

# Idaho producers growing first-ever hemp crop

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

Tim Cornie likes how his first-ever hemp crop looks.

"When it got a little warmer, it exploded," the Buhl, Idaho, farmer said July 11.

Cornie said he expects the hemp plants, grown for grain, to be 5 to 5.5 feet tall at harvest.

"Now it's right at probably 4 feet," he said. "It really looks good."

Cornie said field conditions "got really damp and cool" after the crop was planted in mid-May. "But it still did fine. ... I'm kind of impressed by the resiliency of the plant."

The 2021 Legislature passed House Bill 126. The law allows production of industrial hemp — and related research, processing and transportation — starting this year.

The state Department of

Agriculture approved about 500 acres of hemp for 2022. It licensed 10 producers, six handlers and four handler-producers — including 1000 Springs Mill, which Cornie co-owns. The University of Idaho is licensed in Aberdeen as a producer and in Boise as a handler-producer.

The Shoshone-Bannock and Nez Perce tribes operate under separate USDA-approved hemp plans.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation spokesman Sean Ellis said he would be surprised if hemp is grown on all 500 state-approved acres given higher prices for other crops and increased production costs.

Brad Jensen, deputy director of governmental affairs, said the Farm Bureau is "interested to see how the first growing season goes for hemp producers in the state, and in seeing how interest in producing industrial hemp in the state grows in coming



1000 Springs Mill  
Tim Cornie and Sarabia Silvestre with hemp in early July near Buhl, Idaho.

years as people become more familiar with the crop and how it may grow here in the state."

Greg Willison, who has grown hemp in Oregon and testified before Idaho law-

makers about the crop, said the industry is using up a surplus. That could add opportunity for growers in coming seasons.

"This year is setting us up for a really exciting and col-

laborative Idaho hemp industry," said Christina Stucker-Gassi, who manages the health food and farms program at the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides.

Ketchum-based Hempitecture uses hemp fiber to make a sustainable insulation product for walls, floors and ceilings. The company is building a new headquarters and manufacturing facility in Jerome.

Founder and CEO Mattie Mead said the company now gets its hemp fiber supply from an established primary processor in Montana.

"As the hemp industry grows and matures in Idaho, Hempitecture is positioned as a buyer of finished, processed material," he said.

Mead said that with more acreage, the company would like to see in-state establishment of primary processing, which is mechanical separation of hemp fiber from stalks.

Cornie said 1000 Springs plans to use hemp grain in a meal-replacement bar. The company is growing it on a field of 8-10 acres.

Half this year's hemp field will be harvested using a stripper header that takes off the seed and leaves the rest of the plant standing. This will be easiest on the combine harvester.

Cornie said the other half will be swathed with a draper header that winds seed and fiber together; they will lie down and dry before they go through the combine.

"Whichever we have more success with, we'll have a better idea of how we plant and harvest acres next year," he said.

"We're getting our feet wet," Cornie said. "We wanted to be educated before we do more acres in the future. We knew there was a learning curve, so we didn't want to go whole-hog."

## U.S. Chamber: Government agency shouldn't micromanage cattle markets

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is weighing in against several pieces of legislation in response to soaring meat prices that the organization says would dramatically expand the federal government's role in the market and ultimately harm consumers.

In a blog on the chamber's website, Sean Heather, the chamber's senior vice president of international regulatory affairs and antitrust, said such policies in the past proved harmful.

In the 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, Congress enacted laws such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act to micromanage various markets, he said.

"With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that these bills ultimately harmed consumers by fixing prices and harmed producers by preventing markets from adjusting naturally," he said.

In a rush to address soaring meat prices and ensure that all parts of the supply chain benefit from those prices, several pending bills would dramatically expand the federal government's role in meat markets.

In particular, the Meat and Poultry Special Investigator Act and the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act would give

the USDA significant new authority to manage cattle sales around the country.

"Unfortunately, both bills would harm consumers and reduce competition," he said.

The special investigator bill would create a duplicative office within USDA to combat anticompetitive conduct, which could slow law enforcement investigations and lead to more politicized enforcement decisions, he said.

"Instead of creating a new office, Congress should simply ensure that the existing law enforcement agencies have the necessary tools and resources to do their jobs," he said.

The cattle price bill would displace free market fundamentals with government-controlled pricing. The bill would require cattle feeders to sell cattle to packers, and packers to buy from feeders a mandatory minimum of fed cattle on a cash, spot market.

"As a result, the bill would reduce the ability of all levels of the supply chain to negotiate freely through formula and contract sales, also known as alternative marketing arrangements — a system that has helped to increase consumer demand and improve beef quality by effectively transmitting market signals about consumers' preferences to producers," he said.

In other words, the bill would replace a market

structure that has evolved naturally over time with one created and managed by bureaucrats in Washington.

"When has that ever been a good idea?" he asked.

Instead, Congress should let these post-COVID markets adjust naturally. Fed cattle prices reached a seven-year high earlier this year, benefitting suppliers up and down the chain, and these price signals ultimately will work to expand production and keep prices in check for consumers, he said.

"Beyond their obvious flaws, these bills buy into the White House's faulty narrative that beef markets are suffering from a lack of competition," he said.

Total beef production reached record levels in 2020, and the four-firm concentration ratio in fed cattle beef packing has not changed meaningfully in more than 25 years, he said.

USDA itself recognizes high feed costs, increased demand and changes in the supply chain have driven up prices for wholesale beef and dairy, he said.

"Rather than expand the government's role in the economy, create new regulatory burdens, or hire new, duplicative regulators, Congress should explore other avenues to encourage competition and lower prices for consumers," he said.

## Whatcom County water talks stumble out of the gate

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Farm groups and five mayors in Whatcom County, Wash., blame the Department of Ecology's fervor for adjudication for stalling negotiations on solving the Nooksack basin's water shortages.

The talks, dubbed the "Solutions Table," were to start in June and be led ex-Ecology directors Jay Manning and Maia Bellon.

They envisioned table participants working out a comprehensive plan to sustain fish, farms and cities, similar to the multi-billion-dollar plan developed in the Yakima River Basin.

The Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian tribes objected to the meetings, however, and none have been held. The tribes said they will wait for Ecology to initiate adjudication next year.

In an adjudication, a judge sets water rights. Farmers fear that once tribal water rights are quantified, agricultural water rights will be curtailed. Ecology and tribes strongly support adjudication.

Whatcom Ag Water Board administrator Henry Bierlink, representing irrigators, said Tuesday that Ecology should make adjudication contingent on starting out-of-court negotiations now.

"Once adjudication is filed, all the energy gets focused into the legal system," he said.

Ecology spokesman Jimmy Norris said the agency is willing to engage in talks, even if the tribes don't participate. But the agency also is committed to filing adjudication next June, he said.

"We need the clarity and certainty that comes from adjudicating water rights to make anything that comes from the Solutions Table enforceable," Norris said.

Whatcom County is wet, but farmers need to irrigate for about two months in the summer. Tribes are concerned about low summer flows for fish. Cities are plagued by winter floods.

Ecology and the tribes argue that in a water-short basin, water rights need to be pri-



Seastock  
The Nooksack River flows through Whatcom County in northwestern Washington state.

oritized in court. In the Yakima River Basin, adjudication took more than 40 years.

The mayors of Blaine, Everson, Lynden, Nooksack and Sumas recently wrote Ecology, aligning themselves with farm groups that accuse the agency of overselling the benefits of adjudication and undermining negotiations.

State lawmakers have backed both. They gave Ecology money to start adjudication, but also gave Whatcom County \$250,000 for a parallel "collaborative process." The county hired Manning and Bellon, now private consultants, to lead the talks.

At a meeting in April attended by government and tribal officials, the two ex-Ecology directors championed developing a water-infrastructure plan that could win state and federal funding.

The judge presiding over adjudication won't ask Congress for a billion dollars, Bellon said. Adjudication, she said, "doesn't actually bring water into the system."

"It falls short of really finding a long-term, sustainable plan, a 20- to 30-year plan or 50-year plan, for the watershed to be able to deal with ongoing water shortages," she said.

## Outlook improves for a third straight La Nina

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The National Weather Service on July 14 increased the odds that a La Nina will prevail for a third straight winter, a climate phenomenon linked to ample Northwest snowpacks.

A La Nina has a 66% chance of being in place by early winter, according to the service's Climate Prediction Center. A month ago, the center pegged the chances at 59%.

"I wouldn't say it's a wholesale change," Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond said. "If we're talking about next winter, it's still a long ways away."

During a La Nina, cool sea-surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean trigger changes in the tropical atmosphere. A La Nina formed in September 2020 and has persisted except for a brief period in 2021.

A La Nina influences weather worldwide. In the continental U.S., La Ninas are associated with cooler and wetter winters in the northern tier, but drier and warmer winters in the southern tier.

An El Nino, triggered

by above-average ocean temperatures, has opposite effects. The Climate Prediction Center sees almost no chance that an El Nino will form next winter.

The center says there's a one-third chance sea temperatures will be close to normal.

The center evaluated about two dozen climate models and predicted sea temperatures next winter will be 0.5 to 1 degree Celsius below average, cool enough to cause a weak La Nina.

Since 1950, a La Nina has prevailed for three straight winters twice — from 1974-77 and then between 1998-2001.

The winter of 2000-01 was not good for Washington summer irrigation. The statewide snowpack on April 1 that year was only 61% of average.

Bond said climatologists have little precedent to make judgments about the potential strength of a third straight La Nina.

"I still don't think it's going to necessarily be a really strong event," he said.

Also Thursday, the U.S. Drought Monitor released its weekly report. The northern tier of the West is in better shape than the southern tier.



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