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UP AND AWAY

Operating loans grow as production costs soar

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Farmers and ranchers are asking their lenders for bigger loans this year due to the surging cost of fuel, fertilizer, feed and labor.

“Expenses are through the roof,” said Eric Bennett, relationships manager at Northwest Farm Credit Services.

Some fertilizer is twice the price it was a year ago, and diesel that was 92 cents a gallon two years ago is now \$5 a gallon, he said.

“That’s a problem. Fuel’s just a killer,” he said.

Hay is \$260 a ton and corn silage is \$60 to \$65 a ton standing in the field, compared to \$38 to \$42 a ton last year, he said.

Producers across the country are feeling the sting of inflation and supply-related shortages — due to such factors as the war in Ukraine and shipping problems — sending the price of some inputs skyward.

As farmers tried to keep up with spiraling operating costs farm lending

in the first quarter of the year mushroomed, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

Total non-real estate bank loans to farmers were up nearly 18% year over year in the first quarter to about \$93.4 billion. Operating loans accounted for about 62% of that and were up more than 31% year over year to \$57.8 billion.

Although the number of operating loans reached an all-time low for the first quarter, the average size of those loans approached a record high, the bank reported.

Fortunately, most farmers were financially healthy going into the year.

“Most producers had positive earnings in the previous two years and increased their working capital, positioning them to handle a difficult year,” said Doug Robison, Idaho president of Northwest Farm Credit Services.

The 2022 operating renewal season went well despite higher expenses, he said.



Eric Bennett

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As the cost of inputs continues to increase, many farmers have been forced to seek additional financing from their lenders, even as interest rates rise. The only bright side: Higher prices for many crops.

Industry groups challenge Oregon’s heat and smoke workplace rules in lawsuit

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

A coalition of Oregon business and timber groups is challenging the state’s new workplace rules on heat and wildfire smoke.

On May 10, Oregon OSHA adopted permanent rules intended to protect workers, including farmworkers, from high heat and wildfire smoke. The rules instruct employers on how to provide workers with shade and water, breaks and other preventative measures.

Last week, industry groups challenged these rules, arguing that the guidelines are too vague.

“The provisions... are so vague that they do not provide employers, including plaintiffs’ members, with fair notice of what conduct is required or proscribed,” the suit alleges in court documents.

A lawsuit, filed June 15, asks the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon Medford Division to issue a temporary restraining order preventing Oregon OSHA from enforcing the rules while the court considers whether to block

their enforcement permanently.

The coalition that brought the suit includes Oregon Manufacturers and Commerce, Associated Oregon Loggers Inc. and Oregon Forest Industries Council.

Defendants are OSHA and the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services. The suit also named agency leaders, Oregon OSHA’s acting administrator Renee Stapleton and Oregon DCBS’s director Andrew Stolfi, as defendants.

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Courtesy of Tim O’Hara/Forest Resources Association
H-2B workers plant new seedlings. Business and timber industry groups are challenging Oregon OSHA’s new workplace rules on heat and wildfire smoke.

Proposed wolf rule faltering in Washington



Holly Kuchera/Getty Images

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission moved closer June 24 to rejecting a rule sought by wolf advocates to restrict the department’s use of lethal control.

Several commissioners said a rule was unneeded and would be counterproductive, destroying hard-won progress in balancing wolf recovery and ranching.

“We worked really hard under challenging circumstances,” Commissioner Molly Linville said. “We

are getting fewer and fewer wolves killed and fewer and fewer livestock killed.”

A lethal-control protocol written by an advisory group that included conservation groups and ranching representatives guides, but does not bind, the department.

The protocol came from the department’s time-consuming and expensive effort to keep wolf recovery from being a winner-take-all political and court fight. The protocol has withstood several lawsuits by wolf advocates.

At the request of several environmental groups, Gov. Jay Ins-

lee ordered the department’s staff to propose a binding lethal-control rule. The governor agreed with wolf advocates that annually killing wolves in northeast Washington was unacceptable.

The nine-member commission is set to vote on a rule July 8. Commissioners Barbara Baker and Kim Thorburn agreed with Linville that a rule would take away the department’s flexibility.

“I’m real sure it would chill the advancements that we are making,” Baker said.

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