



IN THE LOOP

How a pandemic ultimately benefited Hood River agritourism

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press
Wine glasses and bottles at Wy'East Vineyards with Mount Hood in the background.

HOOD RIVER, Ore. — It was a sunny spring afternoon. The parking lot at Draper Girls Country Farm was packed. Visitors were touring the Hood River Fruit Loop, one of Oregon's top agritourism destinations.

The Hood River Fruit Loop is named after the cluster of farms growing fruit trees and winegrapes between the Columbia River and majestic Mount Hood. About 30 farms selling fresh produce, flowers, ciders, wines and gourmet foods are part of the official Fruit Loop.

According to the Oregon Tourism Commission, visitors spend more than \$100 million annually in Hood River County, and staffers at the Visit Hood River organization estimate tourists spend as much as tens of millions of dollars on the Fruit Loop alone.

When COVID-19 struck last spring, it rattled agritourism ventures across the nation, including along the Fruit Loop. Events were can-



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Tammi Packer, right, cans Marionberry jam alongside her employees at Packer Orchards & Bakery.

celed. Couples postponed on-farm weddings. The number of foreign tourists nosedived.

Fruit Loop farmers say the lockdown pushed them to adapt at warp speed. Some created websites. Others started delivery services.

Several farmers invented new products. "We all really worked our tail ends off," said Tammi Packer, a farmer along the loop.

It worked. Although some businesses still suffered, especially wineries that were mandated to close tasting rooms, most Fruit Loop farmers say 2020 turned out to be a great year and expect 2021 to be even stronger. Consumer interest in buying direct-from-farm is growing, many say. And agritourism is on the rise.

When COVID came

Farms along the Hood River Fruit Loop have long relied on tourism traffic, so when the pandemic hit, many farmers were afraid a shutdown could destroy them.

For the first few months, the situation looked dismal.

One tourist who visited last April told the

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Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press
Irrigation systems on a farm near Mount Hood.

Klamath Project's A Canal will remain closed in 2021

Extreme drought conditions prompt decision by Bureau of Reclamation

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — For Klamath Project irrigators, 2021 will be as bleak as it gets.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced Wednesday it is shutting down the Project's A Canal for the entire season, mean-

ing farmers and ranchers will receive zero water supplies amid a crippling region-wide drought.

"We have closely monitored the water conditions in the area and the unfortunate deterioration of the forecasted hydrology," said Reclamation Deputy Commissioner Camille Calimlin Touton. "This has resulted

in the historic consequence of not being able to operate a majority of the Klamath Project this year."

The Bureau of Reclamation announced an initial water allocation of just 33,000 acre-feet for the Klamath Project in April — barely 8% of historical demand.

One month later, conditions have gone from bad to worse. Inflows to Upper Klamath Lake are 85,000 acre-feet below what was

reported April 1 following an exceptionally dry month.

The A Canal is the main artery delivering irrigation water from Upper Klamath Lake to 130,000 acres of farmland within the Klamath Project. Officials in April predicted the water would not start flowing until May 15 at the earliest.

Instead, the canal will be left dry through the summer, putting hundreds of family farms at risk.

In addition, the bureau

announced it would not provide "flushing flows" down the Klamath River to benefit endangered salmon. Flushing flows are intended to wash away a deadly fish-killing parasite known as C. shasta that thrives in low-flowing, warm water.

According to the latest water outlook report issued by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, nearly all reservoirs in the Klamath Basin are storing less than 50%

capacity. April precipitation was just 25% for the month, and basin streamflows are expected to run between 8% to 49% through the summer.

Nearly all of Southern Oregon and Northern California are in "severe" to "exceptional" drought.

Paul Simmons, executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association, struggled to find words when contacted Wednesday

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Animal cruelty initiative worrying Oregon farm groups

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

SALEM — Animal agriculture could soon be considered animal cruelty under a proposed ballot measure in Oregon.

Farm groups are pushing back against Initiative Petition 13, which would strip away most protections for livestock producers under the state's animal abuse laws.

The result would effectively criminalize everything from slaughtering livestock to basic animal husbandry, including branding and

dehorning cattle, castrating bulls and docking horses, sheep and pigs, said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of public policy for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

The initiative also seeks to re-classify livestock breeding and artificial insemination as sexual assault of an animal — a Class C felony.

"It's a very different tack than we have ever seen before," Cooper said. "Basically, they're looking to ban anything with animals that is not doctoring."

Initiative Petition 13 was filed

Nov. 2, 2020, with the Oregon Secretary of State's office. The chief petitioner is David Michelson, a Portland animal rights activist.

A similar proposal, called the Protect Animals from Unnecessary Suffering and Exploitation, or PAUSE, Act is also being pursued in Colorado.

The Oregon campaign recently cleared its first regulatory hurdle, submitting 1,000 sponsorship signatures for verification on April 28.

If approved, supporters will need

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Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
An initiative being circulated targets animal agriculture, hunting, rodeos and wildlife management, among other activities.

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