

Port bottlenecks pinch potato exports

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

U.S. potato exports have faced “a great deal of adversity” in the marketing year that started July 1, Potatoes USA said.

Spring 2020’s sharp decline in frozen product sales was followed by continued low demand in July-September, the marketing group reported.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased and markets adjusted, demand started to rebound in the fall.

Shipping issues then began to limit the ability of U.S. exporters to meet demand.

Potatoes USA said the

lack of containers, port congestion, delayed and canceled shipments, and costs have increased in 2021. These factors limited exports — and resulted in shortages of frozen, dehydrated and fresh potatoes in many markets — despite the return of demand.

Importers have begun to ration the limited supplies, prioritizing large restaurant and retail chains and established accounts.

“The pervasive and underlying issue for Oregon and Northwest potato exports, and really most U.S. food and agricultural exports, are the shipping vessel challenges that we are facing,” Oregon Potato Commission

Executive Director Gary Roth said.

Shipping containers arriving with import goods normally are unloaded and then sent to rural areas to be loaded with agricultural crops and products.

But recently, with lucrative freight rates on the imports combined with congestion and delays at U.S. ports, “these containers that have brought imported cargo are being sent back empty, and that has severely limited U.S. agricultural exports including potatoes,” he said.

“This issue has been going on for some time now,” Roth said. “It is approaching crisis proportions.”

Shipper consolidation is

also a factor.

Oregon is a major potato producer. Roth said about 80% of the state’s potatoes go to frozen processing. About one-third of the frozen, processed product grown and produced in the Columbia River Basin of Oregon and Washington is exported.

“When you no longer have the ability to ship a product to a customer who wants it, that can only be bad news for everyone on the supply side,” he said.

Idaho Potato Commission International Marketing Director Ross Johnson said the commission agrees bottlenecks at ports across the world are causing exports to slow dramatically.

He said demand for the state’s potatoes is at an all-time high, “which makes the West Coast port situation even more frustrating.”

Mexico’s supreme court recently allowed the import of U.S. fresh potatoes. Previously they were allowed only in a small area near the border.

“We anticipate that with the recent decision in Mexico, along with port authority hopes for the situation to sort itself out, the future for export volumes should rebound very strongly as we head into our new crop,” Johnson said.

IPC marketing efforts set the stage for strong demand in fresh, frozen and dehy-

drated categories, he said, and “as we look ahead to the future, we anticipate growth numbers to look even more impressive than the decline numbers we have seen due to supply-chain constraints.”

Potatoes USA said exports of frozen potato products for July 2020-March 2021 were down 10%. Exports in March 2021 were up 13% from March 2020.

U.S. exports of dehydrated potatoes were down 3% for the year and up 19% in March compared to a year ago.

Exports of fresh potatoes — chipping and table-stock — were even for the year but up 32% in March compared to a year ago.

Third attempt to ban Oregon coyote-hunting contests fails

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

An attempt to ban coyote-hunting contests in Oregon has failed for the third time after a key legislative committee didn’t take action on the bill.

House Bill 2728, which would have prohibited killing of coyotes in competitions for cash or prizes, passed by House 32-14 last month but has now died in the Senate Energy and Environment Committee.

The committee did not schedule a work session on HB 2728 by the May 14 deadline, the most recent cutoff date for keeping legislation alive.

Proponents of the bill argued that it would stop a cruel and counterproductive practice while still allowing ranchers to protect their livestock.

“It is past time we put an end this is vestige of a bygone era of non-fair chase wildlife management, said Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, referring to the “fair chase” ethical standard of hunting without unfair advantages.

Such coyote-killing contests are different than hunting competition or fishing derbies in which participants vie to obtain the largest ant-



USDA

A bill that would prohibit coyote-hunting contests in Oregon has failed for the third time.

lers or fish within bag limits, he said before the House floor vote.

Killing coyotes on a large scale also doesn’t result in meaningful population control of the predators, since they typically respond by accelerating reproduction, Witt said.

However, the bill wouldn’t limit hunting coyotes for this purpose, he said. “Problem animals or not, coyotes may still be

hunted or shot year-round, just not for contest money or prizes.”

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, said he disagrees with the characterization of coyote-hunting contests as wasteful slaughter.

The pelts are collected and used to raise money for good causes, while the average number of coyotes killed by a competitor is less than one, he said.

The contests also bring a

surge of tourism to remote parts of Oregon during the wintertime, Owens said.

While the science shows that contests aren’t a long-term way to reduce coyote populations, the competitions do serve an intermediate purpose due to their timing, he said.

“They allow the dispatch of some coyotes around calving grounds and are historically done when the cows begin to calve,” Owens said.

Court dismisses ranchers’ case against the USDA

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

A federal judge in Wyoming has dismissed an amended lawsuit filed by R-CALF USA and four ranchers that alleged the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act in its effort to mandate radio frequency identification ear tags on adult cattle entering into interstate commerce.

South Dakota ranchers Kenny and Roxy Fox and Wyoming ranchers Tracy and Donna Hunt were the other plaintiffs.

The court determined the documents provided by APHIS did not prove the agency unlawfully established and utilized two committees that helped it address technical and logistical issues necessary to implement a mandatory RFID system.

R-CALF contended those committees consisted of RFID manufacturers and other advocates and alleged they pursued the precise agenda dictated to them by APHIS.

Federal District Judge Nancy Freudenthal ruled APHIS did not form or select the membership of the Cattle Traceability Working Group and the Producer Traceability Council and did not exercise management or control over the operations of either

for the purposes of FACA.

The court also found APHIS was not a member of either group. It provided input but no funding to either group.

The amended lawsuit sought to prohibit APHIS from using the work product of the two committees should the agency proceed with future efforts to mandate RFID tags.

Unless the case is appealed, APHIS is free to use whatever work product it obtained from the committees should it start a future rulemaking process for RFID technology, according to the judge.

While R-CALF might have lost this battle, it has had success in the broader war over the RFID mandate, according to the organization’s leader.

Represented by the New Civil Liberties Alliance, R-CALF and the ranchers filed an initial complaint in October 2019 alleging APHIS’ pronouncement that it would mandate RFID by 2023 was unlawful. APHIS promptly withdrew its mandate.

In July 2020, APHIS issued a formal notice announcing it was reinstating its RFID mandate with a start date of January 2023. The New Civil Liberties Alliance, R-CALF and others filed comments in opposition to the notice arguing it was unlawful.

Trade Representative Tai hosts first USMCA meeting

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — This week, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai is hosting the first major talks on the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA.

Trade officials from the U.S., Mexico and Canada will discuss the deal near its one-year anniversary.

Agricultural trade between the countries is a key part of the USMCA, and the talks could have significant impacts for American farmers, trade experts say.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told the Capital Press earlier this spring both he and Tai have already had some individual conversations with trade leaders in Mexico and Canada. But this will be the first official USMCA meeting under the new administration.

U.S.-Mexico immigration and labor tensions, Mexican ag barriers, Canadian dairy markets and lumber trade agreements will be among the discussion topics.

Tensions between the U.S. and Mexico are expected over the issue of labor.

On May 12, the Biden administration filed its first

labor complaint with Mexico under the USMCA. The complaint alleged a labor violation at a General Motors plant in northern Mexico.

The next day, Mexico fired back, calling for an investigation of how Mexican migrant workers are treated in the U.S. at meat-packing plants and across agricultural industries.

Labor leaders and farm groups are watching to see how Tai — who has called herself a “worker-centered” trade negotiator — will handle the accusations and perceived labor rights violations.

Agricultural industry leaders are also watching for any possible shifts in Mexican trade barriers.

In recent months, Mexico’s president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, has imposed many commercial trade barriers on U.S. imports, hurting some American farmers.

Several pro-ag and business groups are calling for change.

“Mexico’s failure to adhere to the USMCA over the last nine months has threatened American jobs,” Brian Pomper, executive director of the Alliance for Trade Enforcement, a U.S. business coalition, said in

a statement. “It’s time for USTR to bring Mexico into full compliance with the agreement.”

Canadian dairy questions will also be on the table in this week’s discussions.

The U.S. dairy industry has long been trying to pry open Canada’s market to allow more milk, cheese and other dairy products from the U.S.

In public statements, the U.S. Dairy Export Council and National Milk Producers Federation have criticized Canada’s existing trade policies relating to dairy and urged a more open market.

It’s not yet clear what Tai will do. The USTR told the House Ways and Means Committee last week that she takes the Canadian dairy issue seriously but that she hopes to resolve the problem through discussions rather than litigation.

Timber and other natural resource industries are also watching this week’s talks. A bipartisan group of more than 90 U.S. House members, in a letter sent to Tai Monday morning, asked the trade representative to negotiate a new softwood lumber agreement with Canada.

The lawmakers wrote that a new agreement was needed because “lumber prices have skyrocketed more than 300% since last spring.”

Oregon hemp commission makes headway

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A proposal to create a commodity commission for hemp is making headway in Oregon after three earlier attempts failed to pass muster during previous legislative sessions.

House Bill 2284 would assess hemp farmers up to 1.5% of the crop’s value to raise money for promotions and research.

Because the crop was only recently legalized at the federal level through the 2018 Farm Bill, farmers have scant science-based information about the most effective growing methods, according to proponents.

Research would also delve into encouraging coexistence among different forms of cannabis, which is often grown for unseeded female flowers and is thus vulnerable to cross-pollination.

“We all know there is a lot of research the industry still needs,” said Courtney Moran, president of the Oregon Industrial Hemp Farmers Association.

“We see House Bill 2284 as an incredible opportunity for the Oregon hemp program, putting hemp on the same level playing field as other agricultural commodities in our state,” she said during a recent legislative hearing.

Oregon currently has 23 other commodity commissions for crop, livestock and fish products, which are overseen by the state’s Department



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

Proponents of a commodity commission for hemp are making headway with their fourth attempt in the Legislature.

of Agriculture.

Moran said the hemp industry is trying to obtain one-time federal funding, which would minimize the need for assessing farmers during the commission’s first operating year in 2022.

The original seven members of the hemp commission would be appointed by the ODA’s director, with a majority of them having grown the crop for at least three years.

These temporary members would then establish the rules for the commission, such as the number of permanent members and their geographic representation.

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery will decide on May 19 whether to refer HB 2284 for a vote on the Senate floor. The bill was unanimously passed by the House last month.

Hemp prices have steeply

fallen due to an oversupply of the crop intended for the CBD market, which has suffered due to uncertainty about how the compound will be regulated.

Cannabidiol, or CBD, is touted for its anti-inflammatory properties and other health benefits but the federal government hasn’t yet decided whether to approve it as a dietary supplement.

The extraction process for CBD has also run into federal limits on THC — the psychoactive substance in marijuana — that the hemp industry is challenging in court as unworkable.

These struggles indicate it’s probably the wrong time to create a commodity commission in Oregon, though the concept itself is sound, said Seth Crawford, a hemp seed breeder from Independence, Ore., in written testimony.

Commodity commissions are “much easier to establish than they are to disband, and I would hate to see Oregon farmers paying assessments to a commission without clear federal guidance established,” he said.

Though the hemp commission proposal hasn’t encountered much opposition in 2021, neither did earlier versions of the bill that ultimately failed.

The concept was first introduced and unanimously approved by a House committee in 2017 but died in the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which is the same fate that met a similar bill in 2019.