



John Walchli's potato processing facility is completely taken over to wash, sort and package donated potatoes on Wednesday outside of Hermiston.



A potato harvester digs up and then loads potatoes into a semi trailer in a plot at the Hermiston Agricultural Research & Extension Center.



Bags of donated potatoes are stacked onto a pallet Wednesday at John Walchli's potato processing facility outside of Hermiston.

POTATO: Benefits 7,500 people served by CAPECO

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single-day project, especially because they were just going to till it over," she said. The harvest benefits the 7,500 people served by CAPECO, she said, and the excess is donated to the Oregon Food Bank through the nonprofit organization Farmers Ending Hunger founded by Fred Ziari. John Burt, executive director of the nonprofit, said last year's donation from HAREC was the

largest single donation the organization ever received at one time. Efforts such as this donation have helped the organization grow. "We got 2.5 million pounds of donated stuff last year, and we're going to do 3.5 to 4 million this year," he said. "It's growing, getting bigger — potatoes, onions, carrots, vegetable crops in the valley, fruit, fresh stuff, 22 head of cattle every month — a real mix of things. The fact that we exist gives a focal point for these

growers to say, 'I'll donate through that.' " However, getting the potatoes out of the ground, cleaned, packed and transported requires a lot of work. Stahl Farms stepped up to harvest the potatoes Wednesday morning, and Medelez & BJK Transport provided trucks to haul them for processing. John Walchli Farms and Paul Kern, from Botsford and Goodfellow, processed and packed them. Steve Walker Farms then provided transportation to

another facility for holding until the food bank could pick them up. Herb Stahl, from Stahl Farms, said it was nice to be able to give back. "Farmers Ending Hunger is a great organization," he said. "For us to be a part of it with the rest of the neighbors and farmers around here is wonderful. It's a great opportunity." Contact Sean Hart at smhart@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4534.

FUEL: Residents that drive an average 10,000 miles per year would pay just \$2 a month if the tax is enacted

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Association's political action committee, a Portland lobbying organization for the state's fuel industry. The campaign material cites the \$950,400 the city has received from its share of the state gas tax over the course of the fiscal year before asserting that more of that money should have been allocated to street preservation. According to the city, little more than \$300,000 went to street preservation, with the rest going to city salaries, overhead, insurance, street lights and other ancillary costs. Print isn't the only medium the association PAC has used to attack the campaign for a gas tax. Jeff Eager, a Bend attorney contracted by the PAC to help lead the campaign, said the PAC is behind a Facebook page that has been steadily posting anti-gas tax messages since Aug. 11. Under the name "No Pendleton Gas Tax," the Facebook page has 469 likes as of Wednesday afternoon and has been aggressive in its criticism of the city. On Oct. 4, the PAC posted a digitally altered photo of two boxers. One boxer's head has been replaced by the head of Pendleton City Councilor Neil Brown.

"The neat thing of it is, it's a 1-2 punch," it says at the bottom of the photograph, referring to a quote Brown gave to KUMA in support of the gas tax and the proposed \$5 street utility fee. "It was an unfortunate choice of words," Eager said of Brown's quote. Brown could not be reached for comment as of press time. Sam Byrnes, the owner of the Walla Walla-based oil distributor Byrnes Oil Co., said the campaign against the gas tax isn't personal, its a matter of protecting his business. Byrnes and Eager spoke with the East Oregonian editorial board Oct. 8 to present their case against the gas tax. Byrnes, a veteran oil distributor whose company services gas station in Pendleton, La Grande and Walla Walla, said gas taxes affect his bottom line. If stations don't raise their prices in reaction to the tax, Byrnes said his 10 to 30 cent profit margin takes a hit. If they do, drivers can elect to get their gas on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, or Hermiston, or anywhere else down the road. In addition to Eager's suggestion that the city spend more state gas tax money on road preservation instead of overhead, Byrnes

said further economic development would prevent the need for the gas tax. The Oregon Fuels Association PAC is not without resources. Since August, the PAC has paid Insite LGA Corp., a consulting firm owned by Eager, \$5,499. Additionally, the PAC paid \$1,817 Gateway Communications of Portland to produce mailers. The Oregon Fuels Association PAC's budget for mailers might outpace the total amount of money the pro-gas tax PAC spends over the entirety of the campaign. Pendleton City Councilor Al Plute, the Lets Move Forward PAC's president, said the committee has raised \$1,500 so far and plans to spend \$1,700 at the most. While Lets Move Forward will also distribute mailers, councilor and PAC member Chuck Wood said in a meeting with the editorial board Wednesday that the committee's small budget requires they target only the people most likely to vote. Although Lets Move Forward is operating on a shoestring, committee members believe their message will outshine their bank account. PAC members pointed to a city statistic that said Pend-

leton residents that drove an average 10,000 miles per year would pay just \$2 a month if the tax is enacted. Added to another proposed fee, the city projected it could collect \$1 million per year from residents, commuters and travelers to repair the street system. Wood didn't believe that drivers would skip Pendleton if it had higher gas prices, evidenced by the gas tax for Airport Road sunseting a year earlier than expected, after the city collected all the funds it needed for the project. One reason street repair costs have risen while funds from the state gas tax have shrunk is the increasing prevalence of fuel-efficient cars. Although funds from a local gas tax would be less diluted than the city's share of the state gas tax, Wood admitted cars' climbing fuel efficiency are a longterm concern. But in the meantime, Plute said a failed gas tax ballot measure could have a grave effect on Pendleton's street system. "If this does not go through, there's going to be serious consequences," he warned. Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

COHO: Poor ocean conditions, climate change could be challenge

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meted to about 20,000 in the 1990s because of overfishing, the loss of habitat and the effects of hatchery fish, among other factors. In recent years, improvements have led to increased coho numbers: annual returns now range from 100,000 to 350,000 fish. But federal biologists say poor ocean conditions and climate change could pose a challenge to the coho. The main threats to overcoming that challenge, according to the plan, are degraded habitat and inadequate state rules. The loss of stream habitat for the rearing of juvenile coho salmon is a big concern. This habitat, according to the plan, is critical to produce enough surviving juveniles to sustain the coho population, especially during poor ocean conditions. Stream habitat includes large wood, pools, connections to side channels and off-channel alcoves, wetlands and backwater areas. A large part of the land with critical coho habitat lies on private land, including farmland and timber land. Because the plan is only a blueprint, its implementation will rely on the efforts of local jurisdictions, farmers,

timber companies and other private citizens. State agencies such as the Board of Forestry, which regulates logging buffers near streams, and the Department of Agriculture, which regulates pesticide spraying, will also play a large role, said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the two groups that sued this summer. "We need bigger buffers around streams where chemicals aren't sprayed. We need larger logging buffers," Greenwald said. Greenwald praised the plan for its focus on habitat restoration and strengthening laws to protect that habitat. The big concern, he said, is "whether the state of Oregon will step up and do what's necessary to have healthy salmon." NOAA Fisheries estimates the cost of recovery at about \$55 million over the next five years and about \$110 million to achieve full recovery, depending on the effectiveness of improvements to the coho salmon's habitat and the strength of laws protecting that habitat. The draft plan is open to public comment for 60 days. The agency plans to issue a final recovery plan in 2016.

FIRE: District identified \$3.2M in needed equipment replacements

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from a general obligation bond. If passed, the bond is estimated to cost tax payers an additional 54 cents per thousand dollars of assessed property value for 15 years. The owner of a \$100,000 home would see a tax increase of \$54 per year. The total amount generated from the bond would be similar to the amount expected from a 10-year local option tax that was voted down last year, but property owners would pay less each year. Lt. Steve Potts said the district is in the same position it was in last year. "The need that we have hasn't gone away," he said. "We need to have the equipment, and we haven't been able to get the resources or the funds ... because, over the years, costs have gone up, and we're at a fixed property tax rate. We have

"The air packs are 19 years old, and these are what our firefighters are using to go into deadly atmospheres and conditions, and they're relying on that equipment for their safety. We really need those air packs." — Lt. Steve Potts

enough to operate day to day, but that's just about it." The district has identified about \$3.2 million in needed equipment replacements and upgrades in the next 10 years — far more than this bond would provide. Potts said the list was cut down to "must have" equipment. "The air packs are 19 years old, and these are what our firefighters are using to go into deadly atmospheres and conditions, and they're relying on that equipment for their safety," he said. "We really need those air packs. That's the number one priority we have at this point because it deals directly with firefighter safety." The funding would also

be used to replace a 1977 water tender, or tanker truck, and a 1979 heavy rescue vehicle and refurbish or replace a 1986 ladder truck and possibly a 1997 brush truck and a 1997 engine, according to information from the district. Potts said if the district's equipment suffers a catastrophic failure similar to its last ladder truck and it cannot afford replacements, residents may end up having to pay more to insure their homes. He said some of the vehicles are already starting to show their age. "In the last month, two of the vehicles we are looking to replace have been in the shop for repair," he said.

"These apparatus are starting to cost us money from a maintenance perspective. It's not to say that new vehicles don't have these issues, but the likelihood is much, much less. And we're not saying we're going to go out and buy brand new, but we're certainly going to get newer (than 30-year-old firefighting vehicles)." If funding allows, the fire stations would also be upgraded to include automatic doors and living quarters for quicker response times, according to information from the district. For more information about the bond, visit umatillafire.org or call 541-922-3718.

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