

OSU researching alternative crops, organics at Ontario extension center

Bill Buhrig adds local knowledge of ag to OSU Extension work

By SEAN ELLIS
EO Media Group

ONTARIO — Oregon State University researcher Bill Buhrig wants to help local farmers find alternative crops to plug into their rotations and establish a blueprint for growing organic crops in Eastern Oregon.

Buhrig was born and raised on a farm in the area, so he has an intimate understanding of the local agricultural production system and its challenges.

Buhrig, 39, says he “never really left home” when he accepted the job as a crop agent with OSU’s Malheur County Extension office 18 months ago.

Even while working for six years as a scientific aide at University of Idaho’s Parma research center 18 miles away, he commuted to work from his farm in Vale, Ore.

Fellow OSU researcher Stuart Reitz said Buhrig’s knowledge of the local agricultural industry, as well as his familiarity with the world-leading research on onions and potatoes being conducted at the Parma station, make him a valuable addition to the Malheur County Extension office.



Oregon State University crop agent Bill Buhrig is a researcher at OSU’s Ontario research station.

“We learned just enough to want to learn more. It’s piqued my curiosity.”

— Bill Buhrig,

OSU researcher on pumpkin seed growth in Eastern Oregon.

“He knows a lot of farmers in this area, they know him and he has a very good relationship with growers around the community,” Reitz said. “He’s a tremendous asset to the office.”

One of Buhrig’s main goals is to help local farmers find alternative crops they can plug in to their traditional four- or five-year rotations.

In 2014, he began exploring whether pumpkin seed for

snacks could be grown profitably in the valley.

After a local economic development agency informed researchers that some buyers wanted to know whether it was plausible to grow pumpkin seeds in the valley, Buhrig and other researchers planted 200 row feet of the crop.

“We learned just enough to want to learn more,” he said. “It’s piqued my curiosity.”

Buhrig will replicate the trial this year, and if the results are successful, researchers will start working with a handful of growers to continue exploring the idea.

“From an agronomic perspective, it seems plausible,” he said. “From a logistics perspective, we still have some work to do.”

Potatoes and onions, two of the region’s main cash crops, are grown on 4- or 5-year rotations. A pumpkin seed crop also requires that same type of rotation, Buhrig said.

“This is something that could be dropped right into a crop rotation in this valley,” he said.

Buhrig also wants to develop a blueprint for organic production in the valley. A lot of farmers in the area want to explore the organic market but there is no real agronomic game plan for growing organic crops in the area, he said.

Buhrig is applying for grants that would enable him to set up a 30-acre trial on a full-circle pivot. Multiple crops would be grown on half the acres under conventional methods used in the valley and those same crops would be grown on the other side using no-till organic methods.

“I would like to blueprint out reduced or no-till organic production in this area,” Buhrig said. “That’s a big goal of mine.”

Tyson Foods hopes to rid U.S. chicken of antibiotics by 2017, others to follow

By KELLY P. KISSEL
Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Tyson Foods intends to stop using human antibiotics in its domestic chicken flocks by September 2017, the company said Tuesday, and will explore doing the same for its beef, pork and turkey operations.

The move comes as restaurants demand more natural, unaltered food and amid concerns that widespread antibiotic use can lead to drug-resistant germs. An animal welfare group said if antibiotics are to be taken away, other steps were needed to ensure birds remain healthy.

McDonald’s said in March it wants suppliers to stop using human antibiotics in poultry within two years and the Panera and Chipotle restaurant chains say chicken they currently serve is antibiotic-free.

Donnie Smith, Tyson’s president and CEO, said the 2017 target wasn’t intended to match any customer’s timetable.

“As we worked with our animal pharmaceutical partners and with researchers and with others ... it’s just the first point at which we felt like we would be in a position to totally eliminated the human-used antibiotics,” he said on a conference call.

Christine Daugherty, Tyson’s vice president of sustainable food production, said discussions would begin in the summer about additional antibiotic restrictions, though the company made no pledge.

“For other proteins, the animals in the cattle, hog and turkey supply chain, we want to get to reducing human-use



Chickens gather around a feeder in a Tyson Foods Inc., poultry house near Farmington, Ark. AP file photo

antibiotics on the farm as well but we don’t have a time frame,” she said.

She said human-used antibiotics would still be used in poultry if it was the best course of treatment.

“We will not compromise the well-being of the animals,” she said.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals cautioned that if antibiotics are taken away, the industry must take other steps to keep birds healthy, such as giving chickens room to roam, improving sanitation and addressing poor genetics.

“If animal welfare is not addressed in conjunction with pulling back the drugs, this could actually be a very dangerous move for birds and ultimately for consumers,” said Suzanne McMillan, content director for the Farm Animal Welfare Campaign of the ASPCA.

Tyson said while it already has a premium, antibiotic-free line of poultry, weaning all flocks from human-use antibiotics is not expected to increase costs to consumers. Smith said only a small percentage of birds are treated with antibiotics and are cleared of any residuals before being sent to a processing plant.

Dr. Bill Hewat, the director of Tyson’s international veterinary and live operations services, said the company has strict guidelines on who can enter poultry houses, which can help reduce the risk of contamination.

“We either prevent or contain diseases with our practices of entering houses and transportation and movement of people around the farms,” Hewat said. “Part of this ability for us to reduce these antibiotics has to do with the biosecurity program as well.”

Chileans brace for volcano’s toll on livestock, farming

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — The eruption of Chile’s Calbuco volcano threatens to cause widespread and lasting economic damage, turning cattle pastures barren and choking fish with volcanic ash in one of the world’s top salmon-producing countries.

Thousands of cattle and sheep in danger of dying have been evacuated in Los Lagos. The region produced about 950 million liters of milk last year worth about \$346 million, said Ema Budinich of the National Agriculture Society.

“About 50 percent of Chile’s milk production is located in Los Lagos, so this is affecting the whole industry,” Budinich said Tuesday.

Emir Jadue of the Chamber of Commerce in the nearby city of Puerto Varas estimated the costs at about \$600 million and a 50 percent drop in the region’s hotel industry.

Official damage estimates are not available yet, but Eduardo Aguilera of the



Dead fish lie in a tank at a salmon farm, destroyed by volcanic mudflows from the Calbuco volcano, in an area along the Rio Blanco in Puerto Montt, Chile, Saturday.

National Fishing Service says about 20 million fish have died.

Calbuco roared back to life Wednesday after lying dormant since 1972. It billowed ash about 11 miles high in the initial blast, then several hours later produced a second, spectacular outburst that turned the nighttime sky reddish orange

and caused huge lightning bolts to crackle through its ash plume.

Some 4,500 people have been evacuated. But the Los Lagos agricultural service said more than 45,000 animals remain at risk from eating plants and drinking water contaminated by volcanic ash. Experts say the soil in the area may not

recover for over a year.

The animals “are practically without food because the pasture ceased to exist. They’re roaming on volcanic rock,” said Rodrigo Lavin, head of a farming group in Llanquihue, a province of Los Lagos.

The mighty blasts left Ensenada, about 10 miles from Calbuco’s peak, a ghost town, abandoned by most of its 1,500 residents. Military officials and some returned residents have been clearing the thick soot that covers the town.

“Our three horses, which had been missing since the eruption, finally came back yesterday gaunt and thirsty,” said Daniel Patricio Gonzalez who left town with his wife and children.

“But many other people have had to sacrifice their sheep because packs of hungry wild dogs have been eating them,” Gonzalez said. “The losses from this eruption are huge, but the animals are the ones who are suffering the most.”

Oregon House committee OKs \$2M pesticide measure

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Farm regulators would receive an additional \$2 million for regulating pesticides in Oregon under legislation passed by a key legislative committee.

The House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources approved House Bill 3434, which funds increased pesticide rule enforcement, despite concerns by some lawmakers over how the money will be spent.

Numerous pesticide bills were considered by the committee this year, including bans on neonicotinoids and aerial spraying, before a work group narrowed down several concepts, including:

- Initiating a review of no-spray buffers by the Oregon Department of Forestry.
- Establishing standard operating procedures for investigating pesticide complaints by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.
- Increasing the maximum civil penalties for pesticide violations by two-fold.

During an April 21 work session, Committee Chair Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, said these concepts would be taken up in a new bill before the House Rules Committee.

However, the funding component — House Bill 3434 — remained before the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, said he was uncomfortable with approving \$2 million in funding for pesticide programs that may be changed by the House Rules Committee.

“They can take your ideas and chose to do whatever they want to do,” he said.

Rep. Gail Whitsett, R-Klamath Falls, said she also planned to vote against HB 3434 for the same reason.

“I don’t know what might happen down there,” she said.

Witt said he was assured the upcoming bill before the Rules Committee would reflect the one agreed upon by committee members and the pesticide work group.

Rep. Wayne Krieger, R-Gold Beach, and Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Medford, said they would give HB 3434 “courtesy votes” but may change their positions depending on what happens with the remaining pesticide legislation.

The committee voted 6-2 to refer the bill to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means with a “do pass” recommendation.

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