

Grazing permit restored to the Hammond family

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

The federal government has authorized livestock grazing on 26,400 acres of public allotments in Oregon for the Hammond family, which most recently lost its permit in 2019.

Controversies over the family's use of the grazing allotments stem from the arson convictions of Dwight and Steven Hammond, a father and son who were later pardoned by President Donald Trump for setting fire to rangelands.

"It's great news they've issued the final decision and issued the grazing permit to the Hammond family," said Alan Schroeder, the family's attorney. "The fact it's been restored will certainly stabilize this livestock operation that's been around for 50 years."

Not being allowed to graze livestock on public lands in previous years had a "material" impact on the Hammond family, which owns a ranch amid the allotments in Diamond, Ore., he said.

"They were forced to go other places to put their livestock," which involved significant expenses for hay, leases and transportation, Schroeder said.

The Western Watersheds Project, an environmental group opposed to the grazing authorization, isn't surprised by the decision because the Trump administration has "bent over backwards" to accommodate the Hammond family, said Erik Molvar, its executive director.

"This is a totally political decision," Molvar said.

The ranchers were originally indicted for setting fires to government property in 2010 and convicted in a federal jury trial two

years later.

Dwight Hammond was originally sentenced to three months in prison for one count of arson and Steven Hammond sentenced to one year in prison for two counts of arson.

However, the father and son were ordered to return to prison in 2016 after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled they were subject to mandatory 5-year prison terms.

Protests against the decision culminated in an armed standoff at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge that gained national attention.

Trump fully pardoned the Hammonds in 2018 before they were finished serving the entire mandatory minimum sentences.

While the criminal proceedings played out in federal court, in 2014 the U.S. Bureau of Land Management also refused to renew the Hammonds' 10-year grazing permit for surrounding public lands.

The U.S. Interior Department, which oversees the BLM, ended up renewing the Hammonds' grazing permits in early 2019, citing the pardons as a new circumstance, but U.S. District Judge Michael Simon ruled that decision was unlawful and overturned it later that same year.

The BLM opened up the four allotments to competition last year, with the Hammonds vying against two other applicants for permits to graze the combined 26,400 acres.

The agency has now issued a new 10-year permit to the Hammonds after determining that five of the eight regulatory factors considered "generally weigh in favor" of the family, including its historic use and proximity to the allotments.

USDA updates CFAP: new money for turfgrass, contract poultry, livestock

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

USDA on Friday announced \$2.3 billion in additional assistance for farmers through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, or CFAP, which was part of last year's CARES Act.

The new assistance makes contract poultry and livestock producers, along with pullet and turfgrass sod producers, now eligible for coronavirus aid. These groups were not previously eligible for CFAP aid. The update also provides additional support — called "top-up payments" — for swine producers who already received some money last year.

USDA estimates that combined, contract poultry, contract hog inventory payments will total almost \$2.1 billion.

This new assistance was made possible by the recently passed coronavirus relief package, which allocated \$13 billion to the agricultural sector.

Producers have until Feb. 26 to submit new applications or change existing applications.

Under the original CFAP plan, farmers who raised animals under a contract

for another entity weren't eligible for aid. Poultry, for example, was left out of the original aid package because most poultry farms work on a contract basis. But poultry groups told the Capital Press and USDA that supply chain disruptions early in the pandemic significantly reduced producers' incomes and said they needed financial help.

In response to these requests, USDA Friday announced that contract producers of broilers, turkeys, chicken eggs, laying hens and hogs who suffered a revenue drop in 2020 due to the pandemic are now eligible for assistance.

USDA announced that producers of pullets and turfgrass sod, also previously ineligible for aid, are now also able to apply for CFAP payments. The payment structure, according to USDA, will be similar to sales commodities and the payment rate will vary based on their overall sales.

In addition to the newly eligible categories, swine producers who participated in the first CFAP payments last year will receive an automatic "top-up" payment of \$17 per head, which will increase the total payment to \$34 per head including last year's payment.

Biden's immigration plan would have big impact on agricultural workers

Dairy, nursery and hop leaders react to potential changes

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

President Joe Biden was expected to propose a sweeping immigration bill after his inauguration that would provide a pathway to citizenship for about 11 million people living in the U.S. without legal status.

Policy experts say because the plan is radical, Congress is unlikely to pass it without significant amendments. But farm leaders say the plan, if passed, could dramatically impact agricultural labor — especially in the nursery, dairy and hop industries.

"I'm greatly heartened by the new administration making this one of their first acts," said Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

In an interview with Univision, a Spanish-language television network, Vice President Kamala Harris said the proposal will reduce the wait time for citizenship from 13 to eight years.

The pathway to citizenship would be further streamlined for recipients of



Courtesy of Tami Kerr/Oregon Dairy Farmers Association

Dairy farmers say foreign-born labor is critical to the industry and are in favor of policies that promote stronger legal labor force options.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or so-called Dreamers, agricultural workers and people under temporary protective status, who could be eligible for green cards immediately.

This would impact farmworkers nationwide. Last April, USDA's Economic Research Service estimated half of hired crop farmworkers lack legal immigration status. Some labor contractors estimate it's closer to 75%.

Farmworker advocacy groups say bringing farmworkers out of the shadows by giving them legal status could help prevent them

from being exploited or underpaid.

Tami Kerr, executive director of Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, said she welcomes Biden's plan.

"We're always supportive of paths to citizenship for more workers," said Kerr.

As dairies have grown larger, Kerr said foreign-born labor has become critical. The National Milk Producers Federation last year found more than 50% of U.S. dairy workers were foreign-born.

The nursery industry, too, stands to benefit.

But Stone of the nursery association said in order for

Biden's plan to work, there would need to be something like a grace period during which undocumented workers could safely come forward to seek legal status without penalties for them or their employers.

Kerr and Stone both said they hope farmworkers' household family members will also have a path to citizenship.

Some farmers encourage a less radical option — namely, giving farmworkers permanent legal status instead of citizenship. They, they say, is also likelier to pass in Congress.

Sources familiar with Biden's plan told The Associated Press the bill will not create any guestworker or other visa programs.

"This disappoints me," said Stone.

Many nurseries rely on temporary H-2A visa workers. Stone said he would like to see a visa program with a longer stay period between renewals than H-2A's.

Michelle Palacios, administrator of the Oregon Hop Commission, said she would prefer to see the H-2A program itself reformed.

Palacios said hop growers are not advocating a particular policy but are supportive of "whatever provides an available, legal workforce."

Chemeketa receives \$200,000 donation for Ag Hub

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

SALEM — Chemeketa Community College has received a \$200,000 gift from Northwest Farm Credit Services to build a greenhouse in the college's new Agricultural Hub, which is slated to open in Salem this month.

"This gift is huge. We're so grateful," said Holly Nelson, executive dean of the school.

Brent Fetch, Oregon president of Northwest Farm Credit Services, the area's top agricultural lender and crop insurance provider, explained in a statement why his organization is investing.

"We are pleased to support Chemeketa Community College's Agricultural Hub because we believe this program will yield the next generation of Oregon's agricultural talent, which is vital to the industry's long-term success," he said.

The new hub is modeled after Oregon State University's Extension Service, offering classes, workshops and other agricultural resources to college students and the community.

The college has been planning the Agricultural Hub for years, but high construction costs the past year meant the school was about \$2 million short on funding and had to cut several pieces from its plan, includ-



Courtesy of Chemeketa Community College

Chemeketa Community College's Agricultural Hub, also known as the Ag Complex, is under construction.

ing hoop houses, a conservatory, learning gardens and a greenhouse.

School administrators say the cuts — especially the greenhouse — were a huge disappointment.

Nelson, the executive dean, said a greenhouse is sorely needed because Chemeketa's existing greenhouse is old and dilapidated, requiring regular maintenance.

A new greenhouse, she said, will support the school's horticulture program, which includes horticulture certificates, two-year degrees and a transfer degree option.

She said a new greenhouse will also help the

school provide continuing professional development and workshops, called "workforce training," to local nursery businesses and farms.

After the school made cuts in the face of rising construction costs, administrators decided to fundraise.

When leaders at Northwest Farm Credit Services heard of the college's decision to scrap its greenhouse plans, they surprised college officials with their gift.

"When Northwest Farm Credit Services told us they'd be donating money, we had no idea how much.

We thought maybe \$10,000 or \$20,000. Then we had a Zoom meeting and they told us it was \$200,000. I think we all about fell out of our chairs," said Marie Hulett, executive director of institutional advancement at the college.

The gift, college officials say, will cover about half the cost of the new greenhouse, including installation fees and electrical wiring. Nelson said the school plans to keep fundraising for the remainder.

The new Agricultural Hub, officials say, will serve the local agricultural community and industry with garden and farm demonstration fields, classroom and community meeting space, a beneficial insectary and woody ornament lab. It will train college students in agricultural business, technology, science and logistics. And it will provide support to high schoolers in FFA.

"We cannot thank Northwest Farm Credit Services enough for their trust in Chemeketa, and we look forward to serving the agricultural industry with greater workforce training opportunities, a gathering place for the agricultural community, and robust opportunities for students for years to come," college president Jessica Howard said in a statement.

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