

Inslee signs slate of pesticide fee hikes

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee signed legislation Monday hiking fees on pesticide companies, dealers and applicators to raise about \$2.3 million a year for keeping records and preventing drift incidents.

Senate Bill 5317 received bipartisan support, as well as the backing of some farm groups. Requested by the state Department of Agriculture, the bill responds to a push by some legislators and farm groups to prevent pesticide drift.

The higher fees will allow the department and Washington State University to train and advise more farmers and farmworkers on spraying chemicals.

The department will hire four additional trainers, adding to an existing program. Also, for the first time, the department will have four employees looking for problems and offering help to farmers, department legislative liaison Kelly McClain said.

“Every intent is for them to provide technical assistance,” she said. “They’re not ticket writers.”

The fees will affect approximately 28,700 pesticide applicators and 14,500 pesticide products. The fees will take effect with 2022 licenses and registrations.

The cost of a one-year license for



Washington State Capitol

a commercial pesticide applicator will rise by 13% to \$243 from \$215. Pesticide dealers, pest control consultants and holders of lower-level pesticide licenses also will pay more.

Every pesticide applicator, regardless of classification, will pay an additional \$7 to support WSU’s training and education program.

The department originally proposed raising license fees by about 30%. Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, led an effort to hold increases below 15%.

“I wanted to whack it back and have some accountability,” Dent said Monday.

The department will form a group of pesticide applicators and others in the industry to talk about how the money is spent and whether fees need to be raised again.

Dent agreed the bill may relieve pressure to further regulate pesticides. “We have to educate people,” he

said. “You don’t want to spray anybody ever.”

The bill’s sponsor, Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, said the fees are needed, but turned into a sensitive subject. Cutting back the increases should make the new fees more palatable, she said.

“Anytime there’s a fee involved, it gets controversial, no matter what it’s for,” Warnick said.

The department collects more money from registering pesticide products than licensing applicators.

A two-year registration for a pesticide product will cost \$650, up from \$350.

The department projects collecting another \$1.88 million a year for registering products, while raising an additional \$257,355 through higher license fees. WSU anticipates collecting \$201,439 a year.

In all, the department plans to add the equivalent of 15 full-time employees.

Besides the trainers and field employees, the department will hire a toxicologist, a policy assistant, two outreach specialists and three people related to registering products.

The department plans to replace its aging database of license holders and registered products.

The fees are the pesticide program’s sole support. The fees were last raised in 2008.



Capital Press File

West Coast cherry growers and industry leaders say they aren’t too concerned about oversupply in 2021 because consumer demand for cherries appears to be strong.

Large Western U.S. cherry crop predicted for 2021

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**
Capital Press

Experts predict West Coast sweet cherry crops will be large this year.

California is expected to produce a crop nearly reaching the 2017 record level, and Pacific Northwest growers anticipate a crop about 1 million boxes higher than the 10-year average.

Some years, growers worry that an extra-large Western cherry crop could result in oversupply, driving down prices. But this year, many growers and industry leaders say they aren’t too concerned about oversupply because consumer demand for cherries appears to be strong.

“Demand for cherries the last few years has been outstanding,” said B.J. Thurlby, president of the Washington State Fruit Commission and Northwest Cherry Growers. “So, as always, we hope there is enough demand to keep both (California) and the (Northwest) from backing up. Right now, we think that both the domestic and export markets have the ability to absorb the Pacific Coast crop that we have on the trees.”

California farms in the southernmost growing regions started picking the first week of May.

“We’re looking forward to 2021 being an excellent year for California cherries in terms of both volume and quality,” Chris Zanobini, executive director of the California Cherry Advisory Board, told the Capital Press. Statewide, Zanobini said, the crop prediction is 9.47 million 18-pound boxes, near the record volume produced in 2017.

In the Pacific Northwest, harvest in early districts should begin by June 1.

Northwest Cherry Growers, based in Yakima, Wash., represents sweet cherry growers across Washington,

Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Montana. Washington produces about 85% of the crop across that five-state region.

This year, Northwest Cherry Growers is forecasting 23.8 million 20-pound boxes, about 1 million boxes more than the average of 22.8 million boxes.

That’s smaller than the 2017 record of 26.4 million boxes but substantially larger than last year’s light crop of 19.8 million boxes.

Despite strong crop estimates, cherry growers have faced many challenges this year.

Growers continue to wrestle with a group of viruses and pathogens collectively called “little cherry disease,” which leaves fruit bitter, small and underdeveloped. Northwest Cherry Growers estimated intervention measures to handle the disease reduced potential crop volume this year by about 2.5 to 3 million boxes.

Washington fruit trees also faced frost damage around April 10 during a cold snap. But overall, most growers say the bloom this spring was big enough to compensate for losses.

Another challenge this year was that COVID-19 slowed export markets. Thurlby of the cherry association predicts export volumes in 2021 will be about equal to those in 2020 — 28% to 30% of the overall crop.

But domestic demand is booming, partly driven by U.S. shoppers turning to fresh produce during the pandemic.

To push cherry sales this year, Northwest Cherry Growers will be running the largest marketing campaign in its history. The organization will focus on cherry health benefits.

“People already understand the benefits of things like blueberries,” said Pat Sullivan, a Tri-Cities area grower. “Now’s the time people start realizing cherries are not just a yummy summer fruit, but a good health food.”

Environmentalists target Idaho CAFO regulations

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Two environment groups want a federal appeals court to rule that Idaho’s Clean Water Act permit regulations for dairies and feedlots unlawfully fail to monitor for pollutants.

Food & Water Watch and Snake River Waterkeeper claim the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s statewide permit for “concentrated animal feeding operations” in Idaho violates the Clean Water Act.

“There’s no require-

ment in the permit for them to even look at identifiable discharge points,” said Tyler Lobdell, attorney for the nonprofits, during May 6 oral arguments before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The environmental groups claim that Idaho’s CAFO permit — which can apply to multiple operations — relies on inspections of manure lagoons and other structures but not direct monitoring of effluent, as legally required.

“Monitoring is not the inspection of a piece of equipment. Monitoring is in

regard to discharge,” Lobdell said.

The EPA should instead require CAFOs to implement measures such as testing for pollutants in tile drain runoff, or comparing pollutant levels upstream and downstream from regulated facilities, he said.

Otherwise, the agency doesn’t actually know whether the permit conditions are working, Lobdell said. “There’s no scientific basis for that conclusion.”

Congress intended for entities regulated under the Clean Water Act to actually gather compliance data, not

merely report violations, he said.

Reporting violations is insufficient, especially since dairies often rely on automated systems for wastewater, Lobdell said. “There will be no one there to discover the discharge.”

The EPA countered that it has broad discretion in implementing the Clean Water Act and isn’t required to continuously monitor effluent from CAFOs.

“The regulations don’t require the type of monitoring the petitioners claim,” said Ben Grillot, the government’s attorney.

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2021-2022 Budget Hearing

The Oregon Potato Commission will hold a public budget hearing at 8:15 am Wednesday, June 2, 2021 to approve the proposed 2021-2022 fiscal budget. Any person wishing to comment on the budget is welcome to do so either orally or in writing by noon May 28, 2021 by emailing gary@oregonspuds.com. A copy of the proposed budget is posted on www.Oregonspuds.com for public inspection and can be obtained by emailing gary@oregonspuds.com or leaving a message at 503-239-4763.

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