

## China tariff hike scrambles hazelnut outlook

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

A tariff hike on hazelnuts recently imposed by China is expected to reduce the bonuses Oregon farmers will receive for last year's crop.

Growers have already received 80-90 cents per pound for hazelnuts they harvested last year, but are expecting additional payments based on the industry's final sales results.

"We need to understand where this market is headed before that can happen," said Terry Ross, executive director of the Hazelnut Growers Bargaining Association.

The new 35% Chinese tariff on hazelnuts, which became effective at the beginning of the year, has scrambled expectations for exports to that country.

Bonuses will still be paid for last year's crop but the outlook isn't as positive as it once was, he said. "It will be good, just not as good as we hoped."

Hazelnut buyers in China may seek to change contract terms due to the new tariff, which effec-



Courtesy of Tim Aman

**Wooden totes are filled with hazelnuts harvested in 2021 at Aman Bros. LLC in Mt. Angel, Ore.**

tively increased their price by 35 cents or more per pound, Ross said.

"They can actually renegotiate prices on what's been delivered," he said Jan. 20 during the Nut Growers Society's annual meeting in Grand Ronde, Ore.

Normally, processors could simply send shipments back from China and process the in-shell crop for kernels.

However, lower kernel prices in Turkey, the predominant global hazelnut producer, and congestion in the shipping industry have precluded that possibility.

"There's no way I can afford to bring that container back," said Larry George, president of the George Packing Co.

Retailer tariffs and taxes of 81% were significantly decreased under waivers that China granted under the phase one trade deal struck in 2020, he said.

The exact tariff rate depended on the waiver, but the reductions were substantial, George said.

At the beginning of January, though, China suddenly slapped another 35% tariff on top of those rates.

"Immediately, it just created chaos in the mar-

ket," he said.

The tariff increase likely pertains to broader trade posturing and political discussions between the U.S. and China, but "Oregon got hardest hit by it," George said, adding that it's possible that by April, China will again impose the full 81% in tariffs and taxes.

"There's a message being sent with these tariff increases," he said.

Farmers who produce in-shell varieties for the Chinese market, such as the Barcelona and Jefferson cultivars, will be the most hurt by the tariff, George said.

"It will affect growers of certain varieties more than growers of other varieties," he said.

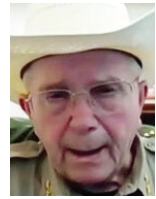
Fortunately, China consumes only about 20-25% of Oregon's hazelnut crop, down from roughly 60% at times in the past, George said.

"We're considerably less dependent on the Chinese market than we were a decade ago," he said.

However, the new Chinese tariff isn't the only problem faced by the hazelnut industry.

## Senate panel OKs bill to stop sheriff's cougar pursuits

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press



**Sheriff Bob Songer**

Two Republicans took a neutral position on the legislation. Sunnyside Republican Jim Honeyford was the only no vote.

Honeyford, whose district borders Klickitat County, said he had more confidence in the sheriff than Fish and Wildlife.

"I know Bob Songer. I know he is interested in protecting his citizens," Honeyford said.

Fish and Wildlife testified earlier in the week in favor of the bill. Southwest Regional Director Kessina Lee said that state wildlife officers who respond to cougar calls educate landowners about co-existing with cougars.

Lee said the sheriff office sees every cougar as dangerous.

Songer said his office has never stopped state wildlife managers from working with landowners. He said his program targets only cougars that are a threat to people, livestock and pets.

"We do not hunt cougars willy-nilly," he said.

The Klickitat County Sheriff's Office has removed 27 cougars since starting the program, according to figures compiled by Fish and Wildlife. State wildlife managers have said they were killing cougars at about the same rate in Klickitat County before Songer enlisted his own hound handlers.

SB 5613 was sent to the Senate Rules Committee, which votes on which bills to bring to the Senate floor. If passed by the Senate, the bill would likely be referred to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

OLYMPIA — A bill to stop Klickitat County Sheriff Bob Songer from deputizing hound handlers to chase and kill cougars passed the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on Jan. 20.

The committee amended the bill to allow sheriffs to use dogs to pursue and kill cougars, but only with permission from the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Songer said Jan. 21 in an interview that he still opposed the legislation.

"I don't agree with the 'Mother, may I?' approach," he said.

Songer announced in 2019 that his office would take the lead in answering cougar calls in his rural south-central Washington county.

Songer said cougars were prowling in populated areas and that having county-deputized hound handlers would ensure a speedy response. The program, the only one of its kind in the state, has angered wildlife advocates and irritated Fish and Wildlife.

Senate Bill 5613 originally sought to prohibit sheriffs from pursuing cougars with dogs. The amended bill would at least hold open the possibility that sheriffs could get permission from Fish and Wildlife managers.

Songer said he doesn't have to answer to a state department to protect public safety.

"The sheriff is the top law enforcement officer in the county," he said. "I've made it very clear to the top brass at the wildlife department that this was our policy."

The committee voted 4-1 to recommend the full Senate pass the bill. The committee's four Democrats voted yes.

## Port of Morrow Executive Director Ryan Neal dies

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

BOARDMAN, Ore. — Ryan Neal, executive director of the Port of Morrow in northeast Oregon, has died.

Neal, 40, was sick with COVID-19 and suffered a heart attack while at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland on Jan. 17, according to sources.

"It's a tough loss for the community, for his family and really for the region as a whole," said Don Russell, a Morrow County commissioner and longtime family friend. "He's going to be hard to replace."

Russell described Neal as "a brilliant guy," who cared deeply about Eastern Oregon and his hometown of Boardman.

He took charge of the Port of Morrow — Oregon's second-largest port district — in 2018, following in the footsteps of his father, Gary Neal, who was the port's director for 30 years before retiring.

The port operates several industrial parks in Morrow County, including the Boardman Industrial Park along the Columbia River. It includes major food processing companies such as Lamb Weston, Tillamook Cheese, Oregon Potato Co. and Boardman Foods.

According to the port, its businesses provided 8,452 permanent jobs and \$2.77 billion in total economic output in 2017. Morrow County boasts the third-highest average wage in the state, due in large part to economic development at the port, Russell said.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said Neal was "a strong advocate for ports throughout the United States, and his work in economic

development at the Port of Morrow has made our economy stronger in Eastern Oregon."

"Ryan has left a legacy of hard work, professionalism and goodwill throughout our region and will be missed by all of us," Smith said.

Lisa Mittelsdorf, the port's economic development director, said port commissioners will meet to discuss filling Neal's position.

Marv Padberg, vice president of the port commission, said everyone at the port is adjusting to the news of Neal's death.

"We lost a key member of our port family," Padberg said. "His loss leaves a big hole. It won't be easy."

Rick Stokoe, president of the port commission and

Boardman police chief, said he admired Neal's dedication to the region and port industries.

"I know this will be a huge loss," Stokoe said. "My heart goes out to the Neal family."

Neal graduated from Oregon State University in 2004 with a degree in business management. He began his management career with Knight Transportation in 2006 as operations manager for the national trucking company, and was promoted to regional sales manager in 2011.

In 2012, Neal was hired as director of operations for Haney Truck Line LLC in Yakima, Wash., managing day-to-day operations for staff and a fleet of more than

400 trucks.

Neal spent two years at Marten Transport as an area sales director before returning to Boardman with the Port of Morrow. He took over as general manager of the port's freezer warehouse in 2016, where food processors store frozen vegetables before shipping them to stores.

The port's board of directors hired Neal as executive director from a pool of 33 applicants.

"He really wanted to move back to this area after he went to college," Russell said. "He was trying to make a difference in his community."

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