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A SECOND CHANCE

As the agricultural economy falters, more farms file for bankruptcy protection to reorganize their finances

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

CHAPTER 12 BANKRUPTCIES BY THE NUMBERS

	2019	2020
U.S. totals:	130	170
The West:	9	20
Oregon:	0	9
Idaho:	3	3
Washington:	0	3

MABTON, Wash. — The Mensonides family designed its dairy with “cow flow” in mind. Cows enter the milking barn in one direction and exit a different way.

Free stalls are 3 feet longer, giving the cows easier access to feed and exercise.

“Easier cow flow is less stress for the cow, and less stress for the cow equals more milk for the dairy farmer,” said Kristyn Mensonides.

But at this dairy, it’s the farmers who are under stress.

The Mensonides family is among a growing number of family farmers who have sought protection under federal bankruptcy laws as the agricultural economy falters. In gen-

eral, the laws allow them to prevent lenders and others from foreclosing on land or equipment while they develop a plan to repay their debts. In many cases, farms emerge on stable financial footing, experts say.

Art and Theresa Mensonides own the Mabton, Wash., dairy. Their daughter, Kristyn, manages accounts, and another daughter, Amy, works in the office. Three other daugh-

ters are not affiliated with the dairy.

The Mensonides family has 11,500 cows and milks about 5,200 of them. They raise corn, triticale and hay for feed on 650 acres. They employ 70 people.

The dairy filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in June 2018. The Mensonides family cited the years-long drop in

See Farms, Page 11



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Kristyn Mensonides, left, with her parents, Theresa and Art Mensonides, at the family’s dairy in Mabton, Wash. The dairy has reorganized its finances under Chapter 11 of the bankruptcy law.

Oregon governor announces \$30M investment to protect farmworkers

Food Security and Farmworker Safety Project includes funding for housing, PPE

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon will provide \$30 million to help protect essential agricultural workers and maintain food supplies amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Kate Brown announced May 28.

Funding will go toward distributing personal protective equipment, quarantining sick workers and helping farms to comply with temporary rules increasing field sanitation and housing restrictions.

“Oregon’s agricultural workers on the front lines during this COVID-19 crisis, working to pro-

vide food for Oregon families,” Brown said. “This investment will bring essential resources to agricultural producers and farmworkers, providing critical resources to keep workers safe and mitigate COVID-19 outbreaks while protecting the food supply chain.”

State lawmakers set aside \$200 million from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security, or CARES, Act to assist cities, counties and tribes paying for items such as face masks and hand sanitizer, contact tracing and testing capacity.

Part of the money was also made eligible for agricultural field san-



Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

itation and worker housing under rules implemented by Oregon OSHA, the state’s occupational safety and health administration.

Among the requirements, farms

must roughly double the number of portable toilets and handwashing stations for crews picking crops and keep beds at least 6 feet apart or separated by an impermeable barrier — such as plastic sheets or Plexiglass — in labor camps.

Oregon OSHA will begin enforcing the rules June 1, and they will remain in effect no later than Oct. 24 during the busy summer harvest season.

The governor’s office worked with state agencies, farmers and worker advocates to develop the Food Security and Farmworker Safety Project using \$30 million in coronavirus aid. Volunteers have already handed out 1 million masks and 500 gallons of hand sanitizer to farms statewide at local

drive-thru distribution centers.

Other components of the program include:

- \$14 million for mitigating COVID-19 outbreaks, quarantining sick workers and awarding grants to community-based organizations for field education, outreach and engagement with migrant workers.

- \$10 million for agricultural workforce housing and reimbursing farms to pay for motels and alternative housing for displaced workers.

- \$5 million for field sanitation, reimbursing farms for additional portable toilets and handwashing stations.

See Safety, Page 11

EPA issues report analyzing heat pollution in Columbia, Snake rivers

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Oregon and Washington regulators are taking steps to address high water temperatures in the Columbia and Snake rivers that impact migrating salmon and steelhead.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a report May 18 that details when and where the two rivers become too warm for fish to survive — especially at each of 14 federally operated dams spanning 900 river miles.

The report, known as a “Total Maximum Daily Load,” or TMDL, typically studies industrial pollutants in waterways such as mercury, nitrogen or phosphorus. In this case, heat is the pollutant that causes stress in salmon, which are protected as an endangered species,



Associated Press File

The Ice Harbor dam on the Snake River near Burbank, Wash. A new EPA study blames dams on the Snake and Columbia rivers for raising the water temperature.

and prevents them from spawning.

Oregon and Washington have set a maximum temperature of 68 degrees Fahrenheit in the rivers to protect fish. According to the EPA, water temperatures at the dams

regularly exceed that threshold between July and October.

Conditions vary by time and location, but are generally warmest farther downstream in August, ranging from 70 degrees at McNary

Dam to nearly 72 degrees at Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River. Temperatures also exceeded 68 degrees in the lower Snake River, from 69 degrees at Lower Granite Dam to 71 degrees at Ice Harbor Dam.

Environmentalists argue just a few degrees can be the difference between life and death for fish.

In summer 2015, warm water exceeding 70 degrees was blamed for the death of 250,000 Snake River adult sockeye salmon, about half of that year’s anticipated run. Groups have urged the federal government to consider removing the lower Snake River dams to avoid a repeat catastrophe.

Brett VandenHeuvel, executive director of Columbia Riverkeeper, said the EPA’s TMDL is a victory

See EPA, Page 11

