



# ALL FOR ONE

## Farmers in three states pitch in to fund Northwest potato research

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

**O**THELLO, Wash. — On a recent April morning, high winds and blowing dust forced Washington State University researcher Mark Pavek and his team to delay planting this year's experimental potato crop.

Instead, they worked in the research shed at WSU's farm near Othello, hand-cutting seed potatoes to prepare to plant a crop that will ultimately help thousands of farmers across the Pacific Northwest.

Pavek is part of a unique research effort. Much of his work, and that of other Northwest potato researchers, is financed by the Pacific Northwest Research Consortium, which includes the potato commissions in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

The 9-year-old consortium just might be the future of funding for agricultural research — the region's farmers helping to finance researchers who work directly with them.

At stake is the Pacific Northwest's \$2 billion-a-year potato crop.

"We're going to solve problems for (growers) if they have problems that need solving, and they all do," Pavek said. "Every year, there's a new problem that comes up."



**Washington State University potato specialist Mark Pavek.**



**Matthew Weaver/Capital Press Andy Jensen, manager of the Northwest Potato Research Consortium**

### Bringing experts together

Using grower assessments, the three potato commissions contribute \$1.5 million through the consortium each year. They then decide which projects to fund and encourage cooperation among researchers at the region's three land-grant universities — Washington State, Oregon State and the University of Idaho.

The cooperative effort was needed, participants say.

"Over the course of the last few decades, the universities have gradually had fewer and fewer scientists working on each crop," said Andy Jensen, the consortium manager.

Each state might have had several experts in plant pathology, entomology or agronomy working on potatoes 40 years ago, he said. Gradually, they lost those faculty positions or decided not to fill them.

Through the consortium, experts around the region obtain funding for their research and work together, avoiding any duplication of efforts.

"We see what the other commissions are doing because we're all doing it together," Jensen said.

That cooperation also makes researchers'

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Getty Images

# Wolf population continues to rise in Oregon

## Latest population estimate documents 173 wolves statewide

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

**SALEM** — Oregon's gray wolf population continued to climb in 2020, with at least 173 individuals documented by year's end, according to state wildlife officials.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife released its annual Wolf Conservation and Management report April 21, which

includes a minimum known count based on verified evidence such as tracks, sightings and remote camera photographs.

The 2020 population is a 9.5% increase over the end of 2019, when ODFW recorded at least 158 wolves.

Wolves started returning to Oregon in 1999 following campaigns decades earlier to eradicate the species across the West. The Wenaha pack was the first to become re-established in the far northeast corner of Oregon in 2008, and the population has been slowly but steadily rising every year over the past decade.

"While northeast Oregon continues to host the majority of the state's wolf population, dispersal to other parts of Oregon and adjacent states continues," said Roblyn Brown, ODFW wolf program coordinator.

A total of 22 packs were also documented in 2020, the same number as in 2019. Of those, 17 qualified as breeding pairs, having an adult male and adult female with at least two pups that survived to Dec. 31.

Under the ODFW wolf plan, management is divided into eastern and western zones. In Eastern Oregon, wolves now fall under

Phase III of the plan, which means the population has reached at least seven breeding pairs for three consecutive years.

West of highways 395, 78 and 95, wolves are still under Phase I of the plan, and will not move into Phase II until there are four breeding pairs for three consecutive years.

The different phases determine how local wildlife biologists and ranchers may respond to wolves that habitually prey on livestock — a standard known as chronic depredation.



ODFW

*See Wolves, Page 9* **Oregon gray wolf**

## Report: Gebbers workers safer in farm housing than at home

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

Farmworkers in housing provided by Gebbers Farms were less likely to get COVID last summer than co-workers who lived in the community, according to testing by the Washington Health Department.

The Central Washington fruit company faces a \$2 million fine for allegedly breaking emergency rules and potentially exposing 2,700 foreign farmworkers it housed to the coronavirus.

The unpublished report, obtained by the Capital Press, concludes that orchard workers were actually safer in Gebbers housing than in private housing.

The difference, according to the report, could be explained by several factors, including "successful prevention efforts at the farmworker housing sites."

Gebbers came under scrutiny and criticism after two H-2A workers, a 37-year-old Mexican and 63-year-old Jamaican, died in July. Both died of COVID, according to the Department of Labor and Industries.

L&I excoriated Gebbers in a late December press release, reporting that an "anonymous caller" in July feared "hundreds" of workers at one camp had COVID.

According to the health report, 3,013 orchard workers were tested between late May and late August and 178 tested positive, or 6%. Among workers living in the community, 12% tested positive. Among workers in company housing, 4% tested positive.

Another 249 workers had symptoms but

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