

California farmers, officials consider compromise on pesticide fee hike

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Farm groups are in discussions with officials at the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, the CDPR, in hopes of reaching a compromise over Gov. Gavin Newsom's recent proposal to increase pesticide fees.



California Gov. Gavin Newsom

Some farm leaders say conversations are going well; others say they haven't been included in conversations yet about how a pesticide fee hike could impact their industries.

"I think the talks so far are good. They're constructive," said Casey Creamer, CEO and president of California Citrus Mutual, a nonprofit trade association and advocacy group.

"We just want to have a conversation. I don't know who they (officials) are talking to, but it certainly isn't us," said Roger Isom, president and chief

executive of Western Agricultural Processors Association.

Val Dolcini, director of CDPR, told the Capital Press he plans to talk with more agricultural groups in the coming weeks before the proposal's May revision.

In January, Newsom introduced the pesticide fee hike as part of his proposed 2021-2022 state budget. The plan would update California's pesticide fee structure for the first time in 16 years, approximately doubling fees for some pesticides. The proposal's goal, officials say, is to deter farmers and home gardeners from using high-hazard chemicals.

Under existing law, the state charges a flat "mill assessment" fee for all pesticide sales at the point of first sale into California. A "mill" is one-tenth of a cent. The current fee is 21 mills, or 2.1 cents per dollar.

Newsom's proposal would create a tiered system. Chemicals EPA labels as lower-hazard would see a gradual fee rise to 2.6 cents per dollar, while pesticides labeled as more toxic would top out at 4.5 cents per dollar.

According to CDPR, 63% of registered pesticides in the state would fall in the lowest tier, 14% in the middle tier and 23% in the highest, or "danger" tier.

The fee hike would be phased in over four years. Once fully deployed, it should bring in \$45 million annually.

Some farm groups say they support additional funding for extension agents, research and community engagement but do not support expanded enforcement and regulation.

Growers in some crop sectors, including nut and fruit tree growers, are especially concerned about the proposal because it would place higher fees on pesticide classes, such as fumigants, commonly used in those crops.

Creamer of California Citrus Mutual, for example, said many international markets won't accept American citrus shipments unless they've been fumigated first. Higher fumigation costs might make exporting unaffordable for California growers. Creamer estimated California exports 30% of its citrus.

Climate Alliance members testify at Senate hearing

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

RECOMMENDATIONS

Those recommendations and a full list of alliance member organizations can be found at: agclimatealliance.com.

Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance's founding organizations testified last week before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee on the role of agriculture, food and forestry in delivering climate solutions.



John Reifsteck

Farmers, ranchers and forest owners are on the frontlines of climate impacts and offer innovative, natural solutions through increased carbon sequestration in trees and soils and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, the alliance said in a press release.

The four representatives stressed that federal climate policy must be built on voluntary, incentive-based programs and market-driven opportunities. It must also promote resilience and adaptation in rural communities and be grounded in scientific evidence.

In addition, solutions proposed by Congress and the Biden administration must be strongly bipartisan and accommodate the diverse needs of producers and landowners, regardless of size, geographic region or the commodity they grow.

"Throughout my lifetime of farming, I constantly have sought out ways to reduce my environmental impact — it is good for the environment, it is good for my farm and it is the right thing to do," said John Reifsteck, an Illinois grain farmer and chairman of the Growmark cooperative. He testified on behalf of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.

"I believe the timing is right for all industries, including agriculture, to come together

and find solutions that will sustain our way of life for generations to come," he said.

National Farmers Union member and Oklahoma farmer and rancher Clay Pope said the alliance sets a new, higher floor for federal policy discussions around agriculture and climate change and gives clear, farmer-backed direction to policymakers.

"Congress must heed these recommendations and quickly act upon them. America's family farmers and ranchers are already feeling the effects of climate change on their land — there is no time to waste," he said.

Stefanie Smallhouse, president of the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation and member of the American Farm Bureau board of directors, said climate policy cannot be one-size-fits-all.

"Just as I have highlighted the unique needs of Arizona's farmers and ranchers in the West, all regions of the U.S. can explain ways in which any given climate policy may or may not work for the landscape, industry and ecology present in that region," she said.

Cori Wittman Stitt, a member of Environmental Defense Fund's farmer advisory group and a partner in a diversified crop, cattle and timber operation in northern Idaho, said the potential for farmers, ranchers and forestland owners to contribute to the climate change solution is well-documented.

Work progresses at Field Fresh Foods facility

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Field Fresh Foods Inc. by late summer expects to start processing, packaging and shipping onions from its newly renovated facility in Nyssa, Ore.

The Los Angeles-based company for 20-plus years has been buying fall-harvested onions from the large southeastern Oregon-southwestern Idaho growing region.

Field Fresh targets greater efficiency and service capability when it finishes a major renovation at 418 Commercial Ave., company owner and President Emelio Castaneda said.

Extreme snow in 2016-17 substantially damaged the building, prompting the previous occupant, Golden West Produce, to vacate it. Golden West built a new facility in nearby Parma, Idaho.

Field Fresh has been improving and outfitting the building since last summer.

"We already know what works and doesn't work, and we are putting in significant



Field Fresh Foods

Carlos Castaneda, left, and Emelio Castaneda of Field Fresh Foods in the building under renovation in Nyssa, Ore.

financial investment in the building and facility," Castaneda said.

The project will cost about \$5 million including property acquisition and interior improvements, he said.

"We are a growing company, and we are taking steps to strengthen the company and strengthen the supply base," he said. "Customers are demanding these products and we are fulfilling these

needs."

Operationally, having L.A. and Nyssa facilities means Field Fresh can reduce transportation costs. The company formerly hauled whole onions to California, where processing removed about a quarter of the onion. The Nyssa facility enables the company to ship an all-usable product, and direct discarded material like peelings to local cattle-feed channels.

Field Fresh sells about 240 fruits and vegetables, some of which are further prepared. The 27-year-old company generates more than \$100 million in annual revenue.

The separate FFF Farms works with growers and supplies Field Fresh, which in the onion business is a year-round provider that pulls from the different growing regions seasonally.

"The operation here is located in the Treasure Valley because of proximity to the product," Castaneda said.

General Manager Carlos Castaneda, Emelio's brother, said FFF Farms will be able to grow further with the additional capacity Nyssa provides. The facility has about 50,000 square feet including office, production and climate-controlled storage.

"I would like to be operational by next harvest" if not earlier, he said.

Work includes building improvements, equipment setup and an upgrade to higher-voltage electricity. The staff of about 20 will increase to 40 to 45 as production begins.

Electric weed control research in Oregon will zap weeds to death

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — An Oregon State University researcher, in partnership with area hazelnut and blueberry growers, is testing a novel means of killing weeds — he's zapping them with high-voltage electricity.

Electric weed control is gaining traction in Europe and parts of the Midwest, but researchers say it's still a rare and emerging technology in the U.S. With support from a USDA grant, Marcelo Moretti, OSU assistant professor of horticulture, is starting experiments this month as part of a three-year project to evaluate the effectiveness of electric weed control in Oregon.

"I suspect growers will adopt this as an additional tool for weed control, especially for herbicide resistant



Marcelo Moretti

weeds," said Moretti. "I think this technology has a place for both organic and conventional growers."

Moretti said it's important to find more non-chemical tools to control herbicide resistant weeds.

"There are some situations we can't spray ourselves out of," he said.

Herbicide resistance develops when a field of weeds is sprayed year after year with a single herbicide. Weaker plants die, but some naturally strong weeds sur-

vive, reproduce and pass on their resistant traits to the next generations.

Moretti will be starting electric weed control trials this spring in two hazelnut orchards, where he says herbicide-resistant Italian ryegrass is a serious problem.

Moretti will also work with a blueberry grower to test the effectiveness of electric weed control on perennial weeds such as field bindweed, a member of the morning glory family.

He and his assistants will use an electric weed control device, called an EH30 Thor unit, manufactured by Zasso, an international brand.

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