

COVID-19



Capital Press File

Shoppers buy produce at the Portland Farmers' Market. Oregon farmers' markets are largely staying open but stripping their operations down to the essentials during the coronavirus pandemic.

Oregon farmers' markets focus on core functions in pandemic

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Farmers' markets are known to cultivate a festive atmosphere that attracts crowds, which is exactly what people are supposed to avoid during the coronavirus outbreak.

At their core, however, such markets are about food distribution, which is why they're exempt from Oregon's prohibition on gatherings of more than 25 people.

Now that they must emphasize only food — not fun — Oregon farmers' markets are preparing to strip their operations down to the essentials during the spring season.

"The social fabric we've been weaving for years, we're rapidly unraveling," said Kelly Crane, executive director of the Oregon Farmers Market Association.

At least for the time being, live music is out, as are chairs, tables, kids' activities and anything else that would encourage people to congregate, she said.

Vendors will space their booths farther apart, lots of hand-washing stations will be provided and signs will advise visitors to maintain social distance, Crane said.

A couple of Oregon farmers' markets have even decided against opening as planned this spring, since they didn't have enough physical space available to spread out their vendors, she said.

Apart from providing an opportunity to buy food in the open air, the state's farmers' markets are critical for the 6,700 small businesses that sell about \$63 million worth of goods at them each year, Crane said.

Markets that maintain operations year-round have already seen a decline in attendance, but their sales haven't dropped as sharply, she said. That's because shoppers are still showing up individually, without their friends and families.

"People are really supportive," Crane said. "They want these institutions to be around after the pandemic."

Many local farmers and ranchers will be especially dependent on farmers' markets this year, as their wholesale restaurant customers have largely been shut down indefinitely, said Trudy Toliver, executive director of the Portland Farmers Market, which is among the largest in the state.

"Direct-to-consumer sales is what will keep them going in this crisis," Toliver said.

Community support will be especially important for such companies as artisan cheese producers, which can't easily scale down or suspend their operations, she said. "They still have to feed their animals and milk their animals."

Grocery stores in Brookings, Ore., have restrictions on the number of certain items people can buy, so residents see the importance of maintaining local sources of food, said Linda Stimson, market manager of the Brookings Harbor Farmers Market.

"If you stop local farms from producing, it's hard to get them started again," she said. "You can't stop egg production or stop stuff from growing, but you can let it go to waste, which is crazy."

Farm products sold at the market go directly from the grower to the consumer, which contributes to safety, Stimson said. "It's not like it's gone through multi-levels of hands."

The coastal farmers' market operates year-round and doesn't attract as many people as big city markets, but visitors are still self-regulating despite the lack of known coronavirus cases in Curry County, Stimson said.

"People come and get their food and leave," she said. "As far as festivities, I think that's the last thing on people's minds."

H-2A labor concerns continue

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

U.S. farmers who rely on workers from Mexico are growing anxious over the coronavirus' impact on border crossings after the U.S. Embassy in Mexico last week suspended processing of routine visas.

The U.S. State Department and USDA quickly announced they would prioritize the processing of visas for returning H-2A workers from Mexico. But farmers worry if that will be enough or if there will be further obstacles to incoming workers at a critical time for pruning, planting and harvesting of winter crops.

South Carolina peach farmer Chalmers Carr has been relying on foreign workers for 22 years. Last year, the number of those workers peaked at 817, he said during a conference call hosted by American Farm Bureau Federation.

The H-2A worker is very important to his farm, he said. "And it is to our industry in the Southeast ... as every commercial peach operator is an H-2A user."

He currently has 390 H-2A workers on his farm with 68 en route from the Mexico border. Those workers account for only 55% of his needs.

"This is a critical time of year where crops are going into the ground," he said.

In addition to peaches, he also grows bell peppers and broccoli, he said.

"So if these crops are not planted in a timely manner, then it's going to have a ripple effect all the way through the supply chain," he said.

On the peach side, he has enough



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An H-2A guestworker clips stems while harvesting Fuji apples in Washington state. More than a quarter-million guestworkers are used for a wide variety of farm tasks across the nation, including planting and pruning in the spring.

workers to prune the trees now and then the crop ahead.

"But with the current numbers we have, there is no way that we'd be able to harvest and pack our crop, not even at 50% of our crop level," he said.

His peach harvest starts about May 10 and continues through the first of September, and it's the same for every peach grower in Georgia and South Carolina.

If anything were to happen with the border closing between now and May 19, he would have to make decisions on walking away from crops in the field that are either planted or permanent, he said.

Farmers in the southwest corner of Arizona supply the vast majority of the U.S. and Canada with winter vegetables such as lettuce, broccoli and

cauliflower, John Boelts, a produce farmer in the area, said.

Many vegetable crops grown across the country have a very short window for harvest. Crops such as iceberg or romaine lettuce only have a four to five day window, he said.

Farmers in his area rely on 3,000 to 8,000 H-2A workers a year. Across the country, that number is in the hundreds of thousands, and farmers are concerned with the ongoing ability to have adequate H-2A workers.

"We've been increasingly dependent on using H-2A program to fill the gaps that we lack due to Congress not taking action over the last three decades to improve our labor laws and our immigration laws so that agriculture would have an adequate work force," he said.

Oregon FFA proceeds with virtual convention amid coronavirus outbreak

Officers to be elected in May

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

REDMOND, Ore. — Under normal circumstances, Josiah Cruikshank would have seen the excited faces and heard the cheers of thousands of Oregon FFA members as he rushed onto the stage with his fellow officers to call the 2020 state convention to order.

But these are far from normal circumstances, and this was far from a normal convention.

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has hit the pause button on social life in Oregon and across the U.S., including sports, parties and just about any activity where people cannot stay at least 6 feet from one another, per social distancing.

That means the Oregon FFA State Convention — originally scheduled for March 19-22 at the Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center in Redmond — was forced to call an audible. Rather than cancel the event, organizers decided to hold a "virtual convention," with sessions streamed online.

Cruikshank, Oregon FFA state president for 2019-20, said it felt a bit strange delivering his retiring address in front of three silent video cameras and a bare bones audiovisual crew, as opposed to an eager live audience.

"It was a tricky thing, but we were



Macy Gibbs

Oregon FFA staff and state officers hosted a "virtual convention" March 19-20 from the Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center in Redmond. From left are Joenelle Futrell, state staff; Olivia Palacios, state reporter; Riley Davis, state vice president; Keegan Gibbs, state treasurer; Deidre Schreiber, state secretary; Josiah Cruikshank, state president; Ellie Hanson, state sentinel; and Lee Letsch, state staff.

so grateful we could have our state convention, even if it was virtual," Cruikshank said.

Preparations for state convention began in November, Cruikshank said, as officers began memorizing their speeches, designing T-shirts and building packets for career development events. Everything changed the evening of March 11, when Gov. Kate Brown banned all public gatherings of more than 250 people.

COVID-19 has since infected 209 Oregonians to date, and new cases continue to increase. All schools are closed through at least April 28, and Brown has ordered the public to stay

home except to go to the grocery store, pharmacy or other essential services.

It quickly became apparent the convention would not go forward as planned, Cruikshank said. Instead, FFA leaders devised the virtual convention as a first-of-its-kind substitute, streamed over Facebook Live on March 19 and 20.

The first session has been viewed 8,800 times and the final session has been viewed 1,800 times. Several comments on the live chat even came from other FFA associations that have also had their state conventions canceled or postponed.

Washington governor orders 'stay home' to fight virus

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Agriculture, food processing and transportation services are exempt from an order issued Monday evening by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee that will close a broad swath of the economy and ban social gatherings, including weddings and funerals, for at least two weeks to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Businesses, including some manufacturers and builders, that are not

deemed "essential work duty" will have to be shuttered within two days, unless all their employees can work from home. In deciding which industries to allow to keep operating, the state followed guidance from the Department of Homeland Security, state Department of Commerce Director Lisa Brown said.

"People will need to eat. We need to keep on the lights," she said.

Essential businesses that will remain open include grocery stores,



Washington Gov. Jay Inslee

medical offices, pharmacies, veterinarians and banks. Restaurants will be able to continue to offer take-out and delivery services, according to the governor's office. The order expires at midnight April 6, though could be extended.

Inslee urged people to not hoard food. "No one

should make a run on the grocery stores to over-stock," the governor said. "If each of us maintains our normal shopping habits, we will avoid the problem of empty shelves. We feel good about this."

Washington's "stay home, stay healthy" order came hours after Oregon Gov. Kate Brown issued similar restrictions to stop the spread of the coronavirus. The states have been conferring, but the same-day timing was coincidental, Inslee's chief of staff, David Postman, said.

The restrictions in both states came after a weekend in which coastal towns reported a large number of tourists flocking to beaches and crowding local businesses.

In a televised address, Inslee said keeping people apart is the "only weapon against this virus."

"This order will immediately ban all gatherings of people for social, spiritual and recreational purposes," he said. "If you want to have parties on the beach or play pick-up basketball at the park or have sleepovers, these are no longer allowed for at least a couple of weeks."

Inslee said people could still go outside, but must remain at least 6 feet apart from everyone at all times. "It's still safe to go outside using social distancing of 6 feet," he said. Washington Department of Health Secretary John Wiesman said people who live in the same home can walk together, but friends, neighbors

and colleagues shouldn't. "Those folks really need to be walking separately."

Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste said knowingly violating a governor's executive order is a gross misdemeanor. He said he did not expect law officers to enforce the order with arrests. "It's about educating the community to stay safe and healthy," he said.

Postman said that Inslee could ask for stronger law-enforcement action if people ignore his order, perhaps with officers breaking up gatherings. "I don't doubt for a second he's going to ask for some enforcement of that," he said.

Added Batiste: "We do have a law on the books that helps us with that."

Health officials said they will look over the next two weeks to see whether the "stay home" order and previous orders are having an effect. Postman said he expected some restrictions to be extended past two weeks.

LEGAL

NOTICE OF PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held pursuant to ORS 576.416 (5), on Monday, May 4, 2020 at 12:00 noon at Chemeketa Events at Winema, Room 210, 4001 Winema Place NE, Salem, Oregon, upon a proposed budget for operation of the Oregon Blueberry Commission during the fiscal year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. At this hearing any producer of Oregon Blueberries has a right to be heard with respect to the proposed budget, a copy of which is available for public inspection, under reasonable circumstances, in the office of each County Extension Agent in Oregon. For further information, contact the Oregon Blueberry Commission business office, P.O. Box 3366, Salem, Oregon 97302, telephone 503-364-2944. The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. Please make any requests for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodation for persons with disabilities at least 48 hours before the meeting by contacting the Commission office at 503-364-2944.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held pursuant to ORS 576.416 (5), on Wednesday, May 6, 2020, at 7:00 a.m., at West Salem Roth's Events Center, Founder's Room "O," 1130 Wallace Road, Salem, Oregon, upon a proposed budget for operation of the Clover Commission during the fiscal year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. At this hearing any producer of Oregon grown Clover seed has a right to be heard with respect to the proposed budget, a copy of which is available for public inspection, under reasonable circumstances, in the office of each County Extension Agent in Oregon. For further information, contact the Clover Commission business office, P.O. Box 3366, Salem, Oregon 97302, telephone 503-364-2944. The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. Please make any requests for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodation for persons with disabilities at least 48 hours before the meeting by contacting the Commission office at 503-364-2944.

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