Coleman Agriculture

**The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the demand for hops.**

# U.S. hop industry results mixed in 2020

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Hop production dropped 7% compared to last year as yields decreased, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

The total area harvested in Washington, Idaho and Oregon reached a record high and was up 4% from 2019, NASS said in the Dec. 22 National Hop Report.

Acreage gains in Idaho and Washington offset a slight decline in Oregon.

Washington produced 71% of U.S. hops in 2020. Idaho accounted for 17% and Oregon 12%. Production dollar value rose in Idaho and Oregon, and fell in Washington.

Coronavirus safety restrictions that shut down brewpubs, bars, restaurants and event venues impacted the hop market substantially.

"With the realities of COVID-19's impact starting to emerge in early spring, when hop planting decisions are finalized, many growers and merchants worked on altering contracts and reducing acreage," said Jaki Brophy, Hop Growers of America communications director.

"Hops are grown on a forward-contract model due to the high cost of growing the crop, so acreage is a direct reflection of demand as communicated by customers through contracts," she said. Other factors played a role, "but this was the largest significant influence on acreage changes overall."

Acreage changes over the next year or two will help determine how much COVID-19 or other market factors influenced states' 2020 changes, Brophy said.

"It's our expectation it will take two years for the beer industry to level back out and be in post-COVID recovery mode," she said.

Michelle Palacios, administrator of the Oregon Hop Commission, said more 2020 acres in the state shifted from alpha varieties to lower-yielding aroma hops, which cost more per acre to grow but bring a higher price. That helped boost the overall 2020 production value.

Harvested acres decreased as growers strung fewer hops in response to the pandemic-driven drop in brewer demand, she said.

Oregon growers were about two-thirds through harvest in mid-September when smoke taint from wildfires had some impact on hop quality, Palacios said.

**Acres harvested**

| State | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| Wash. | 40,880 | 42,269 |
| Idaho | 8,358 | 9,268 |
| Oregon | 7,306 | 7,104 |

**Yield per acre in pounds**

| State | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| Wash. | 2,006 | 1,754 |
| Idaho | 2,034 | 1,855 |
| Oregon | 1,783 | 1,755 |

**Production (1,000 pounds)**

| State | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| Wash. | 82,014.9 | 74,151.5 |
| Idaho | 17,003.1 | 17,190.1 |
| Oregon | 13,023.2 | 12,468.7 |

# 'Atypical' insect behavior a forestry concern

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The changing behavior of several insects is a growing concern for foresters, a University of Idaho Extension expert says.

Chris Schnepf, extension forestry educator in Post Falls, attributes the "atypical" behavior to changes in climate, calling it "global climate weirding."

Moths in the Cydia laricana complex kill the tops of sapling larch trees. They were first recorded in Montana 100 years ago, but were never seen in Idaho until 2020, when they were found at several sites, Schnepf said.

Larch has been planted heavily throughout the state, as the top performer in dealing with root diseases, which are the biggest threat to forest health, Schnepf said.

"Douglas fir and grand fir are super vulnerable to root diseases; larch is our species that's best capable of dealing with it, so it gets planted a lot," he said. "So to see sapling larch that are just getting off the ground have tops be killed by this moth. ... If you're a forester and you've planted larch seedlings, that's pretty painful to see."

Gina Davis/USFS

**The wood boring larvae of the Cydia laricana moth are killing larch tops in northern Idaho.**

University and state entomologists are assessing the situation, Schnepf said.

"It's a moth that's never been seen in Idaho," he said. "It could have been here and we didn't see it."

The moth isn't the only insect that's learned a new trick.

The pine engraver beetle normally survives for two generations a year. But in recent years, it's lasted for three generations.

"If three is the new normal, that starts to affect what we do on the ground," Schnepf said.

The beetles will emerge and attack standing green trees left after a timber harvest.

Fire seasons average a month longer than normal, which means a longer growing season for some bark beetles species, Schnepf said. Farther south from Idaho, they can produce as many as four generations, he said.

Forest density and species composition tend to drive insect and disease issues and forest fire concerns, Schnepf said.

"It's not a cure, but generally speaking, if you reduce stand density and favor larch and pine instead of Douglas fir and grand fir, that deals with a lot of the insect and disease issues that tend to be most problematic," he said.

# Farmer experiments with growing wheat for soy sauce

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

AMITY, Ore. — Bruce Ruddenklau is no stranger to growing wheat at his Willamette Valley farm, but this experiment was something a little different.

Ruddenklau and his wife, Helle, farm nearly 1,000 acres near Amity, Ore., producing a variety of specialty crops including grass seed, radish seed and beans. The couple also plants wheat in rotation, which provides agronomic benefits and a little extra cash on the side.

When Yamasa Inc., one of the world's largest makers of soy sauce, expressed an interest in using flour milled from local wheat at its production plant in nearby Salem, Ruddenklau said they were game to give it a shot.

But there was one key distinction. Most wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest is soft white wheat, a variety with comparatively low levels of protein that is largely exported to Asia, where it is used to make spongecake, noodles and crackers.

The kind of flour required to make soy sauce must be higher in protein — at least 11%. That would mean growing a different variety, known as hard red wheat, with which growers in the region like Ruddenklau have less experience.

"We weren't real sure if we could make it here or not," Ruddenklau said. "I figured we had nothing to lose by giving this a try."

Yamasa is a Japanese corporation that traces its roots to 1645. The company opened its U.S. soy sauce plant in southeast Salem in 1994.

"Oregon's moderate climate, humidity and water quality are instrumental in the brewing of soy sauce by

SEDCOR

**Bruce Ruddenklau, of Ruddenklau Farms, in a 20-acre field of hard red wheat harvested this year for Yamasa Inc., one of the world's largest makers of soy sauce.**

environmentally assisting the required fermentation process that produces a mellow, distinct taste," Yamasa explains on its website.

While ingredients for Yamasa soy sauce have typically come from the Midwest and Canada, CEO Koji Shiraiwa said he wanted to buy locally grown wheat as a way to reduce transportation costs and increase brand recognition.

"We are not planning to take over our competitor, but rather planning to build a strong foothold in the local market by emphasizing our high-quality soy sauce using local ingredients," Shiraiwa said. "Surprisingly, not many Oregonians know Yamasa is local."

The company reached out earlier this year to SEDCOR, the Strategic Economic Development Corporation serving Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties, for help.

SEDCOR, in turn, contacted Ruddenklau Farms to see if they would be interested growing the high-protein wheat needed at Yamasa.

"We are so blessed to live in one of the most fertile regions on the continent," said Abisha Stone, Yamhill County business retention and expansion manager for SEDCOR.

"Oregon is known for being a high quality, high value, value-added food production state. I think it's because our growers are smart and our food manufacturers are savvy."

Ruddenklau said they found and purchased hard red wheat seed from northeast Oregon and planted a 20-acre plot that had just rotated out of tall fescue and spring peas.