

Washington launches online reporting of cattle sales

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington beef ranchers can now report cattle sales online, providing they use electronic ear tags, a way of tracking livestock resisted by some producers as labor intensive and intrusive.

The state Department of Agriculture touts “electronic cattle transaction reporting” as cheaper and easier than calling out a state inspector to verify ownership.

The system was launched this month and shown to industry representatives. “It looks as simple as ordering something on Amazon,” said Danny DeFranco, executive vice president of the Washington Cattlemen’s Association.

The department inspects sales to prevent theft and record cattle movements. The department hopes online reporting will hold down its costs and help it quickly identify cattle exposed to disease.

The agriculture department has allowed dairy farmers to electronically report sales of unbranded cows for several years. The Legislature this year extended the option to beef ranchers selling branded cattle.

Agriculture Director Derek Sandison said in a statement that expanding the system is a “major step toward simplifying and streamlining reporting requirements.”

“It demonstrates important progress toward synchronizing the industry and government with today’s technology,” he said.

Electronic reporting is not mandatory. Ranchers can still call out state brand inspectors. While electronic reporting has been virtually unused by dairy farmers, DeFranco said he expects beef producers to try it.

“Essentially everything is the same, except we have this other option,” he said. “Like any new thing, it will take some time to get some traction.”

The USDA has backed off requiring electronic ear tags on cattle moving between states. Last month, the Trump administration canceled plans to make the tags mandatory by 2023.

The USDA’s position has been that tracking a cow from birth to slaughter by electronic tags would

help contain animal diseases and protect producers from trade sanctions. Critics said the technology was unproven and would require producers to report every time they move a cow from one place to another.

Cattle Producers of Washington President Scott Nielsen said the organization supports electronic reporting, as long as it’s voluntary.

“We’ll continue to resist the mandatory implementation,” he said. “We’re really pleased to see what’s happening at the national level.”

To use the electronic system, ranchers must obtain a “premises identification number,” pinpointing where they have cows. Each cow must be fitted with a USDA-approved 840 radio frequency identification tag.

Ranchers pay an annual fee of \$33 to use ECTR. The per-head fee is \$1.30.

For in-person inspections, ranchers pay a \$20 call out fee, plus mileage, and a per-head fee of \$1.21.

To promote the system, the department is giving away electronic tags. Producers with herds of 50 head or fewer are eligible to receive 40 tags. Those with herds of more than 50 qualify for 100 tags.

Lawmakers also approved allowing self-employed field inspectors to supplement state inspectors.

The inspectors must be trained by the department and not have a financial stake in the sales. No one has applied to be certified, a department spokesman said Tuesday.

Lab administrator: ‘Hot’ hemp more likely under USDA rule

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A high percentage of hemp will test “hot” and have to be destroyed under testing procedures adopted this month by the Washington State Department of Agriculture, the chief operating officer of a Spokane laboratory said Monday.

The state’s procedures are patterned after a USDA rule adopted in October intended to catch hemp too high in THC. In one change, the state agriculture department will stop testing whole plants and instead take a cutting just underneath the flowers at the top one-third of the plant.

Trace Analytics COO Jason Zitzer said the protocol will zero in on the part of the plant with the most THC, excluding other useful parts such as the stalk. “I’m not sure anybody is going to pass,” he said.

The Spokane business was the only private laboratory used this year by Washington to test hemp. Only one sample failed, and that sample was retested at a state lab and passed.

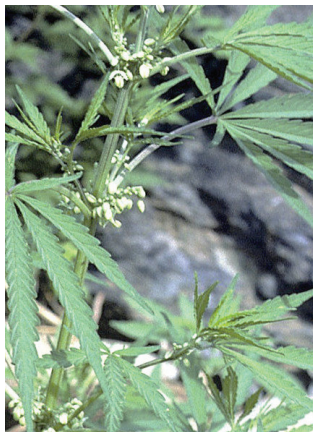
The USDA’s interim hemp rules took effect Oct. 31 and will be enforced until at least Nov. 1, 2021. The agency will take public comments until Dec. 30 on whether to revise the regulations.

“If the USDA changes its rules, we’ll change our policies accordingly,” state agriculture department spokesman Chris McGann said. “Our intent is to have something compatible with USDA rules.”

The 2018 Farm Bill removed a major obstacle to growing hemp in the U.S. by legalizing cannabis plants low in THC, the main psychoactive compound in marijuana. The USDA, however, will require states to continue to license hemp growers and test plants before they are harvested.

Washington will test one plant or less per acre. If the THC level is above 0.3%, the entire field must be burned, plowed under or composted.

Marijuana generally has THC levels of 3% to 15%, according to the USDA. The Alcohol and Drug Abuse



Richard A. Howard/USDA NRCS
Hemp grows in a field.

Institute at the University of Washington reported this year that some retail marijuana products are labeled as having THC content of more than 30%, though the labels are not reliable and results vary from laboratory to laboratory, according to the institute.

Zitzer said he doubts anyone in Washington, where marijuana is legal, would bother to intentionally cultivate hemp high in THC. Farmers, however, could unwittingly plant varieties that exceed the limit.

“Some of these farmers are not going to know about the genetics. They’re only going to know what they’re being told,” he said.

The USDA’s new rules also will change when hemp is tested in Washington. Plants must be tested within 15 days of harvest. Previously, Washington required testing within 30 days. The shorter time frame will cause problems, Zitzer predicts.

Several days can pass before a state inspector delivers plants to the laboratory, he said. Plants have to be dried before testing and that can take up to 10 days, he said.

“Some of it is coming in sopping wet,” he said. “I think the 15 days, especially as wet as the Northwest is, is not great for our region.”

The USDA says 15 days will allow for delays caused by weather or equipment breakdowns, but still give accurate results. The longer hemp stays in the ground, the higher its THC, according to the USDA.

Farmers, cities appeal Oregon airport master plan

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

AURORA, Ore. — A coalition of Oregon cities and residents is pushing back against plans to expand the Aurora State Airport south of Portland over its potential impacts to high-value farmland.

The State Aviation Board met Oct. 31 to adopt findings that the airport’s 2012 master plan complies with Marion County and statewide land-use planning goals. The master plan includes a 1,000-foot runway extension, which some farmers worry will take prime agricultural land out of production.

Opponents filed challenges with the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals, or LUBA, on Nov. 21, including the cities of Aurora and Wilsonville and Friends of French Prairie, a nonprofit group of local farmers and neighbors.

With approximately 80,000 take-offs and landings every year, Aurora State is the fourth-busiest airport in Oregon, behind Portland International, Portland-Hillsboro and Bend. It is one mile northwest of Aurora, outside the city’s urban growth boundary.

Last year, the airport applied for a \$33.3 million grant through the Federal Aviation Administration to extend the runway from 5,000 to 6,000 feet. The coalition, however, argues the project would violate Oregon’s land-use planning laws by encroaching on “exclusive farm use” land.

“We deserve reasonable farmland protections that allow us to predictably use the lands we have invested in,” said Mike Iverson, who grows 200 acres of vegetables adjacent to



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

An airplane departs the Aurora State Airport near Aurora, Ore. A plan for a 1,000-foot runway extension has nearby farmers worried that it will take prime agricultural land out of production.

the airport. “The boondoggle airport expansion is a nontransparent and dangerous threat to Oregon’s agricultural economy and its valued land use planning.”

Groups have previously contested the airport’s master plan, which was originally adopted in 1976. It was last updated by the State Aviation Board in 2011, but that is under challenge.

Betty Stansbury, director of the Oregon Department of Aviation, said the master plan was in fact approved in 2011, but the coalition claims that is not backed up by public records. The matter is currently before LUBA on a separate appeal.

Stansbury said the agency cannot comment on pending legal challenges. Wilsonville Mayor Tim Knapp said the result is that thousands of residents were effectively shut out of public participation in talks to expand the airport.

“The city has to take action to

defend our community’s ability to participate in necessary, required intergovernmental land use and transportation planning that affects our citizens’ quality of life, jointly used surface transportation facilities and other key public interest concerns,” Knapp said in a statement.

At the heart of the issue is Oregon’s statewide land use planning laws adopted in 1976 — specifically Goal 3, which established an “exclusive farm use” zone that limits development on agricultural lands.

Declining farmland continues to be an issue in Oregon, especially around the Portland metro area in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties. Statewide, Oregon lost 1.7 million acres of farmland between 1997 and 2017, according to figures from the latest USDA Census of Agriculture. That’s an average of 85,000 acres, or 132.8 square miles, of farms each year.

Four Oregon water projects win \$2.5 million in grant funding

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Four water projects have won nearly \$2.5 million in grant funding from the Oregon Water Resources Commission while 10 other proposals seeking \$9.8 million were rejected.

The 2019 grants mark the fourth cycle of funding from Oregon’s water supply development fund and also the lowest total amount awarded since the program was enacted.

The commission awarded \$8.9 million to nine applicants in 2016, \$6.3 million to four applicants in 2017 and \$6.3 million to eight applicants in 2018.

Oregon’s water supply development fund currently contains more than \$10 million and another \$15 million

was authorized by lawmakers during the most recent legislative session.

The relatively modest field of proposals and low number of projects recommended for funding raised some questions about the selection process during the commission’s Nov. 21 meeting in Salem.

“That’s not a lot of applicants for the type of money we’re talking about,” said Joe Moll, commissioner and executive director of the McKenzie River Trust.

Proposals are scored by a “technical review team” of experts who evaluate them based on their economic, environmental and social benefits to the public.

Staff members from the Oregon Water Resources Department then make funding recommendations to the

commission, which makes the final decision.

Following are the four projects awarded funding this year:

- More than \$980,000 was approved for a project that would install a bypass channel for fish around the Upper Phillips Dam in Jackson County while piping nearly two miles of irrigation ditch.

- About \$155,000 was approved for the conversion of about 80 acres in Douglas County from hand-line irrigation to a drip system, allowing the farm operation to switch from hay and cattle to higher-value crops.

Conserved water would be dedicated to in-stream flows in Calapooya Creek to benefit federally protected steelhead, trout and salmon, while the property would

operate as a demonstration farm for local high school FFA students.

- More than \$670,000 was approved for the completion of a second deep water irrigation well in Wasco County that’s intended to relieve pressure on the shallower aquifer to the benefit of junior water rights holders.

The project is also expected to stabilize groundwater levels and potentially improve flows in Mosier Creek.

- About \$660,000 was approved for a relocation of the City of Chiloquin’s water supply well in Klamath County, which aims to boost surface flows in the Williamson River. The funding would also pay for new water meters that better monitor usage and help reduce waste.



RECON

WIRELESS BLOCKAGE
AND FLOW MONITOR

 **IntelligentAg**

**IT PAYS TO
LISTEN FOR FLOW**

**BECAUSE YOU CAN ONLY REAP
WHAT YOU SOW.**

Ask your dealer about our year-end
specials on financing and installation.

IntelligentAg.com
406-946-2377