

# Counties' predator control tax running out of time

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — Livestock owners in Douglas and Coos counties are hopeful the predator control district tax bill will be reintroduced in the Oregon Legislature next year.

The tax program has been a voluntary method for landowners to support predator control for the past five years in the two southwestern Oregon counties by paying up to \$1 per acre. The program was also being considered by a couple other Oregon counties.

But the program was not re-approved by the state Legislature in June. Its last day will be Dec. 31, 2021.

Wildlife Services also receives funds from the counties, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Department of Agriculture and the USDA. But funding from some of those sources has been decreasing.

Ron Hjort, an Oakland, Ore., area sheep and cattle rancher, is optimistic if the predator control district tax bill is reintroduced it would pass both the House and Senate if there are no added conditions. The bill was held up most recently in the Senate Rules Committee as it was tied to a bill banning coyote hunting contests in Eastern Oregon and to a bill that would give the state Department of Fish and Wildlife the ability to



Mark Dowdy



Courtesy of Wildlife Services

**Mark Dowdy checks a spot in a fence line where coyotes were entering a livestock pasture despite branches blocking the opening. After 20 years of working as a Wildlife Services specialist, Dowdy retired at the end of July because of the program's funding issues.**

regulate predator management. Eventually, none of the three bills moved forward or were revived.

"I don't see why anybody would be against a tax that is voluntary and is not out of the general fund, but from those involved themselves," Hjort said.

Jim Carr, chairman of the Coos County Predator Damage Control District Advisory Committee, said the program was working in Coos County.

"We're not using public funds," he said prior to the bill going to the legislature earlier this year. "It's a landowner self-assessment."

The Coos County assessment total has been about \$85,000 a year. Most of that money comes from large timber holdings because bear damage to trees in the Coast Range is a major problem.

In Douglas County, the assess-

ment total has been about \$35,000 annually. Most of that money has come from livestock owners with small acreages while timber owners haven't contributed as much because they haven't experienced as many bear issues.

Mark Dowdy, a 20-year Wildlife Services specialist in Douglas County and one of two specialists in the county, retired at the end of July because of the funding uncertainty. There is funding for two specialists in Douglas County through June of next year. Beyond that month, funding sources are questionable or unknown at this time.

Dowdy believes livestock and their protection play important roles in providing safety for the public.

"A whole lot of people don't understand the importance of agri-

culture in this county," Dowdy explained. "Without predator control, sheep operations are likely to end entirely or they won't be able to run their sheep out as far. Then predators will work on calves and goats and those people will feel the pain. With deer numbers down and less predator control, those predators will be right here in town looking for dogs and cats."

"Ranches and farms with their livestock are providing a buffer for towns," he added. "It's always been a struggle to communicate that."

With predator damage being a key reason, the number of sheep in Douglas County has decreased to about 24,000 head from 125,000 back in the 1960s and 1970s. Cattle, which are a little better at holding off predators, have increased to about 61,000 head in the county.

As a Wildlife Services specialist, Dowdy has helped to protect the local livestock industry by taking an estimated 2,000 coyotes and a couple hundred cougars during the past 20 years. By figuring half of those coyotes as females and the average litter size being six, he said the coyote population would explode with no Wildlife Services program, or a diminished one. With cougar litters averaging three, he said their populations would slowly grow with no predator control.

"Even though it's been my job to control coyotes, I absolutely respect them," Dowdy said. "They're the smartest animal out there. For me, the most challenging wildlife was always the coyote."

# Wheat crop insurance harvest prices announced

Agency will not adjust early August prices higher

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

The USDA Risk Management Agency has announced the crop insurance harvest prices for wheat. The agency will use a price of \$9.86 per bushel for winter wheat and \$9.21 per bushel for spring wheat.

Earlier in August, some Washington farmers expressed concern over the prices USDA used to determine crop insurance.

Farmers and grain merchandisers said the Portland soft white wheat export bid price range is too wide, and questioned whether the lower end of the range accurately reflected market value.

Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, said she's hearing from some Walla Walla County farmers who still feel that pricing issues during the Aug. 2-11 period may have kept the final harvest price 25 cents lower than it should be.

WAWG is working with RMA to investigate the pricing calculation during that period and prevent something similar from happening in the future, Hennings said. The organization will also work with the agency to address price discovery in future farm bills.

The agency published Frequently Asked Questions in response to grower concerns.

The winter wheat harvest price is calculated from daily prices during August, according to the agency.

Only bids from participating elevators that export soft white wheat to other countries are captured and reported by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. Bids from other elevators are not included, and the harvest prices issued by RMA are not designed to reflect local prices at any particular elevator. Factors that impact prices at a local elevator can include its location, which can determine how far an elevator may need to ship grain to end-users or export elevators; whether that's by train, rail or barge; and unique growing conditions that affect production and quality.

"It is important to use a price for crop insurance that is designed to be reflective of the market as a whole, and not any single local elevator," the agency states.

In accordance with the crop policy, RMA will use the values reported by the Agricultural Marketing Service and will not adjust higher the prices reported by AMS in early August, according to the agency.

No further action is planned, said Ben Thiel, director for the agency office in Spokane, which serves Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Alaska.

Crop insurance is vital for farmers, Hennings said. "It's important that it's funded at the national level because of years like this," Hennings said.

Farmers this year face a double whammy of drought that has reduced yields and raised the protein levels in some varieties, prompting elevators to pay less. For many farmers, the result is less wheat to sell at lower prices.

WAWG is looking to include high-protein wheat in a national disaster ad-hoc program, Hennings said.

# Food insecurity fell since 2020, but still higher than pre-pandemic

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press

Thirty-eight million Americans lived in food-insecure households last year, a 9% increase over the 2019 level of 35 million, according to the USDA.

About 7.5% of U.S. households with children — 3 million families — didn't always have adequate, nutritious food for their kids last year. That's up 6.5% compared to 2019, the agency found.

"Food insecurity" is measured as not having enough food over a seven-day period.

Prior to Wednesday's report, COVID-19's impact on food insecurity had only been measured anecdotally



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

**Susan Blachnik, manager at the Creswell, Ore., Food Pantry, picks up a box to put in a car truck in 2020.**

and in smaller samples. This is the first complete federal data available formally documenting the full extent of hunger and food hardship.

"While hunger was already a massive, systemic problem in all 50 states before COVID-19 hit the U.S., domestic hunger surged during

the pandemic," said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, a nonprofit that tracks and addresses hunger in the U.S.

In the midst of the crisis, USDA's domestic food aid spending also reached a historic high of \$122.1 billion in 2020 — a spending rate of \$232,305 per minute. Aid programs, funded by relief packages, included the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

The good news, however, is that food insecurity has trended downward since the peak of the pandemic.

Food insecurity nationwide fell nearly 30% between spring 2020 and spring 2021, according to data from the Urban Institute, a think tank.

The institute, based on

its survey, attributed the drop in food insecurity to an improved employment rate, a temporary 15% increase in the maximum benefit for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the introduction of new food donation programs, larger unemployment benefits and government relief payouts.

But food insecurity levels are still higher than pre-pandemic levels, studies show. A recent survey by Feeding America, a nonprofit, found that while 2021 hunger levels are lower than 2020's levels, more than half of food banks reported increasing or steady demand this summer.

USDA and groups such as Farmers Ending Hunger continue to work to combat food insecurity.

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