

# Large chicken farm gets approval from Oregon regulators

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**  
Capital Press

SCIO, Ore. — Oregon regulators have approved a large commercial chicken farm that will raise nearly 3.5 million birds annually in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

The state Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality issued a Confined Animal Feeding Operation, or CAFO, permit for J-S Ranch near Scio, Ore., on May 26, allowing it to produce broiler chickens for the poultry company Foster Farms.

Opponents in the community have pushed back against the proposal, raising concerns ranging from the potential for air and water pollution to increased traffic on rural roads. They organized a group called Farmers Against Foster Farms last year, and vowed to continue fighting the project.

Eric Simon, of Brownsville, Ore., will run J-S Ranch. The farm will include 11 barns each measuring 39,120 square feet — or approximately 10 acres under roof — housing up to 580,000 chickens at a time. Six flocks will be raised per year.

No chickens will be slaughtered

on site. Instead, Simon said the birds will be sent to Foster Farms' processing plant in Kelso, Wash.

Simon is a longtime poultry farmer who has contracted to raise chickens for Foster Farms since 2000. He also owns Ideal Ag Supply, a local dairy and poultry equipment company.

Simon purchased the Scio property in July 2020 and submitted his application for a CAFO permit the following month. It was met with concerns from neighbors about the farm's size, location and how it would handle an estimated 4,500 tons of manure annually.

"We're kind of frustrated that it's taken so long, but we're pleased that it's finally getting done," he said.

## Permit conditions

The permit is contingent on meeting several conditions.

First, Simon must obtain a stormwater construction permit from DEQ, road access permit from Linn County and water supply plan signed by the Oregon Water Resources Department before breaking ground.

Second, before any chickens arrive the farm must complete a ground compaction study to ensure



Courtesy of Eric Simon

**Eric Simon, 51, a longtime Foster Farms contract poultry grower, will run the Scio operation. Simon says his operation will help meet demand for locally produced chicken and boost the regional economy.**

the poultry barn floors will not allow contaminants to seep into groundwater.

ODA and DEQ are requiring the farm to install and monitor two static wells to ensure that groundwater levels are at least 2 feet below the barn floors. Simon must also provide data from drinking

water wells at the farm to ensure groundwater is healthful to drink.

Farmers Against Foster Farms posted a statement on its Facebook page criticizing ODA for issuing the permit without considering factors such as public health, fire risk or air emissions.

"ODA has never met a CAFO or a CAFO site they didn't like," the group wrote. "The reality is J-S Ranch still does not have all of the appropriate permits in order to begin construction. Our community of farmers and ranchers will continue to fight this at every turn in order to protect our land and water from the negative impacts of industrial chicken factories."

## Raising concerns

A virtual public hearing for J-S Ranch was held in October 2021. Over the course of the public comment period, ODA and DEQ received 130 written and oral comments, of which 114 were opposed. The scope of the review was limited to potential surface water and groundwater discharges.

Kendra Kimbirauskas, who raises pastured pork, grass-fed beef and goats in Scio, is one of the core organizers of Farmers Against Foster Farms.

She said they remain concerned about ammonia emissions at J-S Ranch, along with groundwater contamination during wet winter months that often leaves fields in the area flooded.

"We do not have a lot of faith that (the agencies') conditions are going to mitigate pollution," Kimbirauskas said. "There's not going to be an impermeable barrier between the chicken litter and the ground."

Farmers Against Foster Farms is objecting to both the stormwater construction and county road permit, Kimbirauskas said. Increasing semi-trailer traffic along Jefferson-Scio Drive could be "potentially treacherous, if not fatal," she said.

J-S Ranch is not the only large chicken facility proposed in the area. The Evergreen Ranch in Scio would also raise 4.5 million broiler chickens each year near Thomas Creek, and Hiday Poultry Farms LLC is eyeing a site between Stayton and Aumsville, according to the group.

"Our laws are not set up to protect people from the impacts of these types of operations," Kimbirauskas said.

## Anticipating a small crop, Washington Apple Commission tightens budget

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Apple industry leaders from across Washington state predict a smaller-than-average crop this year due in part to an unusually cold and stormy spring.

At the Washington Apple Commission meeting May 26, growers shared crop predictions, with most estimates ranging from 105 million to 115 million 40-pound boxes, significantly smaller than the five-year average of 128.3 million boxes.

"My take is, it seems like nobody has a good crop," said commissioner Jim Thomas.

Growers based their estimates on how apple trees bloomed this spring, which many said was "spotty," in some cases with entire orchard blocks not blooming.

Although the short crop was largely attributed to this spring's winds, cold weather and wetness — which damaged blossoms and limited pollination — some growers said they believe the orchards may also be experiencing long-term effects from 2021's heat wave.

"We kind of feel that the heat last year had a lot to do with (lack of bloom), because blocks that were off last year that should have been on this year are taking another year off," said commissioner Michael Roche. "It's hard to figure out what causes that, but we feel that the heat last year had a lot to do with the return bloom this year, because we're just not seeing bloom where there should be bloom."

The short crop creates a budgeting challenge for the apple commission.

The commission is funded by assessments from growers. Some of this money funds the commis-



Capital Press File

**Red Delicious apple blossoms. Based on how apple trees bloomed during 2022's cold, wet spring, Washington apple industry leaders predict a smaller-than-average crop this year.**

sion's operations, which include promotion, advertising, education and market development for Washington's fresh apple crop.

Apple commission money is also used as matching dollars for federal programs. For example, \$2 million from the commission returns \$5 million in Market Access Program funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In turn, the commission also helps fund other industry organizations, including the U.S. Apple Association and Northwest Horticultural Council.

At current budget levels, according to commission vice president Robin Mooney, a break-even crop would need to be about 128 million boxes. This year's smaller crop means about a \$700,000 shortfall in the organization's \$4.7 million budget.

Commission president Todd Fryhover said the short-term solution is to temporarily reduce the board-designated reserve.

Other board members agreed and voted to decrease the reserve from \$4 million to \$3 million to give the commission more working capital during the short crop year.

## Oregon farmer ending his term as U.S. Wheat chairman

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Two years ago, Oregon farmer Darren Padget assumed leadership of the U.S. Wheat Associates board during uncertain times, and now he's leaving during uncertain times.

"It's an interesting time to be a wheat producer," he said. "Something that people viewed as the red-headed stepchild of the commodities for a long time is now front and center because of the Ukraine situation. It is unusual times for sure."

Padget became chair of the U.S. Wheat board in July 2020. His term will end during the board's meeting June 6-9 in Bend, Ore. Rhonda Larson, a farmer from East Grand Forks, Minn., will replace him as chair at that meeting.

Padget lists the potential for overseas hunger as his top concern for the industry. Uncertainty in Ukraine and India means some of the world populations most in need of wheat will be impacted, he said.

"The Black Sea feeds them and that may be a really tough deal," Padget said. "There's no way the U.S. can backfill that, or Australia or Canada, even all together. (The Black Sea) is 13% of the world's trade and we're 6.5%."

Russia invaded Ukraine three months ago. Neither nation has been exporting wheat. Both border the Black Sea.

"Full bellies don't revolt, and I'm afraid things are going to get pretty nasty in certain parts of the world that are already on the edge," he added. "Food shortages are just going to exacerbate that problem. That's sad, from a food producer's standpoint."

Padget also pointed to high prices of inputs and supply shortages as challenges facing the industry.

These are "very uncer-



U.S. Wheat Associates

**Darren Padget at his Grass Valley, Ore., farm in 2019. Padget began his term as chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates in July 2020.**

tain times, and it doesn't look like it's going to end any time soon," he said. "It's easy to be discouraged with high inputs and the world situation the way it is, but the ag community's a resili-

ent, adaptable bunch, and we'll get through it. Better times (are) ahead, I'm sure, but in the meantime, we've got to tough it out."

U.S. ports are open and the industry touts its reliabil-

ity to overseas customers.

"As long as we have it, it's for sale," Padget said. "It's too bad the Midwest is having their issues, but we will have wheat for sale. The (Pacific Northwest) is looking good, and there's wheat coming in from other places. Time marches on. It's just unfortunate we're short on supply when the world really needs it."

The Northwest drought put a huge dent in wheat yields last year, but this year's crop is in much better shape so far.

The industry pivoted to virtual meetings and trade teams during the pandemic.

"Everybody's anxious to get back together, and hopefully this fall that can happen," he said.

In his year as past chairman, "I hope to do some traveling and at least have a farewell tour," Padget said with a chuckle.

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