

Chicken producers to build large-scale operations

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

Oregon will likely soon have two new large-scale chicken operations — one in the Scio-Jefferson area, the other in Aumsville.

Poultry producers contracted with Foster Farms plan to raise millions of broiler chickens at the operations. Proponents say the new sites will expand Northwest chicken production, meet demand for locally produced protein and boost profits for contracted poultry growers.

But some locals, including neighboring farmers, fear the mega-operations will damage good soil, ruin views, pollute water and air and hurt surrounding property values.

Christina Eastman, 56, a Scio resident, called the expansions an “abomination.”

Eric Simon, 51, a longtime poultry farmer, will run the Scio operation. Simon owns Ideal AG Supply, a dairy and poultry equipment company. In Brownsville, Ore., Simon has also been a contract grower for Foster Farms since 2000.

Simon, knowing Foster Farms has been looking to expand, said he hoped to enlarge his own contract with the company, but finding the right property wasn't easy because it needed to be large, relatively secluded and have



Courtesy of Eric Simon
Eric Simon, 51, a longtime Foster Farms contract poultry grower, will run the Scio operation. Simon says his operation will help meet demand for locally produced protein and boost the regional economy.

level ground, water rights and close proximity to Interstate 5.

Then a property at 37225 Jefferson-Scio Drive went up for sale.

“When we found this place, it was a diamond,” he said.

With Foster Farms' go-ahead, Simon recently purchased the property, where he plans to build 12 poultry houses, each 60-by-600-feet.

Robert Wheeldon, director of Linn County Planning and Building Department, said he approved Simon's building applications.

“These are going to be state-of-



Courtesy of Christina Eastman
Christina Eastman, 56, a Scio, Ore., resident from a multi-generational farming family, said she is concerned and “heartbroken” about the proposed Foster Farms expansion.

the-art facilities,” said Simon.

Simon also filed a Confined Animal Feeding Operation, or CAFO, application with Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Andrea Cantu-Schomus, ODA spokeswoman, said her agency received the application last August.

The permit would allow Simon to run 3.5 million birds annually — 580,000 birds per flock, six flocks per year. Simon said he'll probably raise closer to 540,000 birds per flock.

At full capacity, according to ODA, the operation would produce

about 4,500 tons of manure annually, to be sold as an organic soil amendment.

Simon said the manure will never be kept outside.

“We're following every rule, above and beyond,” he said.

The CAFO permit will go up for public review soon. Simon expects to start building in May or June.

The proposed site does not include a kill plant. Simon said his poultry will be processed in Kelso, Wash., and sold mostly in Northwest grocery stores.

Foster Farms did not respond to repeated requests for comment for this story.

Simon said the project will support his family, create five jobs and boost local tax revenue.

But his project is unpopular. Across Scio this spring, lawns are dotted with hundreds of signs: “No factory chicken farm in our community!”

Eastman, the Scio resident, formed a group called “Farmers against Foster Farms.”

Eastman is caretaker for her family's 300 acres of multi-generational farms, three of which are adjacent to the site.

She's worried about smells, sounds and pollution and said she's “heartbroken” a piece of fertile land will be lost to large-scale farming.

Simon, the poultry farmer, said, “We want to be good neighbors.”

According to people familiar with the matter, another contract grower for Foster Farms plans to build a large-scale operation near Aumsville at Porter Family Farm, a Century Farm homesteaded in 1848.

“I feel there are other places they could've chosen,” said Teresa Anderson, 55, who lives next to the proposed Aumsville site. “Just because it's lawful, doesn't mean it's the right thing to do.”

USDA reopens CFAP, provides additional aid

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — USDA on Wednesday announced it has a new plan — called Pandemic Assistance for Producers — to provide farmers with financial aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.

USDA had paused its Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, or CFAP, during the transfer of power between administrations.

The agency says it has completed a review of CFAP, identified gaps and issued the new plan. Previously existing programs, including CFAP, will now fall under the new initiative.

“Our new USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative will help get financial assistance to a broader set of producers, including to socially disadvantaged communities, small and medium-sized producers, and farmers and producers of less traditional crops,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a statement Wednesday.

The new plan has four parts: \$6 billion in new assistance programs, \$500 million for existing programs, additional payments under CFAP and \$2.5 million to help disadvantaged farmers.

New programs

Starting this spring, USDA will dedicate at least \$6 billion for the following:

- Dairy farmers through the Dairy Donation Program.
- Euthanized livestock and poultry.
- Biofuels.
- Specialty crops, beginning farmers and local, urban and organic farms.
- Costs for organic certification and conservation.
- Other expansion and corrections to CFAP.
- Timber harvesting and hauling.
- Personal Protective Equipment.
- Improving food supply chain resilience.
- Supporting food donation and distribution.
- Reducing food waste.

Existing programs

USDA will also invest \$500 million in several existing programs, including:

- \$100 million to Specialty Crop Block Grants.
- \$75 million for the Farmers Opportunities Training and Outreach program and the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement to help minority, veteran and beginning farmers.
- \$100 million to the Local Agricultural Marketing Program.
- \$75 million for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, aimed

at increasing fruit and vegetable purchasing by low-income consumers.

- \$20 million for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for disease prevention.

- \$20 million for the Agricultural Research Service to work with Texas A&M University on health and agriculture initiatives.

- \$28 million in grants to state departments of agriculture.

- \$80 million to domestic users of upland and extra-long staple cotton.

Increased CFAP payments

USDA will help the Farm Service Agency make payments according to mandated formulas under CFAP 1, 2 and AA. Several farm sectors can expect top-up payments. Changes include:

- An increase in CFAP 1 payment rates for cattle starting April 1.
- Additional payments for swine producers and contract growers.
- Additional CFAP assistance of \$20 per acre for producers of eligible crops including alfalfa, corn, cotton, hemp, peanuts, rice, sorghum, soybeans, sugar beets and wheat.
- Assistance with applications related to pullets and turfgrass sod, row crops, insurance indemnities and natural disasters.

Deadly virus confirmed in feral rabbits near Portland

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

MILWAUKIE, Ore. — Oregon wildlife and agriculture officials have confirmed the presence of a deadly virus in feral domestic rabbits in a Portland suburb, sparking concerns the disease could spread to wild rabbits.

On March 14, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife received a report that eight domestic or feral rabbits were found dead in Milwaukie.

Ryan Scholz, state veterinarian for the Oregon Department of Agriculture, was notified and had one of the rabbit carcasses delivered to Oregon State University for testing. Results came back positive for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 on March 24.

The disease does not pose a risk to humans, but is highly contagious among rabbits and can spread through contact with other infected animals or contaminated food and water, causing acute or sudden death.

“At this point, we are confident that all eight of the rabbits died from RHDV2, and

the virus has taken hold in the feral rabbit population,” Scholz said.

ODA and ODFW are asking the public to report any dead rabbits as the agencies track the virus. Officials will continue to test feral rabbits in the Milwaukie area.

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease was also recently discovered in two wild jackrabbits in Ada County, Idaho, southwest of the Boise Airport.

There is no treatment, cure or vaccine for the disease. Symptoms in rabbits may include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, lack of coordination, excitement or nervousness, difficulty breathing, congested membranes around the eyes or bloody, frothy nasal discharge at death.

To report dead rabbits in Oregon, call 1-800-347-7028 or visit www.oda.direct/RHD.

In Idaho, anyone encountering a dead wild rabbit is asked to leave the carcass in place and contact the state Department of Fish and Game at a regional office or by calling (208) 939-9171. Incidents can also be reported online at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/conservation/wildlife-health/add>.

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