

Harvest links Gilliam County farmers to flour mills of Asia

Despite challenges, family stays in the field to feed world

By ERIC MORTENSON
EO Media Group

CONDON — It's a limited palette this time of year in the Columbia Plateau counties. Blue sky above brown fallow, with combines of John Deere green or Case IH red moving in slow, shrinking circuits around golden wheat fields.

It's an empty landscape, most ways you look. Few buildings and no traffic. And in that emptiness, you can lose track of the broader world. The wheat kernels tumbling into the hopper on Chuck Greenfield's combine are the reminder of the connection. From Gilliam County, with fewer than 2,000 people, it will go to flour mills in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines.

"Feed the world," Greenfield says.

It is a diminished group of farmers who can make a living doing that. Greenfield's employer, Marc Pryor, said the county had about 150 wheat farmers in the 1970s. Now he estimates the number is in the teens. It's a classic example of the economy of scale: Like most crops, wheat's narrow profit margin makes it critical to spread input, equipment and labor costs over more acreage, and it forced many farmers to get bigger or get out.

In 1950, Oregon had 34,000 farms of one to 49 acres. Now it's down to 21,800 in that size category. The state lost 8 percent of its farmers between the 2007 Census of Agriculture to the next one in 2012.

The weather, crop diseases, equipment breakdowns and the market don't care. Wheat that sold for \$7 a bushel one year brings \$5 the next. There may be enough rain to germinate and nourish a dryland wheat crop through the bone-dry summer, and there may not. "It's pretty tough right now," Pryor says.

He's 66 and trying to maintain the farming operation that flourished under his father, Earl Pryor, now retired. His stepmother, Laura Pryor, was the Gilliam County judge for many years. The family business, now called Prycor LLC.,



Chuck Greenfield, who turns 72 in September, is field manager for the Pryor family in Gilliam County. In his 35th harvest season, he calls it "a good way of life."

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— Chuck Greenfield, field manager for the Pryor family in Gilliam County

farms about 3,500 acres. Marc Pryor monitors the farm from Los Angeles, where he lives and has a business, and returns home to Condon for harvest.

Marc Pryor is president of an engineering forensics business, which involves finding out why materials, products, structures or components fail, or don't work like they should. Farmers have their own structural problems.

Some are putting land into conservation reserves and making money that way, Pryor says, but that takes land out of production and limits expansion possibilities. Estate taxes can make it difficult to pass farms along to heirs, and in some cases the previous generation still needs to be supported by the farm's revenue. A strong U.S. dollar can make U.S. wheat more expensive than competitors', crucial to Pacific Northwest producers whose wheat is exported.

But to people who question the business, Pryor has a ready



Operator Justin Waggoner swings his Case IH combine into wheat growing outside Condon. Despite its rural roots, Columbia Plateau wheat is exported to Asia.

answer. "Well, we produced over six million pounds of food this year, what have you done?"

"And it's in our blood," Pryor adds. "That's why we're still doing it."

Chuck Greenfield, the combine driver, talks about the same thing. He turns 72 in September and is the Pryor field manager. He's worked for the family 35 years.

"You're kind of independent, you don't have to deal with a lot of people," he says. "If you work in a factory, you're basically a number."

He glances over, taking his eyes off the machine's spinning header for a second.

"As far as I'm concerned, this is a good way of life," he says. "It's not always bad to sit and listen to the combine."

His grandson, Justin Waggoner, is driving the red Case IH combine. He went to school to learn welding, but returned to the wheat fields.

"I didn't ask him to come back," Greenfield says. "He's got farming in his blood."

Greenfield and his grandson circle in to the trucks to unload. Truck driver Buster Nation, who says he's "16 running on 17," manipulates an auger transferring wheat from a smaller truck to a larger one, which will haul the load to a grain elevator.

The teen says he didn't know how to do anything when he started this summer; now he can operate every piece of equipment out here.

"This is one of the best learning experiences I've ever had," he said.

PENDLETON

City priority list ready for public input

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Over the next four months, the public will get a chance to tell the Pendleton City Council whether it should stay the course or reshuffle the deck in favor of new priorities.

After a priorities committee met a second time Monday, mayor-elect John Turner released a set of 12 priorities for the 2017-2019 biennium, which Turner and members of the committee will show to residents with the goal of cutting the list down to four or five for the council to approve in January.

The latest draft of the priority list mostly changes grammar and phrasing from the original draft the committee made Aug. 15, but there are a few key differences.

The committee changed "support UAS range economic development" to the more general "increase economic development activities."

The Eastern Oregon Regional Airport and its unmanned aerial systems range have been a focus of the council in recent years, even earning a spot on its 2013-2015 goal list.

Turner said the broadening the priority was less about deemphasizing the airport and more geared toward making sure they weren't "handcuffed" to any particular industry.

The other major change the committee made took the opposite tack — refining a goal that originally was much broader.

The first list featured a general statement about fostering "special relationships" with the Round-Up, Happy Canyon, Umatilla County and other community organizations. The priority now singles out the Round-Up and Happy Canyon and promotes expanding their capacities for current and future events.

Turner said Round-Up General Manager Casey Beard, who is on the committee, told fellow members that his association was interested in expanding their property beyond their current "campus."

Both the Round-Up and the city own several properties west of nearby Southwest 18th Street and have looked into co-developing the land.

"What's good for the Round-Up is good for the city of Pendleton," Turner said, quoting City Manager Robb Corbett.

With a list of priorities now in hand, members of the committee will now ask the public to rank their top five priorities, which will be considered when the list is pared down.

Turner said priorities that don't make the cut will still receive attention from the city, but the top priorities will get more notice from the council.

The list of 12 will be presented to community groups, local government bodies and the public at large through public meetings.

Turner and two new councilors will join the council at its first meeting Jan. 3.

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HERMISTON

New bottle recycling center opens Friday

East Oregonian

Hermiston's new center for recycling cans and bottles will open Friday.

The BottleDrop Redemption Center, operated by the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative, is located at the former Goodwill building at 740 W. Hermiston Avenue. It will be staffed and open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

As members of the recycling cooperative, Wal-Mart, Safeway, Fiesta Foods, Rite Aid, Bi-Mart and Big Lots in Hermiston will no longer be required by the state to take bottles and cans at their stores after Sept. 9.

Customers will be offered three different ways to redeem deposits. The center's self-serve machines will accept up to 350 containers per customer per day. Staff can accept and hand-count up to 50 containers per person. And regular customers can open a BottleDrop Account.

The account offers pre-labeled bags that customers can drop off at the center 24 hours a day for staff to count. Within 48 hours the deposit money will be available in the customer's account, which they can redeem for cash at participating grocery stores or use it to pay for groceries.

The Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative said in a news release that the Hermiston center will be the state's 16th BottleDrop center after the legislature approved a statewide rollout in 2013.

"You really have to experience one of our clean, spacious BottleDrop Redemption Centers to appreciate this whole new level of returning bottles and cans," John Andersen, President of OBRC, said in a statement. "We are excited for Hermiston residents to see how fast and convenient collecting your refund can be."

Meacham wolves kill calf

East Oregonian

MEACHAM — A 450-pound calf was killed by wolves on private land near Meacham Creek, according to the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

The animal was found injured and lying partially in a pond on a forested cattle pasture Aug. 20. It had numerous bite marks on its backside consistent with a canine, and wolf tracks were seen around the edge of the pond. The calf died minutes later.

The attack happened within the Meacham Pack's territory in the southern portion of the Mount Emily Unit. The pack had at least five total wolves as of the end of 2015.

This is the first confirmed wolf depredation in Umatilla County since May 20.

MISSION

New exhibit celebrates Happy Canyon

Also features saddle bronc champ Jackson Sundown

East Oregonian

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Happy Canyon Indian Pageant and Wild West Show, a new exhibition at Tamástlikt Cultural Institute will highlight its history. In addition, the exhibit features the 100th anniversary of Jackson Sundown winning the saddle bronc finals at Pendleton Round-Up.

"Jackson Sundown and Happy Canyon: A Century Later" opens Friday, Sept. 2 at the museum, which is located off Interstate 84, Exit 216 near Wildhorse Resort & Casino, Mission. There is no admission charge during the First Friday event.



The exhibition, created and curated by staff, historians and collectors, includes artifacts, photos, and written stories. Visitors will learn about Jackson Sundown's championship run and the history of Happy Canyon, including the story and participation by the Umatilla Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Named Oregon's official outdoor pageant five years ago, Happy Canyon is presented nightly during Pendleton Round-Up.

Roy Raley, the first Round-Up president, believed the community and visitors needed first-class entertainment during the evenings after the rodeo. Working with local tribal members and historians, Raley



Jason Hill and Becky Waggoner, doctor and nurse in the Happy Canyon Night Show, attempt to save a man during a past performance. The show, which is celebrating its centennial year, is featured in a new exhibit at Tamástlikt Cultural Institute.

wrote the script, planned the scenery and directed the first pageants.

Today's pageant begins with the portrayal of the early American Indian culture. It shows the two cultures clashing as emigrants, seeking a new life, come to the frontier. Fighting breaks out, then peace comes and the scene changes to that of a wild frontier town. The show ends with a patriotic flourish.

Jackson Sundown, a well-known horseman and Nez Perce tribal member, was a crowd favorite. In 1911, he made the Round-Up's saddle bronc finals. Competing against George Fletcher, a

black man, and John Spain, who was white, the competition ended in controversy and protest.

Sundown made the finals again in 1915 — placing third. The third time was a charm for Sundown, as he finally won the finals in 1916.

The exhibit runs through Oct. 29. Tamástlikt is open Monday through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Regular admission is \$10 for adults, \$9 for seniors, \$6 for youths ages 6-17, free for ages 5 and under.

For more information, call 541-429-7700 or visit www.tamastlikt.org.