



PLAN BEE

How farmers are using native mason bees to boost crop production



Jim Watts and daughter, Hope Watts, package mason bee shipments.



MASON BEE FACT SHEET

- Genus: Osmia
- Family: Megachilidae
- Origin: the Americas
- Nature: Gentle, nonaggressive, solitary
- Males do not sting; females only sting if attacked
- Nests in a cavity instead of a hive
- Named after mud "masonry" used to seal nests
- No queen to protect; every female is fertile
- Hibernates in winter inside cocoon
- Doesn't produce honey
- Outperforms other pollinators in many crops
- Carries dry pollen on its abdomen
- Color: varies by species, usually dark-colored (metallic green or blue)
- Size: .25 to .75 inches long
- "Generalist" pollinator; moves at random instead of systematically
- Adversaries: Houdini flies, predatory wasps, pollen mites, some ants
- Only flies in 300- to 400-foot radius from nest



Watts Solitary Bees

Source: Washington State University

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

BOTHELL, Wash. — Jim Watts calls himself a farmer, but he doesn't raise livestock or crops. Watts is a bee farmer.

Across the West, growers are turning to a tiny, overlooked insect to pollinate crops: the native mason bee. In Washington state, Watts is leading the movement.

Researchers call mason bees "the new frontier" for crop pollination.

In recent years, many farmers say they have bought or rented mason bees because they are affordable, low maintenance, improve crop yields, repopulate areas with native species and even push honey bees working alongside them to be more efficient.

Researchers have known about mason bees'



Photo courtesy of Jim Watts

Mason bees are smaller than honey bees and have many other characteristics that make them unique, entomologists say.

pollinating potential for decades, but their use in agriculture has been overshadowed by the ubiquitous honey bee.

USDA's most recent data show farmers in the Western U.S. spend more than \$300 million annually on crop pollination by honey bees. Western farms use honey bees in dozens of crops across millions of acres. For example, 2020 reports show California farms are using honey bees to pollinate 1.2 million almond acres, and Northwest farms this year are pollinating nearly 300,000 fruit tree acres.

Until recently, large-scale propagation of mason bees has been a pipe dream.

Now, it's taking wing.

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NORPAC creditors seek \$5M claw back from farmers

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Creditors of the former NORPAC cooperative want to "claw back" nearly \$5.3 million from farmers for crop payments and seed they've already received from the bankrupt processor.

A committee representing unsecured creditors — who don't have collateral for

loans to NORPAC — argues the crop payments were "fraudulent transfers" the farmers must return under bankruptcy law.

Recovering the \$5.3 million on behalf of the cooperative would benefit the unsecured creditors, who currently stand to be repaid only 10% to 45% of the money they're owed by NORPAC. Under bankruptcy law, money from debtors can be "clawed back" if it's paid out improperly.

Earlier this year, the former NORPAC cooperative, now called North Pacific Cannery & Packers, filed a lawsuit against 10 farm members seeking a declaration that they were owed no additional payments for 2019 crops beyond advances for harvesting and hauling expenses.

Now, the unsecured creditors want to file another complaint seeking to recover additional funds that were already received by those same 10 growers, with the lawsuit serving as a test case.

However, the litigation may have additional repercussions for all of NORPAC's 140 grower-owners.

The unsecured creditors allege that NORPAC



NORPAC Foods

Creditors of the former NORPAC cooperative seek to "claw back" more than \$5.3 million from farmers.

growers were paid cash for crops in 2018 and 2019 even though the cooperative was insolvent and had sustained a net economic loss from processing and selling those vegetables.

NORPAC's bylaws required the cooperative to reduce cash payments to farmers during money-losing years and instead compensate them more with patronage retains, or ownership in the cooperative, according to a court document filed by unsecured creditors.

Despite sustaining heavy losses in 2018 and 2019, NORPAC made cash payments to the defendant growers that exceeded what they

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WATER SLIDE

OWRD cautions against expanding groundwater use in Harney Basin

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

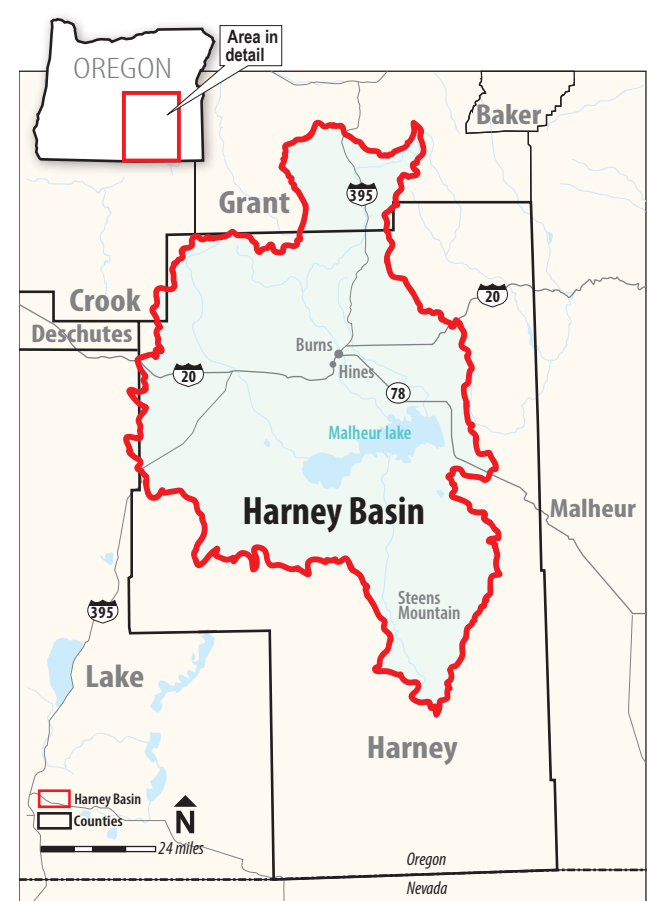
BURNS, Ore. — Preliminary findings of a four-year study in the Harney Basin of southeast Oregon indicate groundwater is being lost faster than it can be replenished, and farms will likely need to start using less in an effort to stabilize shrinking aquifers.

As a result, state water regulators are urging growers in the basin not to irrigate any more land with groundwater — even if their permit allows additional pumping.

The Oregon Water Resources Department is sending letters to permit holders cautioning them against increasing groundwater development, which could be curtailed to prevent wells from running dry.

Under Oregon water law, farmers and ranchers must apply for a water right permit to use groundwater for irrigating crops and watering livestock. OWRD then designates a time period to "develop" the water right, such as digging wells and installing pivots.

If permit holders cannot put all of the water to use right away, they can apply



Capital Press

for an extension allowing them to add more irrigated acres in the future, sometimes years after the permit was first issued.

Now, OWRD is asking those producers not to expand and instead brace for cutbacks to slow the rate of groundwater

declines. The department previously notified permit holders in October 2019 that requests for extensions were unlikely to be approved.

"It is important for the community to understand

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