

Potato processors agree to pay more to Idaho growers

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

French fry processors will pay Idaho potato growers about 20% more this year, but farmers worry that may not be enough to offset the rising price of inputs such as fertilizer.

The Southern Idaho Potato Cooperative each year negotiates separately with processors Lamb Weston, McCain Foods and J.R. Simplot Co. on behalf of member growers. The effort impacts other players, such as dehydrators who also contract for potato acreage.

Ron Jones, the cooperative's negotiator, said April 25 that it had certified agreements with Lamb and McCain. It has not certified an agreement with Simplot.

Contract details were not released. The number of acres grown is not part of the negotiations; processors make arrangements with individual growers for the volume to be contracted.

"The increased price for potatoes may not be enough to offset the increase in input costs," Jones said. "In particular, fertilizer costs have increased dramatically."

Labor, repair and other costs also rose, as did open-market prices for potatoes and processors' internal costs. Last summer's heat-wave reduced yields and quality around the West.

The contract price for the 2021 crop decreased slightly from 2020 as the industry dealt with COVID-19 uncertainties. Input costs also rose between 2020 and 2021.

Jones said this year's 20% increase in price per hundredweight of processing potatoes is "an approximation. Some growers with some varieties would be paid more, and others would see a lesser increase."

For example, a processor may pay a higher percentage

increase for a variety that is more difficult to grow or is produced in eastern Idaho, where a shorter growing season can reduce yield, he said.

Idaho grows about one-third of U.S. potatoes and is the country's top producer. More than half the state's 300,000-plus acres of potatoes are for processing. Washington ranks second in total acres, but 90% of its crop is for processing.

Jones said year-to-year contract price increases are similar in Idaho and Washington, where negotiations began last summer and concluded in October.

Dale Lathim, Potato Growers of Washington executive director, said that state's price increase "set the bar for the rest of the groups in North America to target for their negotiations."

"The 20% price increase sounds like it's very large and it is, but grower costs are going up that much or more," Lathim said. "This will keep some growers at par to where they have been economically, but many growers that don't have a lot of buying power or have to lease their land will be definitely taking a hit on the profitability of their potato contracts."

"This does not make everybody happy," Jones said of the Idaho contract. "Growers in different locations have different costs."

For example, many eastern Idaho growers use more fertilizer and less manure, but have lower rents, he said. Growers in the west may need to fumigate.

Lamb Weston in its last two quarterly earnings reports mentioned higher potato costs, resulting from the lower 2021 Northwest harvest, among challenges. Its April 7 report said the company had secured enough raw potatoes to meet near-term production needs.

Conservancy purchases Oregon ranch, plans 'climate preserve'

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

BEND, Ore. — A California-based nonprofit has acquired the 30,000-acre Cherry Creek Ranch in Central Oregon and plans to establish the organization's first "climate preserve," dedicated to mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The Wildlands Conservancy bought the former cattle ranch northeast of Bend for \$16.5 million, or \$550 per acre. Part of the funding was provided by the Center for Biological Diversity, which is also partnering on a revamped vision for the property.

All land management decisions at the newly christened Enchanted Rocks Preserve will be made in favor of creating a climate-resilient landscape, said Frazier Haney, the conservancy's executive director. That includes halting the removal of juniper trees that sequester atmospheric carbon, and eliminating diversions previously used for flood irrigation along Cherry Creek to provide more water in-stream for fish and wildlife.



Jack Thompson/The Wildlands Conservancy

The Wildlands Conservancy has partnered with the Center for Biological Diversity to purchase the 30,000-acre Enchanted Rocks Preserve in Central Oregon for conservation.

"We have moved off all the cattle, and are in the process of getting staff into the house there," Haney said. "The change on the ground is just beginning."

Enchanted Rocks is the 23rd preserve under the Wildlands Conservancy, and the first outside California. Combined, the group manages a little more than 200,000 acres for nature, outdoor recreation and education.

Haney said the Conservancy was initially approached by a real estate agent in Bend about buying the 33,000-acre Skyline Forest on the eastern slope of the Three Sisters Wilderness.

When that proposal did not work out, Haney said they were steered to Cherry Creek Ranch near the John Day River where they were immediately struck by the area's natural beauty, surrounded by rimrocks and multi-colored geological formations that lended the preserve's name.

"It was the most beautiful thing we'd seen in Oregon," he said. "It was like a compass aligned in my brain. I knew it was for us."

Over the next year, the Wildlands Conservancy will raise additional funds to build new visitor facilities at Enchanted Rocks and open

the preserve to the public.

Haney said the conservancy brings in more than 1.5 million visitors each year to its nature preserves, and provides more free outdoor education programs for underserved communities than any other nonprofit in California.

As a climate preserve, Haney said the conservancy will protect 10,000 acres of forest at Enchanted Rocks from commercial logging. The group also opposes a federal program that calls for removing juniper trees to improve rangeland health and habitat for sage grouse.

New dean chosen to lead WSU's ag college

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Wendy Powers will be the next dean of Washington State University's agricultural college.

Currently associate vice president of agriculture and natural resources at the University of California, Powers' appointment as the head of WSU's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resources begins on Aug. 15.

A priority will be finding resources for the college, including more facilities, expanding research programs and hiring more faculty and staff to support those programs, Powers told the Capital Press.

"Also increasing student enrollment, and really trying to get those numbers up there," she said. "All of that with an effort towards trying to ensure WSU and the college are really present in every community across the state and making a difference in the lives of all the Washingtonians."

Powers said she's "eager" to meet farmers and ranchers and hear about their concerns and needs from the college.

"I think there's a great



Wendy Powers

future in agriculture," she said. "We've seen through the pandemic how important local food production and food access is. I'm eager to work with them and advance that any way we can."

Powers replaces former dean André-Denis Wright, who led the college from 2018 to 2021. Interim dean Rich Koenig has overseen CAHNRS since mid-2021.

"We applaud WSU for selecting an experienced leader who understands the land-grant mission and the importance of collaboration," said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission. "We look forward to working with Dr. Powers. We've had good working relationships with past deans, and we certainly believe we'll be able to work well with Dr. Powers."

During the hiring process, Powers' extension experience stood out, Squires said. He said he was impressed by her ability to apply research in the countryside.

"We are pleased by the announcement of Dr. Pow-

ers' selection as the next Dean of CAHNRS," said Jon DeVaney, president of the Washington State Tree Fruit Association. "It is a testament to the shared commitment of WSU and its stakeholders to the mission of CAHNRS that we were able to recruit a candidate of Dr. Powers' background and experience. We look forward to continuing the cooperative relationship we have enjoyed with Dr. Wright and Dr. Koenig in strengthening CAHNRS programs and the state's agricultural sector."

Powers stood out from the beginning during a "very broad national search" because of her breadth of leadership experience, WSU provost Elizabeth Chilton told the Capital Press.

Powers' position at the University of California gives her "system-level experience," Chilton said.

"Which, of course, for WSU, we have a footprint in every county," Chilton said.

Finalists for the position spent two days at WSU, including visiting an extension site in Prosser. Powers reported back to Chilton what she'd heard and her ideas if offered the position.

"She is an amazing lis-

tener," Chilton said. "I think what (farmers) are going to find is someone who really listens and takes seriously the land-grant mission to serve the communities and state of Washington, and will be really listening to them, as to how we can help meet those needs."

Powers said she's particularly excited to emphasize undergraduate and graduate education alongside WSU's cooperative extension and agricultural experiment stations.

"WSU has an amazing reputation in research, cooperative extension and education," she said. "I'm very excited about being part of that legacy."

Powers holds a doctorate in animal science and a master's degree in dairy science from the University of Florida, and a bachelor's degree in animal science from Cornell University.

According to a WSU press release, as a scientist, Powers linked research discovery with outreach to the livestock industry, providing knowledge and tools to help producers reduce their environmental impacts while staying competitive and meeting growing consumer demand.

Oregon Court of Appeals overturns \$1 billion timber verdict against state

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — The Oregon Court of Appeals Wednesday struck down a \$1 billion jury verdict that was intended to compensate 14 county governments for insufficient logging on state forestlands.

A law that requires Oregon to manage the forestland for the "greatest permanent value" does not create an "immutable promise" to maximize revenue for the counties, the appeals court ruled.

The appellate court said that "historically, 'value' has myriad definitions, some of which could relate to revenue production and others that do not relate to revenue production."

The statute also directs that forests be managed for the "greatest permanent value" to the state, rather than to the counties, which means the text falls short of the "clear and unmistakable intent" of making a contractual promise, the ruling said.

For that reason, a state judge in Linn County wrongly refused to dismiss the class action lawsuit against the state government, the ruling said.

After a month-long trial in 1990, a jury determined the State of Oregon violated a contract requiring it to maximize revenue from forestlands donated by the counties in the 1930s and '40s.

State forests must be managed for the "greatest permanent value" by law, but the 14 counties claimed the Oregon Department of Forestry impermissibly expanded that definition beyond its original intent.

Under language adopted in the late 1990s, the "greatest permanent value" was

changed to include environmental and recreational considerations that restricted timber harvests, shortchanging the 14 counties and tax districts within them of revenues, the plaintiffs claimed.

Attorneys for Oregon appealed the jury verdict on the grounds that the counties didn't have an enforceable contract that dictated how state forest officials must manage the nearly 700,000 acres of donated property.

The law governing state forestlands pertains to "matters of statewide concern" that cannot be challenged in court by the counties, state attorneys claimed. As political subdivisions of the Oregon government, the counties cannot sue over such state policies.

Federal environmental laws enacted since the property was donated, such as the Endangered Species Act, also effectively limit how much timber can be extracted from state forestlands, according to state attorneys.

The counties claimed that Oregon forestry officials weren't obligated to create habitat for federally-protected species that resulted in logging restrictions. In any case, the counties said the state government can alter forest management policies but must still pay them damages for breaching the contract.

Counties provide health-care and other functions under contract with the state government, so they must be able to rely on such agreements being enforceable, the plaintiffs said. If the counties had known the state government could re-interpret the contract's terms at will, they'd never have donated such huge amounts of forestlands.

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