

Outlook good for potato crop despite tight supply chain

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

As potato harvest begins, regional supply shortages are likely to be alleviated “very shortly,” a national potato industry leader says.

“Generally speaking, this time of year, every year, we have some tightness in the market,” said Blair Richardson, CEO of Potatoes USA. “This year it’s a little tighter than normal because the demand for potatoes and potato products has just been really strong the last couple of years.”

The Pacific Northwest represents 60% to 63% of the total U.S. potato crop. Richardson expects a “fantastic” quality crop that will bring extra volume into trade channels.

The global supply chain remains stressed across all commodities and products, Richardson said, pointing to “complexities” with shipping containers, port struggles and extended timelines getting products to and from sources and destinations.

He said the potato industry is faring “fairly well” compared to many commodities. He’s heard anecdotes of short-term supply constrictions, but the industry hasn’t run out of anything.

“You could see some tightness in certain areas, but the great thing about pota-



Matthew Weaver
Capital Press File

Blair Richardson, CEO of Potatoes USA.

atoes is you can get them in all kinds of forms — (dehydrated), frozen, fresh or chips,” he said. “From a consumer perspective, they’ll still have access to potatoes. It may not always be exactly the one they were expecting.”

Processors and suppliers are working to keep facilities operating and producing in the midst of global uncertainty, including the war in Ukraine and its effect on the supply chain, Richardson said.

“A lot of this is just going to be something we’re going to have to wait and see and plan as best we can,” he said.

Any shortages or constrictions are a short-term situation, Richardson said, but he anticipates consumer demand will only grow.

“They already love potatoes, but it’s becoming obvious that (potatoes are) healthy and they’re good for you,” he said.

Some Oregon winemakers cut costs by making energy upgrades

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

Last year, John Paul, winemaker at Cameron Winery in Yamhill County, Ore., got a call.

It was from Luis Morales, an outreach specialist for Energy Trust of Oregon, a nonprofit that helps businesses save on energy costs. Morales asked Paul if he would like a free energy study — for an expert to visit his winery to look for ways he could cut energy use.

Paul had already worked with Energy Trust several years prior to install solar panels at his winery, so he welcomed the visit to identify additional energy-saving opportunities.

During Morales’ visit, the specialist discovered that Paul’s heating and cooling systems were old and inefficient, so he recommended that the winemaker install new ductless mini-split heat pumps that could both heat and cool spaces and keep storage rooms at a



Jason Quigley/Energy Trust of Oregon

John Paul of Cameron Winery in Dundee, Ore.

more consistent temperature, better controlling the wine-aging process.

The result was less energy use and lower costs. Paul has been keeping records on his Portland General Electric utility bills for years, and after installing the new pumps in January, he found that his February bill was 75% lower

than it had been the previous February.

“It’s saving me a huge amount of money,” said Paul.

Energy Trust offered Paul a \$2,165 incentive to set up the heat pumps. That incentive helped cover part of the installation cost, which was done by Husky Heating & Cooling of Newberg.

Installation cost Paul around \$8,000, and he anticipates the return-on-investment timeframe — when he has earned back in savings the initial investment cost — will happen within about four years of installation.

Energy Trust of Oregon has worked with other wineries as well. The owners of Dobbes Family Estate in Yamhill County, for example, invited the nonprofit to conduct energy audits. As a result, Dobbes Family Estate has installed new insulation and upgraded its irrigation.

According to Energy Trust, many business owners — including farmers —

are eligible for the nonprofit’s services, which include energy audits, consultation and cash incentives to help with installation costs for HVAC systems, heat pumps, water heating, refrigeration and insulation.

Susan Jowaiszas, Energy Trust’s spokeswoman, said the nonprofit’s work can “connect (business owners) to equipment that will require less maintenance, lower their operational costs and can also make their spaces more comfortable for them and their customers.”

As a result of state legislation, the Energy Trust of Oregon gets its funding from customers of five utility companies: Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas and Avista. A percentage of customers’ utility bills goes toward supporting energy-efficiency programs across Oregon and Southwest Washington, including through Energy Trust.

OSU course on farm wildfire plans available

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

An Oregon State University Extension course that helps farmers create wildfire preparedness plans is available online.

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health began requiring the plans for many farm operations in 2019.

Enrollment in the three-hour, seven-module online course costs \$25.

Topics include understanding unique wildfire risks in agricultural areas; identifying locating and documenting hazards; mitigating risk with defensible space and better-prepared structures; creating fuel breaks; on-site water sources for firefighting; inventorying available resources; and creating medical, fire emergency and fire-prevention plans.

OSU said the course is also designed to benefit ag operations without employees, and rural residents.



Mark Graves/The Oregonian via AP

An online course helps farmers and others to write fire plans.

The requirements apply to producers with employees who work to suppress wildfires on farms and rangeland. A documented emergency action plan is required as well as firefighting action and prevention plans.

Workers who go beyond using an extinguisher or small hose to control fire must have basic training and an annual refresher.

OSU estimates the likelihood of fire in Oregon’s populated urban and rural areas is greater than that of 64% of states.

Jacob Powell, the OSU Extension educator for Sherman and Wasco counties, developed and leads the course. Extension fire educators provided peer-review edits.

It covers how to create emergency farm plans. He said the advantages of a written plan include having all contacts easily accessible in one place and clear steps to follow.

“I’m seeing a lot more people have those plans in writing,” Powell said.

A course goal is “to provide tools for producers to deal with these problems,” Powell said.

He said more producers are taking fire precautions such as shutting down equipment in high-risk conditions and parking it in safe areas and using disc lines to create defensible space.

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