

Strawberry arrival due

The State Employment Division has joined its local office, area farmers and Oregon State University specialists in predicting a June 10 start for this year's Gresham-area strawberry harvest.

In the state Farm Labor Information bulletin, the division set the date, weather permitting, and said picker shortages are expected at the beginning of the harvest.

The division also predicted a June 5 start in the Oregon City area and June 7 start in the McMinnville area.

The bulletin reported weather conditions have been erratic in many areas throughout the state and cool, wet weather has hampered various agricultural activities. The result is late starting dates for some crop harvests.

County staffs tighten belts

By John Dean
staff reporter

A \$550,000 drop in anticipated timber revenues is forcing Clackamas County departments to cinch up their belts one notch tighter for the coming year.

County officials learned last week that receipts from Oregon and California Railroad (O&C) timber will be \$550,000 less than originally estimated, bringing the total 1978-79 county budget to under \$44 million — \$2 million less than this year's.

The drop in timber revenues comes at a bad time for the county's budget committee which is now trying to figure out which departments and programs will bear the brunt of the \$2 million slash. All county departments, from assessor to weed control, presented their individual budgets to the committee in a series of hearings that ended Tuesday.

After making the painful \$550,000 cut next week the committee will propose a budget to the board of county commissioners, who will hear public testimony on the budget around the middle of June.

The commissioners are scheduled to adopt a final budget on June 27, four days before the start of the new fiscal year.

Fewer trees cut

Why the extra budget cut? Don Williams, assistant to the commissioners, explained that the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which controls the C & C timber lands in Western Oregon, pays Oregon counties according to how much timber is actually cut by, rather than sold to, timber companies. While trees are being bought at the same rate, Williams said, fewer are being cut than BLM estimated, due possibly to the rainy winter and spring. Thus, receipts for Oregon counties are down.

Williams was quick to note that the picture is not entirely bleak. Because all O&C timber must be cut within three years of the time it is sold, the county should receive that \$550,000 some time in the next two years, Williams said.

Still, the budget must be cut an extra \$550,000 this year.

"It's now a question of how much more damage we do to existing programs," said Schumacher. The previous budget had included several projects that would cost immediately, but save the county money over the long run, including construction of an additional courtroom, consolidation of administrative services under one director and more efficient scheduling of juries.

While these would be wise moves if the county had the money, in the budget crunch "their start-up costs are enough that they might be cut out" of the budget, Schumacher said.

One other way to trim the budget could be to not replace employees who leave or retire from the county. If the county finds nothing else, Williams said, it may have to lay off employees.

Bad shape

O&C funds are the county's largest source of revenue, twice as great as its share of property taxes. They are also the least predictable, shifting sometimes as much as \$2 million from one year to the

next. O&C revenues were originally intended to be used for public works, Schumacher said. "But the county is in such sad shape that it has to use it" in the general fund, he said.

The county's "bad shape" stems from its antiquated tax base. Last set in 1949, the county's share of taxes has risen 6 percent every year, the maximum allowed by Oregon law. However, the county has more than tripled in size, and lately, with inflation running at 7 percent plus, the real value of county taxes has actually declined.

If the county is to be able to plan its budget several years in advance, it must become less reliant on the unpredictable O&C revenues. "It would be nice if we could get a tax base to cover the rest of the county programs" other than public works, Schumacher said. Whether county voters would approve a higher tax base is open to debate.

This year, the county may not even do that.

Roads

With the failure of Ballot Measure 5, director of public works John McIntyre says the roads department will be able to repave only 32 miles of county roads instead of 64.

According to a recent county survey, more than 1000 miles of roads in Clackamas County need resurfacing. At that rate, says operations director Don Broadsword, it will take the county more than 30 years to put all its roads in good condition.

The park system could also suffer. If the budget goes through as proposed, McIntyre says, "we may look at closing Metzler Park," located on the Clackamas River near McIver State Park.

The area of planning, though, could be where the budget crunch squeezes hardest. While positions are open now, they will be left unfilled if the budget goes through as proposed.

With fewer people, the planning section will have to slow down, rather than speed up, its land-use planning efforts. While some property owners may cheer at the news, it could have severe consequences in a couple of years.

The county has until 1980 to comply with the Land Conservation and Development Commission's (LCDC) 15 land-use goals. If it does not meet that deadline, it could meet the same fate as Hood River County, which lost its LCDC planning assistance grant until it could meet the LCDC requirements.

In Clackamas County, the LCDC grant accounts for more than 25 percent of the total planning budget.

According to McIntyre, the present planning staff will be able to complete a plan, but not a very good one, by 1980. While he says that LCDC appears to be more interested in meeting the 1980 deadline than in the quality of the plan, he says that an incomplete or short-sighted plan could have negative consequences for the county after 1980.

Sheriff's layoffs

County law enforcement officials are also cringing at the cuts. Sheriff John Renfro faces the task of cutting \$280,000 from his current budget for next year for the coming year.

Renfro has offered two options to the budget committee: (1) Lay off 14 of the 82 deputies on the force, for a reduction of \$287,000; or (2) lay off 10 deputies and 1/2 clerk for a total reduction of \$211,000. Renfro offers two ways to make up the difference on option 2: one would totally eliminate sick leave and vacation pay for uniformed officers, while the other would fund half of the sick leave and vacation and maintain half-staff skeleton crews on holidays.

If the committee chooses to lay off deputies rather than increase his budget, Renfro expects that the remainder of the force will respond only to calls involving immediate personal injury. Sheriff's officers would no longer respond to parking violations, nuisance reports, non-injury traffic accidents, litter complaints, vacation checks, daytime noise complaints, civil and domestic disturbances or insurance reports. Renfro estimates that these minor calls make up 26 percent of the present workload.

Deputy Lance Meharry, told the budget committee Tuesday that nuisance and domestic complaints are more important than they appear on the surface.

"Nuisance complaints

have the potential of escalating into a violent situation," Meharry said. "Most people want something done. Our presence often does avoid a bad situation."

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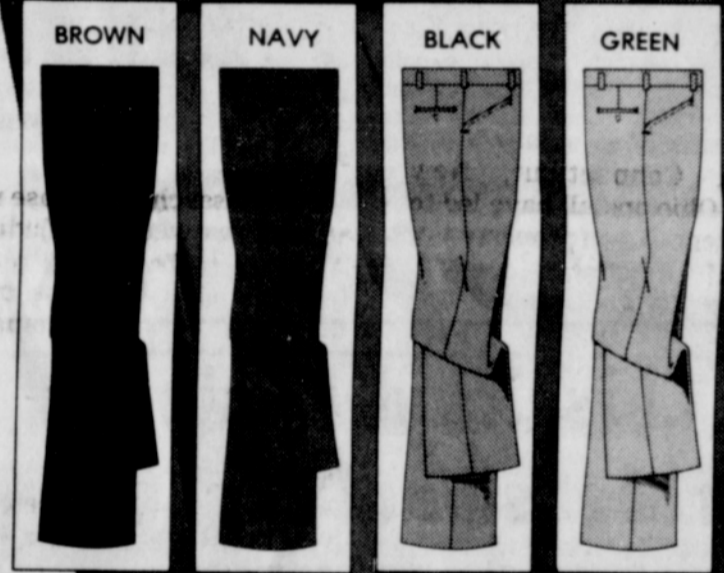
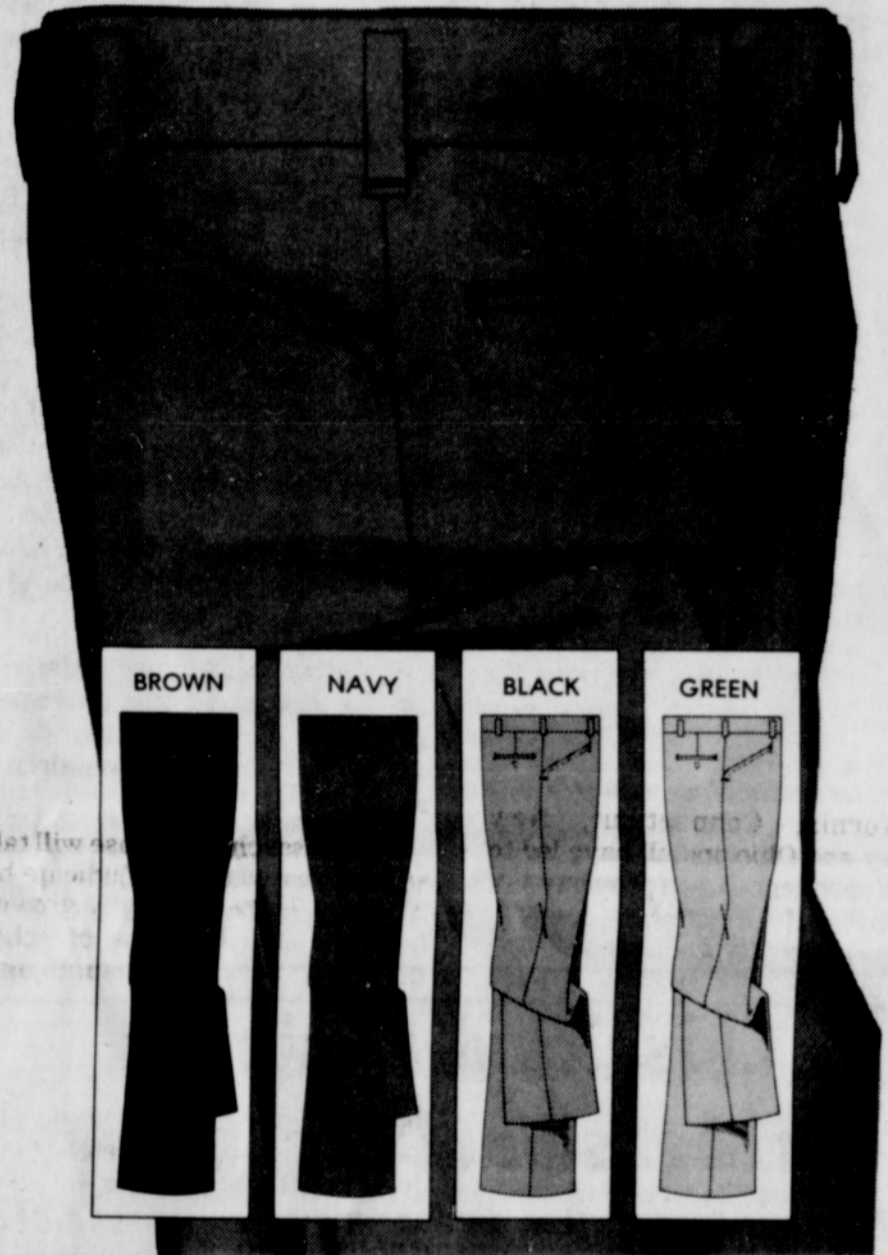
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