# Senator puts Washington meat inspections on table

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Reg Keddie/Dayton Natural Meats File

**Washington state Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, has introduced a bill creating a meat and poultry inspection program within the state Department of Agriculture.**

The top-ranking Republican on the Washington Senate agriculture committee has reintroduced the apparently popular but so far unfunded idea of the state inspecting meat and poultry.

State inspections would complement USDA inspections, helping small producers reach retail markets and allowing meat to be labeled "Washington inspected and approved."

"It would give consumers a better idea of where the meat was raised," said Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake.

The USDA monopolizes inspections under the Federal Meat Inspection Act. But with USDA oversight, states can have their own inspectors.

Senate Bill 5045, introduced by Warnick, would direct the state Department of Agriculture to negotiate with the USDA to create a state program.

The department already licenses more than 100 custom-meat processors. But those businesses can only process meat for the owners of the animal.

State inspections would allow small producers to sell meat without first selling a share of the animal to the consumer.

Some 27 states have meat inspection programs, with the USDA paying half the cost. Oregon lawmakers last spring voted to have state inspectors. The state Department of Agriculture hopes to have a program formed by mid-2024.

Washington lawmakers also considered creating a meat inspection program last year. The state agriculture projected that inspecting custom-meat operations would cost $1.8 million a year.

The bill was scaled back, directing the agriculture department to help producers market meat and to negotiate an agreement with USDA. The bill passed the Senate unanimously and advanced through House committees without opposition.

The proposal stalled at the end, though. The bill still cost $245,400 a year and didn't make the budget.

Warnick said she hoped a bill could be written to cost halfway between $1.8 million and $245,400.

"We're hoping to get it done because it would open up an opportunity for a number of facilities," she said.

# Pacific Power rates drop 3.5% for irrigation customers

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

Energy Trust of Oregon

**Pacific Power irrigation customers in Oregon will see a rate reduction.**

PORTLAND — Oregon regulators have approved lower electric rates for Pacific Power customers in 2021, thanks in part to cheaper fuel and tax credits from wind and solar energy, according to the utility.

That comes as welcome news for irrigators already struggling financially with the coronavirus pandemic and water shortages due to extreme drought.

Most of Pacific Power's 615,000 Oregon customers will see a 5.2% rate reduction, including an estimated 3.5% reduction for agricultural pumping. The utility has 7,984 irrigation customers statewide, about half of whom are in the drought-stricken Klamath Basin.

Ben DuVal, power committee chairman for the Klamath Water Users Association, said the group is pleased with the outcome following months of deliberations.

"We appreciate Pacific Power's constructive approach to negotiation and settlement," DuVal said in a statement. "We were able to resolve irrigators' most important issues efficiently, and cost-effectively."

Given the company's initial proposal, things could have turned out much differently.

Pacific Power submitted its request for a general rate revision to the Oregon Public Utility Commission in February 2020, asking for a 6% increase. For irrigators, the rate hike would have been 10%.

Rate increases were needed to help pay for more renewable energy and transmission upgrades while phasing out coal-fired power plants, the company argued.

In 2016, Oregon lawmakers passed the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Act, directing the state's two largest utilities — Pacific Power and Portland General Electric — to stop using coal by 2030 and double their renewable energy mandate by 2040.

The KWUA and Oregon Farm Bureau, among other organizations, contested Pacific Power's rate case.

"Electricity is one of the most significant operating costs for agricultural customers who are highly dependent upon the use of pumping and sprinkler equipment to deliver water to their crops," KWUA stated in an Oct. 12 filing.

Increasing electricity costs would exacerbate an already dire situation for farmers and ranchers reeling from drought, wildfires and COVID-19, the filing stated.

The PUC determined that Pacific Power cannot charge ratepayers for incremental decommissioning costs of its remaining coal plants — at least for now.

"We must ensure that PacifiCorp's transition away from coal resources is fair to Oregon customers," said Megan Decker, PUC chairwoman. "We need to improve Oregonians' confidence in the cost estimates through additional PUC staff and stakeholder review before we include PacifiCorp's projected costs in rates."

The PUC also approved Pacific Power's annual Transition Adjustment Mechanism, or TAM, that incorporates fuel costs and tax credits associated with multi-billion dollar investments in renewable energy.

Stefan Bird, president and CEO of Pacific Power, said the revised general rates and TAM combined should lower customers' electric bills by an average of 5.2% in 2021.

"We kept our commitment to our customers in 2017 to keep rates flat for at least three years and we are pleased to now deliver these price reductions while simultaneously making big strides in decarbonization and network resilience," Bird said.

DuVal, with the KWUA, said irrigators should see a 3.5% reduction with the new base rate and annual adjustments.

"Customers are getting economic benefit from smart investments that Pacific Power has made in meeting its renewable energy requirements in the state of Oregon," he said.

But Decker, the PUC chairwoman, cautioned that rates may increase in 2022 after further evaluation of Pacific Power's ongoing costs as it drops coal generation.

# Critic of farm employers wins Washington state grant

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The farmworker advocacy group Community to Community Development, a politically active organization that accuses agriculture of exploitative labor practices, has received a $50,000 grant from the Inslee administration.

The Bellingham, Wash.-based organization is one of 358 nonprofits to share in $11.85 million from the Washington Equity Relief Fund for Nonprofits.

Gov. Jay Inslee directed the state Department of Commerce to give federal CARES Act funds to nonprofit groups led by minorities and that serve minorities. Nearly 1,000 organizations applied.

Commerce announced the recipients Dec. 30 but did not disclose spending plans by the organizations. The grants ranged from $25,000 to $75,000.

Community to Community has been at the forefront of farm labor issues, arguing there is no shortage of U.S. farmworkers and calling for an end to foreign guestworker programs, as well as capitalism.

The group has supported boycotts and strikes, and endorsed legislation to increase state oversight of farm labor conditions.

"As a farmworker community leader, I hold the state accountable for the deaths of farmworkers that have happened and will continue to happen," the group's head, Rosalinda Guillen, told a Senate committee in 2019.

The Commerce Department declined Monday to provide details on Community to Community's application. A spokeswoman said in an email that "there is nothing in the application requiring them to say how they will use the money."

"The only requirements are an attestation that the organization has been impacted by COVID and, of course, they cannot use the money for any illegal purposes," the spokeswoman said.

Community to Community's application was sponsored by the Institute for Washington's Future, a nonprofit whose board chairwoman is Guillen.

Efforts to obtain comment from Community to Community or the Institute for Washington's Future were unsuccessful.

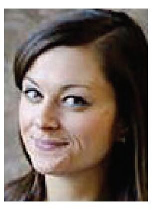
Organizations can't use equity grants for lobbying, according to the commerce department.

# Spending, relief package to benefit cattle producers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Several provisions in the government spending and COVID-19 relief package signed by President Donald Trump will benefit cattle producers and the industry.

The bill includes $1.4 trillion in government spending and $900 billion for pandemic relief.



**Danielle Beck**

The relief portion of the bill includes $11 billion for USDA to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID by providing support to agricultural producers. It includes additional funding for cattle producers, said Danielle Beck, senior executive director of government affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Cattle producers received payments from earlier pandemic relief approved by Congress through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. The first was for losses from Jan. 15 through April 15. The second was an inventory payment, which NCBA said fell short of covering all losses.

The third payment is for losses incurred from April 16 through May 14, Beck said in the latest "Beltway Beef" podcast.

"It's really intended to provide assistance to those producers who were really left out in the cold after that April 15 cutoff date," she said.

The additional payment will be based on what producers previously received, she said.

"So this is some targeted relief that we've really been asking for way back when the CARES Act was enacted," she said.

Another big win for cattle producers and NCBA was the inclusion of provisions proposed in the Requiring Assistance to Meat Processors for Upgrading Plants, known as the RAMP-UP Act.

The COVID relief portion of the bill provides $60 million for USDA grants to meat and poultry processors to upgrade their facilities to become part of the federal inspection system to be able to sell across state lines, she said.

"That's, I think, tremendous when it comes to increasing competition in the packing sector," she said.

It would allow more market access, allow custom products to make their way into new markets and, hopefully, provide more hook space, she said.

"These grants getting out the door sooner rather than later are going to help us out quickly and make changes, much-needed changes, sooner," she said.

USDA is also required to work with states to improve the existing Cooperative Interstate Shipping program. It is also required to conduct a report on the availability of financing for new and existing meat and poultry processing capacity, she said.

The bill also includes $284 billion in a second round of Paycheck Protection Program loans that simplifies the forgiveness process for loans under $150,000, she said.

"More importantly, the bill specifies that forgiven PPP loans will not be included in taxable income," she said.

In addition, the bill clarifies deductions are allowed for expenses paid with the proceeds from a PPP loan, she said.

The relief portion of the package also ensures livestock producers are paid for their animals by requiring dealer trusts.