

Nonprofit helps Oregon farmers improve their energy efficiency

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

As Mindy and John Woody's flock of sheep grew, so did the couple's monthly pasture irrigation bill.

"The pumping was getting really costly," said John Woody.

So, the Woodys, who run goats, cattle, 100 lambs and 50 ewes in Douglas County, Ore., decided to explore options for producing their own energy. They wanted to install a small array of solar panels — less than an acre — to meet their farm's energy needs, but installation would be expensive, and grant applications looked "complex and convoluted."

"We found (USDA's Rural Development REAP program) and wanted to apply for it, but the grant application was daunting in

terms of amount of paperwork," said Woody.

Then the Woodys found Lake County Resources Initiative, or LCRI, a small, Lakeview-based nonprofit that helps farmers statewide with energy efficiency projects and grants.

With LCRI's guidance, the Woodys navigated the paperwork and received a \$23,615 REAP grant and other funding. The Woodys turned on their new solar energy system for the first time Aug. 20.

"I don't think it would've been possible without LCRI," said Woody.

Several farmers who have received help from LCRI say the nonprofit is an under-appreciated and important service for Oregon farmers.

The work of improving rural energy efficiency "has never been more important" than at this time when rural energy bills are so high, said

Hannah Mullin, in public relations for LCRI.

According to a joint report from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy and Energy Efficiency for All, rural households pay about 40% more on energy bills than their metropolitan counterparts.

Nick Johnson, executive director for LCRI, said the nonprofit's work is also important as farmers seek to make irrigation efficiency improvements during drought.

Over the past decade, the nonprofit has served hundreds of Oregon farms. According to Johnson, projects have included solar array installations, irrigation system improvements, fitting of more energy-efficient lighting systems and equipment upgrades.

LCRI offers several services, some only to specific

counties, others statewide.

Farmers whose businesses are located in Lakeview are eligible for cash incentives through Energy Trust of Oregon, with guidance from LCRI.

Farmers across the entire state can receive project assistance from LCRI with USDA Rural Energy for America Program, or REAP, grants. LCRI offers consulting, advice, grant-writing support and helps connect producers with contractors.

LCRI also helps farmers statewide apply for additional incentive programs, including REAP.

Farmers in four counties — Lake, Klamath, Harney and Modoc — are eligible for an additional service: agricultural energy assessments, or energy audits. During an assessment, experts tour a farm, looking for ways farmers can cut costs.



U.S. Air Force

A formation of F-15C Eagle and F-15E Strike Eagle jets from the 366th Fighter Wing, Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

Ranchers warily view plan to revise Air Force training ranges

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Proposed changes to Air Force training ranges in remote parts of Idaho and Nevada could impact ranchers in the area.

The plan to fly F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jets lower and faster than the speed of sound is a major component of the Air Force Airspace Optimization for Readiness proposal for the Mountain Home base in Idaho.

The Air Force recently extended the 45-day public comment period on its Draft Environmental Impact Statement through Sept. 22.

Rancher Gus Brackett of the 71 Livestock Association said the extent the ranches' day-to-day operations and the cattle are affected remains to be seen.

However, "it seems like when it comes to mitigating environmental concerns, the ranchers will bear the brunt of whatever mitigation is necessary," he said. The group plans to comment on the proposal.

The approximately 40-member 71 Livestock was founded in 1917 to help in rangeland adjudication. Named after a founder's cattle brand, it represents ranchers in an area generally bordered by the Snake River to the north, the Jarbidge mountains and wilderness area to the south, Salmon Falls Creek to the east and the Bruneau River to the west.

The proposal's potential impact on Jarbidge and

Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness areas and on sage grouse habitat are major concerns, Brackett said.

"The land our organization encompasses is some of the best sage grouse habitat remaining," he said.

While the plan's impact on the grouse population is unknown, "if the population declines, the only way they can mitigate for that decline is to remove cattle from the range," Brackett said.

That's easier than controlling predators, for example, he said.

Brackett is a principal in Brackett Ranches, in the Flat Creek-Three Creek area about 80 miles southwest of Twin Falls. The Juniper Butte Training Range is closest to the ranch while the Saylor Creek Bombing Range is farthest.

The proposal excludes ranches and homes in the Three Creek area.

"The impact is not the jet flight," Brackett said. "It's the sonic boom."

"You could make the case cattle would be less calm," he said.

The Air Force in its plan said it aims to establish consistent low-altitude and supersonic training floors across the six areas Mountain Home AFB fighters use.

The Air Force said Paradise North, Paradise South, Owyhee South and Jarbidge South aren't adequate due to their medium-altitude floors and high supersonic floors, "which make it impossible to train at lower altitudes in the manner that real-world threats require."

Idaho almonds fare decently in challenging year

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Yields in a southwest Idaho almond trial won't be down as much as a University of Idaho pomologist feared.

Essie Fallahi, of the UI's Parma Research and Extension Center, expects overall yields to be down 10-20% from the long-term average, depending on variety.

This year's crop contended with early-April frosts — as almonds were in full bloom — and poor pollination conditions.

UI's almond trial is in its seventh year. The full-orchard study on irrigated ground involves 16 varieties — a mix of early, medium and late maturities selected in part for their cold tolerance.

Fallahi said the cur-



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

Keevan MacKenzie and Kelly Moylan shake-harvest an early almond variety Aug. 26 at the University of Idaho Parma Research and Extension Center.

rent trial has shown a year with good growing conditions produces almond yields about the same as those seen in California.

In a year when frost is severe and untimely in Idaho, "we can expect a reduced yield in all the stone fruits,

including almond," he said.

Southwest Idaho almonds are challenged by the potential of frost at bloom time, "the same challenge as peaches," he said. "We can use peaches as a point of reference, mainly because both bloom at the same time and



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

University of Idaho pomologist Essie Fallahi shows almonds at UI's Parma Research and Extension Center on Aug. 26.

both are from the *Prunus* genus."

California Almond Board officials visited in August. In Idaho, lower land and other costs have the potential to make up for reduced yields in a challenging year, Fallahi said.

Irrigation infrastructure is another plus.

Idaho wolf-caused depredations down during most recent quarter

The number of Idaho livestock depredations confirmed as wolf-caused dropped in the most recent quarter, though the number of investigations increased, USDA Wildlife Services told the state Wolf Depredation Control Board Aug. 31.

Wildlife Services, which the board pays to investigate livestock depredations and conduct control actions, investigated 44 depredations from April 1 to June 30, State Director Jared Hedelius said.

It confirmed 18 as wolf-caused. Additionally, seven were listed as probable, 15 as possible or unknown and four as caused by predators other than wolves.

He said the 44 investigations involved six cows

confirmed as killed and one injured, five calves killed and four injured, and 17 sheep and a herding dog killed.

Wildlife Services removed 13 wolves for livestock protection and put radio collars on two.

In the year-earlier period, Wildlife Services investigated 31 depredations and confirmed 24 to be wolf-caused. Twenty-five wolves were removed and four were collared.

In the state's fiscal year that started July 1, Wildlife Services conducted 187 depredation investigations and confirmed 108 as wolf-caused, Hedelius said.

A year earlier, 102 of the 205 depredations investigated were confirmed as caused by wolves.

The number of reported depredations and confirmations can vary widely, he told Capital Press.

Idaho Wolf Depredation Control Board member Richard Savage, a Clark County rancher, said weather variations can influence totals between reporting periods. Other potential factors include control actions, hunting and trapping, and movement of wolves, livestock and ungulates, he said.

The board is funded by the livestock industry, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Legislature's General Fund, which is sourced by income and sales tax primarily. IDFG does not receive General Fund money.

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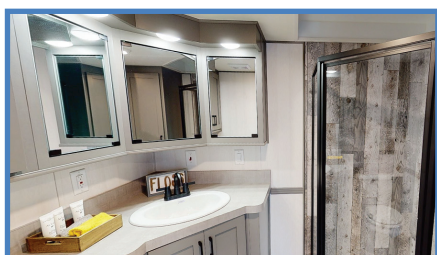
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