



PULLING UP STAKES

Why some farmers are leaving the West Coast



Courtesy of Crystal Otley

The Otley family. Left to right are Sierra, Crystal, Shane and Jacee.

‘THE STATE IS GOING IN A DIRECTION WHERE IT’S HARD TO DO BUSINESS HERE. IT JUST ADDS ANOTHER THORN IN THE BUCKET.’ — Shane Otley

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

Pressure was building: The cost of doing business was escalating, each year brought new regulations and groundwater supplies in Eastern Oregon’s Harney County were steeply declining, prompting agencies to move toward limits on well-drilling.

Shane and Crystal Otley, who raise cattle and hay near the town of Burns, said ranching in Oregon has become more and more difficult.

“The state is going in a direction where it’s hard to do business here,” said Shane Otley, 46.

This winter, the Otleys were also eyeing House Bill 4002, a proposal in the Oregon Legislature to end the agricultural overtime exemption. Shane Otley testified against the bill, estimating it would increase his business costs by 38%. The bill passed the House and Senate and awaits the governor’s signature.

“It just adds another thorn in the bucket,” said Otley.

Shane and Crystal have long considered moving to another state, but until recently, it’s just been talk.

Now, the Otleys are selling their ranch.

The family received an offer and expect to close the deal April 15. Meanwhile, they’ve been visiting other states, looking for the right place to start fresh.

Shane Otley said leaving won’t be easy. He’s a fourth-generation farmer with Oregon roots. But he said he wants to keep his business alive and give his daughters their best chance at pursuing farming somewhere with lower costs and tax burdens.

The Otleys aren’t the only farmers leaving the West Coast. Farmers fed up with the regulatory climate in California, Oregon and Washington have for years threatened to move away.

But is that actually happening? Yes and no.

No, farm experts say there does not appear to be a mass exodus of farmers leaving the West Coast states. Calling it that would be hyperbole.

But yes, farmers are trickling out, and industry leaders say it’s been happening more during the past few years.

There’s no single reason. Farmers cite a constellation of motivations for moving: seeking less crowded places, political concerns, COVID protocols, estate taxes, regulations and associated costs, opportunities for expansion, “climate migrants” fleeing drought and farmers seeking more secure water supplies.

The common thread is that farmers are moving to places where they believe their businesses, and families, can better thrive.

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USGS to study water priorities for Willamette Basin

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — The U.S. Geological Survey is embarking on a study to better understand water supply and demand in the Willamette Basin.

The study is part of a larger effort by the USGS to assess water availability and infrastructure nationwide in response to climate change, population growth and other challenges.

To identify gaps in water availability, the agency is undertaking a series of 10 Integrated Water Science studies in basins across the country, meeting with stakeholders and mon-

itoring interactions among climate, human consumption and hydrology.

The Willamette Basin was selected as the fourth IWS study area, following the Delaware, Upper Colorado and Illinois river basins.

Tanya Trujillo, the Interior Department’s assistant secretary for water and science, said in a statement the Willamette Basin supports major cities, fertile agriculture and ecologically important species such as salmon, “making it an ideal location to develop better science for future decisions that will affect both the environment and people of the region.”

Nestled between the Oregon

Coast and Cascade mountain ranges, the Willamette Valley spans 150 miles north to south and 60 miles east to west. It is home to two-thirds of the state’s population, including the Portland metro area, and \$2.3 billion worth of agricultural production.

The basin was chosen “because its hydrologic and environmental setting is representative of the challenges faced by conflicting water demands between humans and ecosystems — particularly salmon — throughout the entire Pacific Northwest,” according to the USGS.

Integrated Water Science studies



Capital Press File

The Willamette River flows past downtown Portland.

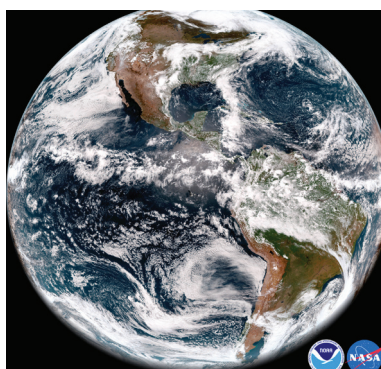
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La Nina hangs on, expected to stick through summer

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The reigning La Nina has more staying power than expected and likely will stay through the spring and into the summer, influencing U.S. temperatures and precipitation for the upcoming months, the National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center says.

The Pacific Ocean cooled in early March, strengthening a La Nina that formed last summer and had been expected to fade in the spring. Compared to a month



ago, chances are nearly double that the La Nina will still prevail in June, July and August, accord-

ing to the climate center.

While a La Nina can worsen drought in the southern tier of the U.S., it’s linked to cool and wet weather in the Northwest.

Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond said the continuing La Nina could help the snowpack have a spring resurgence. The statewide snowpack has been dropping this month and was down to 85% of average on March 11.

“Our mountains should do pretty well,” Bond said. “I wouldn’t be surprised that in a month people, not necessarily in agriculture, are

grousing that the spring is really cold and wet.”

In February, the climate center gave the La Nina a 27% chance of persisting through the summer. Now, the center rates the chances at 53%.

Bond said a La Nina has more effect on Washington winters than summers.

“By the time you get to summer, there are some impacts, but they are weaker,” he said. “I’m not sure it’s going to be that big of a deal.”

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