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Farmers, ranchers feel impact of COVID-19

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The coronavirus pandemic is taking its toll on agriculture, causing lost markets and declining prices.

Milk is being dumped, produce is being left to rot and some producers are worried they won't have an operation left to hand down to the next generation.

Milk prices have declined 26% to 36% depending on its utilization. Prices have fallen as much as 31% for cotton and hogs, 25% for cattle, 14% for corn and 8% for soybeans, according to American Farm Bureau Federation.

"The entire supply chain is trying to adapt to match supply with the changes in demand. Meanwhile, the markets continue to swing daily," Zippy Duvall, AFBF

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president, said in a phone conference with reporters.

Jim Alderman, a produce grower in southern Florida, has been farming for 40 years and said he's been through freezes, floods

and hurricanes but has never seen anything like this.

"What is happening to us today is that the foodservice industry is basically shut down," he said.

Hotels, clubs, all the restaurants are closed — and that's creating a backlog. Squash, for example, has to be picked every day. If it doesn't get picked, it gets too big to sell. The market today is about \$4 and change for a half

bushel box of yellow squash or zucchini squash, he said.

"That is way below our cost of picking and packing. ... There's no sense in packing it because there is no sale for it," he said.

Some growers are cutting squash every day and throwing it on the ground, hoping the market will turn around, he said. A lot

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RESEARCHERS HAVE 'SUPERWEEDS' IN THEIR SIGHTS

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

Besieged by lawsuits and a rising tide of weeds resistant to its popular Roundup herbicide, German chemical giant Bayer is touting a landmark discovery — a new molecule that will kill resistant weeds using a different mode of action.

"Mode of action" describes precisely where and how an herbicide kills a weed at the tissue or cellular level: for example, by interrupting a weed's growth.

"We're super excited by the breakthrough we think we've made," said Bob Reiter, head of research and development in Bayer's crop science division.

R&D takes time, and Axel Trautwein, a molecular scientist at Bayer, said a decade may pass before a new product reaches the marketplace.

But many farmers are already enthusiastic. "I'm excited about this," said Randy Grant, grower and president of the Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association. "We need more tools in our toolbox."

The discovery comes after a nearly 30-year drought in development of new herbicides, and experts say Bayer's innovation will have profound impacts on

farming. But many growers and researchers worry the new "tool" won't be enough by itself to combat the populations of herbicide-resistant weeds taking hold on more than half of U.S. farms.

Resistant weeds

Resistance is part of a weed's basic biological struggle for survival. When a field of weeds is sprayed again and again with a single herbicide, that herbicide kills weaker individual plants, but some naturally strong weeds have random traits that allow them to survive the herbicide. These survivors reproduce, passing on resistant traits to the next generations.

Weeds are not the only pests whose populations evolve to resist pesticides. Parasites do it. Mosquitoes do it. Even bed bugs do it.

Growers now grapple with so-called "superweeds" present on hundreds of millions of acres across the U.S., according to Stratus Ag Research.

The Washington Grain Commission estimates herbicide-resistant weeds across all crops increase growers' costs on average

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**NEW CHEMICAL,
METHODS OF FARM-
ING WILL BE USED
AGAINST HERBICIDE
RESISTANT WEEDS**



Laboratory work at Bayer. The company estimates its new herbicide will be on the market by the end of the decade.



A corn field that uses Roundup Ready crop management solutions for weed control.



GETTY IMAGE

Oregon hemp farmers retrench in 2020

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Oregon's hemp growers are apparently retrenching in 2020 after the crop's explosive expansion last year left many bitterly disappointed with their financial results.

Roughly 6,300 acres of hemp were registered for planting during the first quarter of 2020, down more than 75% from the 25,400 acres registered during the same period in 2019, according to the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Though it's still early in the season — last year, farmers ultimately registered to grow nearly 64,000 acres of hemp — experts say a problematic harvest, glutted market and regulatory morass is forcing growers to drastically scale back their ambitions.



Barry Cook, left, speaks with his son, Bo, in a field of hemp growing at his nursery in Boring, Ore. Cook believes the hemp industry is seeing a course correction in production but still faces a bright future.

Rick Bush, a hemp farmer and processor in Salem, said he personally uses the cannabidiol, or CBD, extracted from hemp for health rea-

sons and considers it a "wonderful product."

However, the "brutal" economic situation of plummeting CBD prices

and insufficient demand has devastated growers who'd invested heavily in growing the crop last year, he said.

"Hemp is an empty promise," Bush said.

Many farmers who planted hemp in 2019 were later confronted with inadequate or insufficient harvest machinery, a lack of storage and processing capacity as well as weather problems that degraded the crop's quality.

"You had just one setback after another," said Beau Whitney, founder of Whitney Economics, a consulting firm that tracks the hemp industry.

Processors now have more than enough hemp biomass remaining for extraction, as well as a surfeit of finished CBD products they've yet to sell, which is depressing prices for the

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