; Dave Coates, PCC Airfoils, Portland; Jackson Coleman, Coleman Agriculture, St. Paul; Matthew Cook, Cook Family Farms, Albany; Betsy Earls, Weyerhaeuser, Salem; Nathan Miller, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Salem; Nicole Ruggiero, Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, Tigard; Susan Schmidlin, Schmidlin Angus Farms, Vernonia; Andrea Sonnen, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Woodburn; Diann Washburn, Oregonians for Food & Shelter, Dallas; Alexa Weathers, Kerr

Supply Co., Gervais; Jeremy Felty, Oregon Small Woodlands Association, Corvallis; Rob Hamlin, Riddell Farms, Monmouth; Chris Hedstrom, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Salem; Matt Hegerberg, Heron Timber, Sheridan; Katie Kissler, Hancock Forest Management, Gresham; Brent Klumph, Oregon State University Research Forests, Sweet Home; Heidi Leib, Boise Cascade Wood Products, Albany.

- **Eastern/High Desert:** Jason Flowers, Flowers Farms, Midland; Kelley Hamby, Central Oregon Irrigation District, Redmond; Catherine Kiyokawa, Kiyokawa Family Orchards, Parkdale; Lisa Patrick, SAGE Center, Pendleton; Nicole Sullivan, Trout Unlimited/Owyhee Watershed Council, Adrian.
- **Southern:** Brennan Garrelts, Lone Rock Resources, Roseburg; Gordon Jones, OSU Southern Oregon Research and Extension, Talent; Sean Naumes, Naumes, Inc., Medford; Whitney Schmke Henneman, Silver Butte Timber Co., Roseburg; Jolene Moxon, Modoc County, Calif., Agricultural Department, Malin.

Recruiting for REAL Oregon Class 4 will begin this winter. For more information, visit www.real-oregon.net.

Farm, food expo offers small farmers tips to be profitable, sustainable

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — The keynote speakers at the upcoming Farm and Food Expo know how to make the most of their land.

Paul and Elizabeth Kaiser, owners of Singing Frogs Farm in Sebastapol, Calif., operate a 3-acre farm that grosses more than \$100,000 per acre each year, said Hilary Sepulveda, outreach coordinator for the Spokane Conservation District.

The expo is Oct. 25-26 at Spokane Community College and will offer more than 35 classes.

The Kaisers will discuss managing an intensive, no-till, hand-labor vegetable production system that is profitable while restoring soil health on their farm.

They have increased their soil organic matter by more than 400% while drastically reducing water use. Their farm has demonstrated that ecological sustainability can mean economic sustainability, with up to 10 times the sales per acre compared to similar farms, according to the conservation district.

The expo provides two days of education and resources to small-acreage farmers, those who have less than 5 acres, as well as gardeners and “foodies,”



Singing Frogs Farm

Singing Frogs Farm in Sebastapol, Calif.

FARM AND FOOD EXPO ONLINE

<http://sccd.org/departments/small-acreage/farm-food-expo>

Sepulveda said. Sepulveda expects 400 to 500

people to attend the conference.

Classes will also be of interest to large-scale farmers.

The event includes a tour of the new South Spokane Farm Corridor, which includes Casa Cano Farm, Snapdragon Flower Farm and Vets on the Farm. Space is limited for the \$50 tour. The tour ends at the Moran Prairie Grange for the annual Vets on

the Farm dinner and auction.

Cost of the expo is \$100 for adults, \$75 for seniors and students and \$25 for youths.

Roughly 38 vendors will also be at the event. To just attend the vendor fair costs \$10.

Contact Sepulveda at 509-535-7274, ext. 214 or hilary-sepulveda@sccd.org

WDFW seeks to fill wolf panel slots

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is seeking to fill four vacancies on its Wolf Advisory Group.

When at full strength, the panel has 18 members. The department has tried to use the group to build a consensus among ranchers, hunters, environmentalists and others on managing wolves. The panel has no legal authority.

Fish and Wildlife is looking for people who “value compromise and cohesion on issues, with the intent to resolve conflicts,” according to a department press release.

The group meets for two

days at least four times a year. Most meetings take place in Spokane, Ellensburg or Olympia. Advisory group members may be reimbursed for travel expenses.

To apply, send letters with the applicant’s or nominee’s name, address, telephone number and email address. People or groups who are nominating someone must also submit their own names and contact information.

The letters should include the candidate’s relevant experience, organizational affiliations and why they would be an effective advisory group member.

Letters also should

address the candidate’s familiarity with Washington’s wolf plan and current status and management, and their experience in collaborating with people with dif-

ferent values.

The deadline is 5 p.m. Nov. 8. Letters may be emailed to wildthing@dfw.wa.gov or sent to Washington Department of Fish and

Wildlife, P.O. Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504-3200.

Applicants who applied in 2018 will be considered and do not need to re-apply.

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