It might be too early to call it an upward trend, but Oregon farmers and ranchers generally made a little more money this past year, according to newly released statistics.

Oregon's net farm income for 2002 was up around 8 percent from the previous year, to nearly \$356 million.

The good news is tempered by the fact that 2001 net farm income was at its lowest level in 18 years. Still, it appears the agriculture industry in Oregon is holding its own despite a number of challenges.

Net farm income is the amount retained by growers after paying all expenses for their business.

"Certainly, we are encouraged to see the numbers go back up and we hope the net farm income for Oregon bottomed out the previous," said Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture (ODA).

"This is one more indication that our farmers and ranchers are hanging tough while the economy struggles to right itself."

Other economic indicators confirm Coba's contention that Oregon agriculture remains a vital economic contributor. The value of agricultural production is at \$3.5 billion.

Many individual commodities have done well this past year.

Agricultural exports are rebounding, and the value of the U.S. dollar has softened, which helps the producer. And as the overall economy improves, there is every reason to believe agriculture's bottom line will improve as well, said ODA.

It continues to be a roller-coaster ride for Oregon agricultural producers. Figures from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Economic Research Service show a volatile year-

to-year net farm income figure.

In 1990, net farm income stood at \$533 million. It peaked at \$681 million and \$672 million in '93 and '97 respectively. In contrast, times were tough in '95 (\$437 million) and '99 (\$354 million). The 2000 net farm income of \$422 million was a modest increase from the previous year, but was followed by the low mark of

\$330 million in 2001.

An analysis of the statistics reveals some of the reasons for the gains this past year.

Gross sales and cash receipts last year were roughly equal to 2001. But after several years of increasing expenses, it appears a drop in the cost of doing business is most responsible for the improved net farm income figure during 2002.

"Farm expenses -what it costs farmers to
produce the crops and livestock -- were down by
around 3 percent from
2001," said Bent Searle,
ODA analyst. "So even
though the gross farm income was down very modestly, expenses decreased
even more.

"That's a good sign that the industry in Oregon is making crucial adjustments and finding ways to adapt while maintaining productivity with fewer inputs."

Reflecting the trend in the overall economy, lower interest rates have also trimmed the cost of doing business for Oregon farmers and ranchers. Growers paid around \$186 million in interest payments on real estate, operating loans, and other forms of credit during 2002.

Lower land rents are also a factor in the better bottom line. Farmers and ranchers paid \$217 million in 2002 to rent land from non-operator landlords -- a

10 percent decrease from the previous year.

But there are some higher costs in the latest report. Labor costs in Oregon climbed a modest half a percent in Oregon last year to \$756 million, still making it the highest single expense cost for Oregon producers. In fact, the amount paid to employees is more than double the amount retained by producers as net farm income.

Machine repair and maintenance costs continue to rise for Oregon farmers, which indicates producers are making efforts to lengthen the life of existing equipment and machinery.

All in all, Oregon's agricultural producers are taking whatever management steps they can to control the expense side of the balance sheet.

"Farmers and ranchers are looking real closely at how they are doing things," Searle said. "They are being careful in what they are spending and becoming much more efficient in their operations."

While there are a number of Oregon industries that may not be enjoying an increase in the bottom line, agriculture is demonstrating its resilience as one contributor to the state's economy that is showing some signs of recovery, ODA said.

Our opinion of people depends less upon what we see in them than in what they make us see in ourselves.
-Sarah Grand-

Nurseries share travel costs

When Willamette Valley's Fisher Farms needed to send only a small order of plants to Philadelphia during spring this year it didn't have enough to fill a 50-foot-long trailer to be trucked east. But thanks to the Internet other nurseries in similar situations were found, and together they had enough plant material to fill the trailer.

The result is an economical and efficient program to maximize available transportation, a key issue for Oregon's numberone agricultural commodity, said ODA.

Funded largely through a \$40,000 specialty crop grant administered by

ODA, the partial-load website provides a primary communication tool for nursery growers who need to ship less than a full load. They can find other growers with the same need for timely and more costeffective shipments. The Web site, LoadView, is managed by the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

So far there have been nearly 10,000 visits to the website. Hundreds of partial loads and dozens of truck transports have been posted, said ODA. The overall success is difficult to measure because most arrangements are finalized via telephone calls, ODA said.

Mixed-use travel focus of meeting

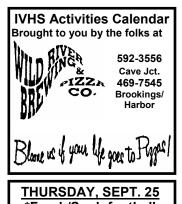
Establishing a rural transportation system plan is the topic of a meeting set for Monday, Sept. 29 by the Josephine County Rural Planning Commission.

The meeting will be held in Anne Basker Auditorium adjacent to the county courthouse in Grants Pass from 7 to 9 p.m. Such a plan is required by State Planning Goal 12. It must address all travel modes for people and commodities.

For more information phone Steve Hodges at (541) 474-5460.



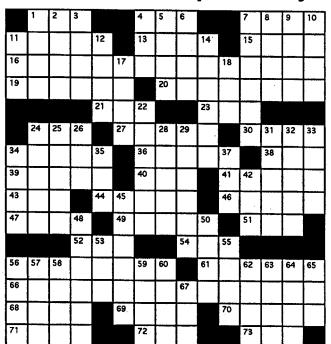




*Frosh/Soph football at North Valley - 5 p.m. *JV/Varsity volleyball vs. Phoenix - here 5:15/6:30 p.m. *Boys soccer vs. Hidden Valley - here 4 p.m. SATURDAY, SEPT. 27 *Varsity football vs. North Valley - here 1 p.m. *Varsity volleyball at Bonanza - 9 a.m. *Boys soccer at North Valley - 10 a.m. *Girls soccer vs. north Valley - here 10 a.m. **TUESDAY, SEPT. 30** *JV/Varsity volleyball at **Rogue River** 5:15/6:30 p.m. *Boys soccer vs. Henley here - 4 p.m. *Girls soccer vs. **Cascade Christian**

here - 4 p.m.

Support the merchants who advertise in the 'Illinois Valley News'



Crossword Puzzle provided by

Oregon Caves Chevron

One of the last old fashioned service stations left

Highways 199 & 46 Cave Junction Jeff Stiles, Dealer



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1 Space
4 Unruly tot
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NOW OPEN SUN. - THURS. 6 A.M. - 9 P.M. FRI. AND SAT. 6 A.M. - 11 P.M. 592-3080

2003 Puzzle Features Syndicate Dist. by DBR Media, I

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