

Washington farmworkers move up on COVID waiting list

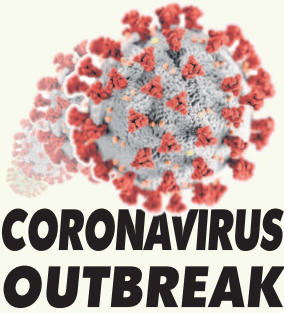
By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Farmworkers and food processing workers younger than 50 will be able to get inoculated for COVID at the same time as their older co-workers, according to Washington’s new vaccination plan.

Previously, agricultural workers over 50 had priority over younger colleagues, potentially delaying vaccinations for most farmworkers into late spring or summer.

A grower who sets up a vaccination clinic will now be able to immunize all workers at the same time, Gov. Jay Inslee’s spokeswoman said in an email Wednesday.

“The change was made to allow for flexibility and



ultimately efficiency of the delivery of vaccines,” she said.

The revision increases chances that farmworkers will be widely vaccinated by early spring, but it’s unknown when the shots will be available.

The state made a “Phase 1A” priority of vaccinating health-care workers and nursing home residents.

The state moved Monday into “Phase 1B, Tier

1,” allocating doses to people over 65 and people over 50 in multigenerational households.

Farmworkers and workers in food processing plants won’t be eligible for shots until the state moves into the next stage, “Phase 1B, Tier 2.”

“It’s going to take us several weeks,” Health Secretary Umail Shah said. “We have health-care workers who are still getting vaccinated, so that process is going to continue.”

Shah said the state will try to move through the phases as quickly as possible. “But I think we have to remind ourselves that vaccine supply also will be a challenge for us,” he said.

Some 1.5 million Washington residents are now eligible for vaccinations. The state is receiving

100,000 doses a week, according to health officials.

At a press conference Monday, Inslee said he expected vaccine production to increase, but predicted a frustrating wait for people used to quick delivery of consumer products.

“There’s an unlimited number of tennis shoes people can buy, but there’s not an unlimited number of doses we can buy right now,” he said.

Farmworkers and food processing workers are categorized as “high-risk essential workers” because they are near co-workers for extended periods.

The new vaccination schedule also speeds up inoculations for younger corrections officers, bus drivers, firefighters, police officers and social workers.



Associated Press File

A barred owl. A federal judge has thrown out another lawsuit against barred owl removal experiments, though the study has nearly concluded anyway.

Judge rejects complaint against barred owl removal experiments

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

A federal judge has struck down another legal challenge to barred owl removal experiments along the West Coast, which aim to gauge impacts on threatened spotted owls.

However, the ruling came after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had already concluded most of the experiments and is preparing an analysis of the data.

The agency’s findings are expected to be included in a broader plan for managing invasive barred owls, which are known to drive the less-aggressive northern spotted owls from their habitats.

The barred owl issue is concerning to the timber industry because federally protected spotted owls have continued to struggle despite strict logging curtailments in national forests.

In two earlier lawsuits, the Friends of Animals nonprofit claimed the removal experiments in Washington, Oregon and California forests violated the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but those cases were dismissed.

In the most recent complaint, the plaintiff challenged the Fish and Wildlife Service’s agreements protecting landowners from liability if they “take” spotted owls that move onto their property as a result of the experiments.

U.S. District Judge Anne Aiken has now rejected arguments by Friends of Animals that the “safe harbor agreements” and associated permits do not provide a required conservation benefit.

The information derived from the experiments is intended to help spotted owls while the agreements create an incentive for landowners to partake in the study, she said.

“Accordingly, a net conservation benefit arising from establishing areas to test and develop new and innovative conservation strategies through barred owl removal, in exchange for authorizing incidental take, is not plainly incon-

sistent or erroneous with the regulation,” Aiken said.

The judge also rejected allegations that the Fish and Wildlife Service insufficiently surveyed for spotted owls in the experiment areas and should have supplemented an environmental analysis of the experiments.

Although most of the barred owl removal experiments have ended, Friends of Animals worries about the continued effects of the safe harbor agreements and permits, which will remain effective, said Jennifer Best, an attorney for the group.

“We remain concerned about this and are considering our options as to whether to appeal,” Best said.

Over the course of the experiments, which began between 2013 and 2016, the Fish and Wildlife Service shot 3,135 barred owls in four areas along the West Coast.

The experiment site in Northern California will remain active for another year, while experiments in Oregon and Washington have ended because the existing results were scientifically credible or because further removals wouldn’t have affected the statistical results, said Robin Bown, a biologist with the agency.

“We didn’t want to keep going just to keep going,” Bown said.

The removal experiments have resulted in declining barred owl populations in the treated areas, which is significant because there was a possibility they’d quickly recolonize these sites, she said. “Some people thought they would refill so fast that we couldn’t do anything.”

However, the Fish and Wildlife Service is still conducting its analysis to see if removing barred owls actually helped spotted owls, with the results expected to be done in a few months, she said.

In the next two years, the agency also plans to develop a management plan for barred owls that will examine methods beyond killing the birds, such as sterilization and relocation, Bown said.



Associated Press File/East Oregonian

Essential workers, including farm and food workers, are now approximately fifth in line for a COVID-19 vaccine. Experts say they should start receiving a vaccine around the second week of May.

Oregon farmworkers to wait longer for vaccinations

Essential workers likely to receive vaccinations in May

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

Oregon began vaccinating teachers for COVID-19 on Monday, but farmworkers and other workers considered to be essential will have to wait until May under the state’s latest schedule.

In a press briefing last Friday, Gov. Kate Brown defended her latest decision to reject federal guidelines and prioritize teachers and other school staff for the vaccine before the elderly or people with underlying conditions.

Oregon Health Authority said seniors ages 70 to 74 will be pushed back to Feb. 28 and those 65 to 69 must now wait until March 7.

Essential workers, including those in the agricultural sector, will become eligible for vaccines in Phase 1b of a four-phase plan, meaning they are now fifth in line after health care workers, educators, people 65 and over and those with underlying conditions.

“I know there will still be some who disagree with this choice,” Brown told reporters. “I also know

there are many Oregonians who are eager to get the vaccine. The harsh reality is we are managing a scarce resource right now. I wish we had more vaccines to give.”

Jan. 12, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services urged states to prioritize aging people and those with underlying health conditions. Other states complied, but Oregon went its own direction.

Brown said her goal is “to get our kids back in the classroom this school year,” but she received mixed responses for putting teachers first.

Some education groups say the move is crucial to help the state’s students.

Others, including leaders of the Portland Association of Teachers and Oregon State University, have expressed concern, saying schools won’t be safe until communities are safe. If schools open, they say, children and educators can still carry the virus home to other family members.

Even if all teachers get vaccinated, that doesn’t mean all schools will open immediately.

Marc Siegel, spokesman for Oregon Department of Education, told the Capital Press his agency’s highest priority is “to return our schools to in-person instruction.” But Siegel said each school has its own plan.

Some school districts, he said, are considering summer school options. Siegel said the state will use about \$450,000 in incoming coronavirus aid money from the federal government to help make up for lost learning.

It could be months before farmworkers and others in the food sector get vaccinated.

Oregon has been vaccinating health care workers, the top priority group, since December. The state has upwards of 400,000 health care workers, and as of Sunday, Oregon Health Authority spokesman Jonathan Modie told the Capital Press 308,051 doses have been administered.

It will also take time to vaccinate educators, daycare workers and school staff — about 110,000 people, according to the Oregon Department of Education.

Then comes Oregon’s 65-and-older crowd. According to Census data, this includes about 764,400 people. Health officials predict nearly 80% of seniors will be vaccinated by the end of the first week of May.

The second week of May, essential workers are expected to be eligible. This will include agricultural workers, but OHA has not yet announced who will take priority.

LEGAL

The Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) will hold a meeting from 3-5 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021 (no public input at this portion of the meeting) and the regular quarterly meeting from 8:45 a.m. to noon Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Both meetings will be held virtually. Information on how to attend can be found at <https://oda.direct/meetings>. The regular quarterly meeting agenda covers SWCC reports, advisor reports, Soil and Water Conservation District programs and funding, Agriculture Water Quality Management Program updates, and other agenda items. The Oregon Department of Agriculture complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need special accommodations to participate in this meeting, please contact Sandi Hiatt at (503) 986-4704, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

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Unified industry got dairy through 2020

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

In his address last year at the Dairy Forum, International Dairy Foods President and CEO Michael Dykes said the industry would see more change in the next five years than it did in the last 15 years.

“Oh my goodness, I had no idea what we would encounter during the year 2020, but we have certainly seen change,” he said during the virtual Dairy Forum 2021.

The pace of change has been “unbelievable,” and he’s proud of every sector in the supply chain for how it responded to the challenges, he said.

“During this 2020, during this pan-



Michael Dykes

chain intact, taking care of producers and processors and making sure food was available for the less fortunate.

“All of the leaders across IDFA and National Milk Producers Federation came together with one goal in mind — what was in the best interest of this dairy industry collectively. We made a difference, a big difference,” he said.

demic, everyone has stepped up. Everyone has given a little extra, and we’ve all made some unbelievable things happen during 2020,” he said.

The focus was on keeping the supply chain intact, taking care of producers and processors and making sure food was available for the less fortunate.

Worker safety at processing plants was paramount. After taking care of workers, keeping the supply chain intact was the next job.

The two dairy organizations developed a plan and came out early with it to help the industry survive.

“We came out unified, and I think it goes to show you when an industry sector is unified and with clear requests, we can make some amazing things happen, and we did that,” he said.

The effort resulted in government payments to producers and recourse loans for processors, he said.

“And most importantly, we wanted to make sure that people were fed and that dairy products were continuing to be consumed,” he said.

That resulted in about \$6 billion in government food boxes with 133 million boxes delivered, he said.

“That’s a lot of food to a lot of people,” he said.

It also resulted in \$250 million to \$300 million in Section 32 purchases, school meal programs, dairy’s participation in the Paycheck Protection Program and labeling flexibility in rerouting foodservice food to retail, he said.

All of those were things the two organizations were working on early, he said.

“Our dairy industry I think ends 2020 in pretty good shape and far better than any of us would have guessed back in April, May, June,” he said.