

Idaho Farm Bureau annual meeting planned for Dec. 3-5

COEUR D’ALENE, Idaho — The Idaho Farm Bureau Federation will have its 80th annual meeting Dec. 3-5 at the Coeur d’Alene Resort.

Labor, trade, legislative priorities and safety are among scheduled presentation topics. The Farm Bureau also plans to issue its annual awards, and through its House of Delegates establish 2020 policy.

Dec. 3, President Bryan Searle and CEO and Executive Vice President Rick Keller are scheduled to speak at the general-session luncheon. Presentations are scheduled on legislative issues, electrical safety, trade issues and opportunities, pest recognition and management, and the tight labor market and potential solutions.

A Young Farmers and Ranchers meeting and awards banquet are planned.

INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION

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Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members debate various issues during a past annual meeting. This year’s annual meeting will be Dec. 3-5 in Coeur d’Alene.

Events scheduled Dec. 4 include a training session on dealing with farm-related challenges and a workshop on safe, distraction-free driving. Meetings of the five district caucuses and district women’s caucuses are planned, as is a meeting of the Women’s Business Committee.

Lunch and dinner events include awards presentations. House of Delegates sessions run Dec. 4-5.

Dec. 5 scheduled events include the county presidents breakfast, director elections and the state board of directors meeting, luncheon and spouse’s luncheon.

Club wheat premium means tight seed supply

Spring club varieties susceptible to Hessian fly

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Washington farmers are expected to plant more acres of spring club wheat next year to take advantage of a nearly \$2 a bushel premium for the subclass.

The added acreage is also expected to create a tight supply of the seed.

Club wheat prices average \$1.75 higher per bushel than for soft white wheat. Soft white ranges from \$5.80 to \$5.95 per bushel on the Portland market, while club wheat goes for \$7.70 to \$7.82 per bushel.

“We had less acreage and production for this crop year,” said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission.



Washington Grain Commission

With club wheat selling at a premium to soft white wheat, industry members expect more acres to be planted and tight spring wheat seed supplies. There will be enough club to meet the needs of buyers in Japan, the top market for Western white wheat, a blend of soft white wheat and club wheat, according to the Washington Grain Commission.

Some of that reduction was due to less planting of the variety Bruehl, which is susceptible to the falling number starch problem and other factors, Squires said.

Club wheat is a subclass of the soft white wheat primarily grown in the Pacific Northwest. It has a more compact head, giving it a clubbed appearance, and has weak gluten and lower protein levels.

Western white wheat is a blend of soft white wheat and club wheat. Japan purchases a blend of 80% soft white wheat and 20% club. Thailand and Singapore purchase a blend of 90% soft white and 10% club wheat. A company in South Korea purchases straight club

wheat as a specialty.

There hasn’t been a premium for club wheat for four years. Demand for Western white wheat has grown each year, Squires said.

The commission worked extensively to get Taiwan back into the club wheat market after two years.

The Philippines used to purchase a lot of Western white, until premiums increased in the 1990s. The commission recently brought a team of millers to the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland to train them on how to use it in their products.

Seed supplies of club wheat varieties J.D. and Melba are tight.

“Three-quarters of what I have available is already committed to growers,” said Ryan Higginbotham, of HighLine Grain Growers. “As it looks right now, I will sell 10 times more spring club seed this coming year than I have every year for the past three.”

Higginbotham cautions that spring club wheats are susceptible to the insect pest Hessian fly. Growers should manage their risks with insecticide seed treatments or foliar insecticide spray, he said.

“Depending on where they’re at, the club may or may not be the best option for them,” he said. “Yes, it’s more valuable currently, but with Hessian fly there is a risk you could lose 5%

yield, you could lose 45% yield. Weigh the options.”

Higginbotham recommends that farmers put in an order for spring club wheat as quickly as possible.

Squires expects growers to plant as much as they can. Acreage tends to fluctuate from 100,000-plus acres to more than 270,000 acres. Acreage will increase, he said, but be limited by seed supply.

The commission has told Japanese flour millers that there will be enough club wheat to meet their needs. Japan is the top club wheat buyer, purchasing about 65% of the overall supply when stocks are tight and a smaller percentage when stocks are greater.

When there is no premium, club wheat can be added to soft white cargos at a percentage of 1 to 5%, Squires said.

Farm labor bill passes House Judiciary panel

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

A farm labor bill has passed the U.S. House Judiciary Committee on a near party-line vote of 18-to-12, with the ranking Republican saying it doesn’t provide long-term wage stability.

“One need look no further than the first few pages to figure out the real point of this bill: a path to citizenship for an unknown number of illegal immigrants who do some work in agriculture, along with their families,” said Rep. Doug Collins, R-Ga., in urging a no vote.

The Farm Workforce Modernization Act, formerly H.R. 4916 and now H.R. 5038, was introduced Oct. 30 by Reps. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., and Dan Newhouse, R-Wash.

The committee took a voice vote Nov. 20, followed by a recorded vote Nov. 21.

Newhouse called it an “excellent step forward for a bipartisan bill.” He said he hopes it passes the full House quickly and can be improved upon in the Senate.

Seeking to ensure a legal and sufficient agricultural workforce, the bill provides renewable visas for agricultural workers in the country illegally, phases in mandatory E-Verify (electronic verification of employment eligibility), amends the H-2A-visa agricultural foreign guestworker program and freezes the minimum wage of H-2A workers at 2019 levels throughout 2020.

Noting the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), the minimum wage for H-2A-visa workers, increased 6.3% in 2019, Collins said the bill fails to provide long-term stability in setting those rates. It allows increases up to 4.25% per year after a one-year freeze.

The U.S. Department of Labor certified 257,667 regular H-2A positions in 2019. The bill allows regular positions (of up to 10 months) to

continue uncapped, but caps new year-round positions at 20,000 per year with half reserved for dairies.

It leaves out meat and poultry processing, forestry and aquaculture, Collins said, calling it an “enormous problem” because poultry employs more than 16,000 people in his congressional district.

Collins said H-2A users have asked for protection from frivolous lawsuits but the bill does the opposite by subjecting them to private right of action in federal court.

Users want the H-2A program managed by USDA and the bill does not do that, he said.

Collins argues the bill promotes fraudulent applications through extremely low document standards and the ability to withdraw a knowingly false application without prejudice.

Prior to the committee action, more than 300 agricultural groups signed a letter supporting the bill but saying a few provisions “raise significant concerns” that should be worked on as the bill moves forward.

Dan Fazio, executive director of the farm labor association, Wafra, in Olympia, Wash., wrote an email to members prior to the committee action “strongly opposing” the bill because it “will not lead to a workable future flow” of workers needed. It doesn’t do enough to rein in escalating labor and housing costs, he said.

Fazio called the bill “mean-spirited and anti-farmer” because bill sponsors refuse to add a provision allowing farmers to charge foreign workers for housing.

Michael Marsh, president and CEO of the National Council of Agricultural Employers in Washington, D.C., said he was pleased with committee passage but that labor and housing costs hopefully can be addressed in the “more employer-friendly environment” of the Senate.

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