

Christmas tree checkoff supporters prevail in referendum

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Supporters of a national checkoff program aimed at promoting real Christmas trees have prevailed in another hard-fought referendum against opponents who believe it's ineffectual.

About 55% of farmers and importers voted in favor of the checkoff, which generates about \$1.8 million a year in mandatory fees of 15 cents per tree.

"I'm just delighted our industry will get the chance to help itself," said Betty Malone, an Oregon Christmas tree farmer who spearheaded the checkoff idea.

The program survived by a narrower margin of 1% in a previous election administered last year by the USDA, which oversees research and promotion boards for 22 crops.

Proponents of the Christmas Tree Promotion Board argue that collectively investing in advertising and research helps the industry compete against artificial trees, but critics claim indi-

vidual growers can spend their marketing dollars more effectively.

Farmers voted on the checkoff in 2018 after it had been operating for three full years. While the USDA didn't explain why another referendum was held in 2019, supporters and detractors assumed it was because the first vote was so close.

Supporters tried to "flood the zone with information" to clinch another victory this year, sending regular emails to farmers and speaking to state Christmas tree organizations, said Blake Rafeld, an Ohio farmer who led the pro-checkoff campaign committee.

"You never know how a vote is going to come out, and we had an organized opposition," Rafeld said. "My gut told me based on anecdotal information that we would be successful."

Real Christmas trees have steadily lost market share to plastic imports from China, necessitating a concerted approach to winning over younger consumers, according to checkoff supporters.

The Christmas Tree Promotion Board has focused on creating online videos



Capital Press Photo/Mateusz Perkowski, File

Workers load Christmas trees onto a conveyor in preparation for shipping at Sunrise Tree Farm near Philomath, which is owned by Pat and Betty Malone. The Christmas tree industry has voted for the second time in favor of continuing a research and promotion program.

meant to be shared through social media, highlighting the family memories created by real trees as well as their economic and environmental benefits.

The board is also directing money toward agronomic research, such as battling insect pests and diseases. "So many of the funding streams for research are drying up," Malone said.

Farmers Against Christmas Tree Taxation, an organization that opposes the checkoff, alleges that consumer preferences are largely driven by demographic trends, with artificial trees favored by older people without young children at home.

Farmers are more likely to reap gains from targeted advertising in their local area than from a generic

national campaign, which hasn't proven effective with commodities such as milk, according to opponents.

Sales were strong in 2018 due to a healthy economy but the Christmas Tree Promotion Board likely got some of the credit, potentially helping checkoff supporters in the referendum, said Frans Kok, a Virginia farmer who organized the anti-checkoff campaign.

"I think it's completely erroneous but the economy did what the economy did," Kok said.

It's possible for checkoff opponents to trigger another referendum if at least 10% of eligible farmers request it, but Kok said he'd like more information about the most recent vote before starting a petition.

New Oregon lab, seed certification bring standards to hemp

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

AURORA — A unit of wheat is called a bushel, and a standard weight of potatoes is called a century. But hemp as a fully legal U.S. agricultural commodity is so new that a unit of hemp seed doesn't yet have a universal name or an agreed-upon quantity.

That's one example of the startling lack of uniformity — and accountability — in an industry that's sprung up almost overnight since the U.S. late last year removed hemp from the controlled substances list.

A global hemp research lab announced Thursday in Oregon, coupled with a nascent national review board for hemp varieties and a handful of seed certification programs nationwide, are the first steps at addressing those concerns — and creating accountability by standardizing U.S. hemp for a global market.

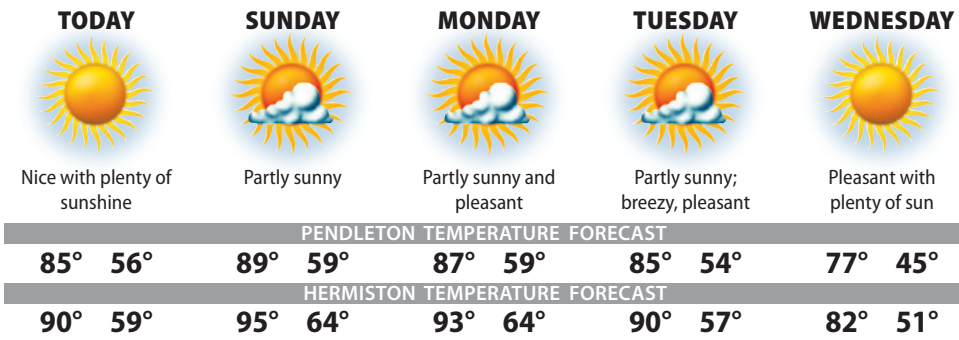
"If you look at a lot of financial markets, they're all saying, 'People are investing in this, and we have no idea what to divide it by,'" said Jay Noller, head of Oregon State University's new Global Hemp Innovation Center. "We have hemp fiber. What is it? What's the

standard length?" Oregon State's research hub will be the United States' largest and will offer a certification for hemp seed that guarantees farmers the seed they're buying is legitimate and legal. That's a critical need when individual hemp seeds are currently selling for between \$1.20 and \$1.40 per seed — and an acre of crop takes up to 2,000 seeds, Noller said.

Licensed hemp acreage in Oregon, which has an ideal climate for growing the crop, has increased six-fold since last year, earning Oregon the No. 3 spot for hemp cultivation after Montana and Colorado, according to Vote Hemp, which advocates for and tracks the industry in the U.S.

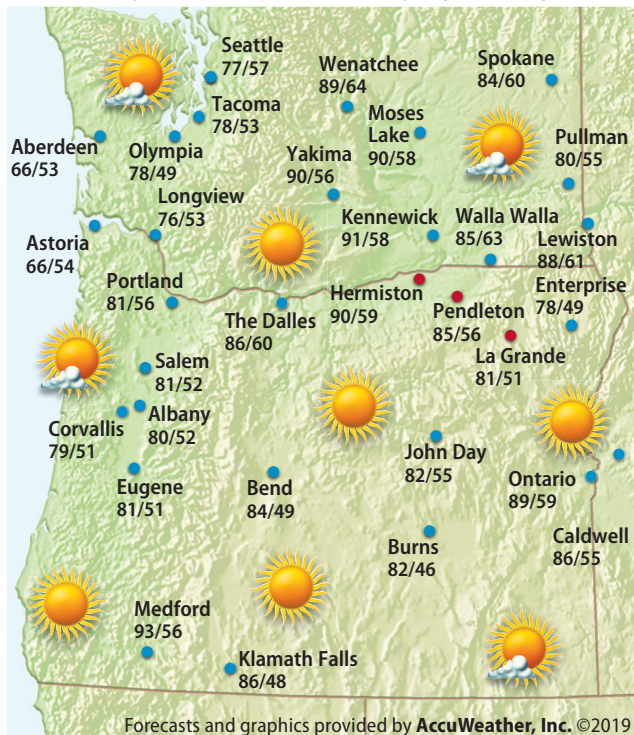
Four other states — North Dakota, Colorado, Tennessee and North Carolina — also have hemp seed certification programs. Other U.S. universities, such as Cornell in Ithaca, New York, have hemp research programs, but Oregon State's will be the largest, built on years of hemp research done in test fields in China, Bosnia and Serbia and now at 10 research stations sprinkled across the state. On Thursday, Oregon State researchers began to sow their third crop in a field in Aurora.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	80°	54°
Normals	78°	52°
Records	103° (1933)	37° (1930)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.05"
Normal month to date 0.72"
Year to date 9.33"
Last year to date 6.33"
Normal year to date 7.23"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	84°	62°
Normals	79°	53°
Records	102° (1933)	37° (1930)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date Trace
Normal month to date 0.33"
Year to date 4.42"
Last year to date 5.00"
Normal year to date 5.44"

WINDS (in mph)

Boardman	Today	Sun.
	SW 4-8	SW 4-8
Pendleton	WNW 4-8	WNW 4-8

SUN AND MOON

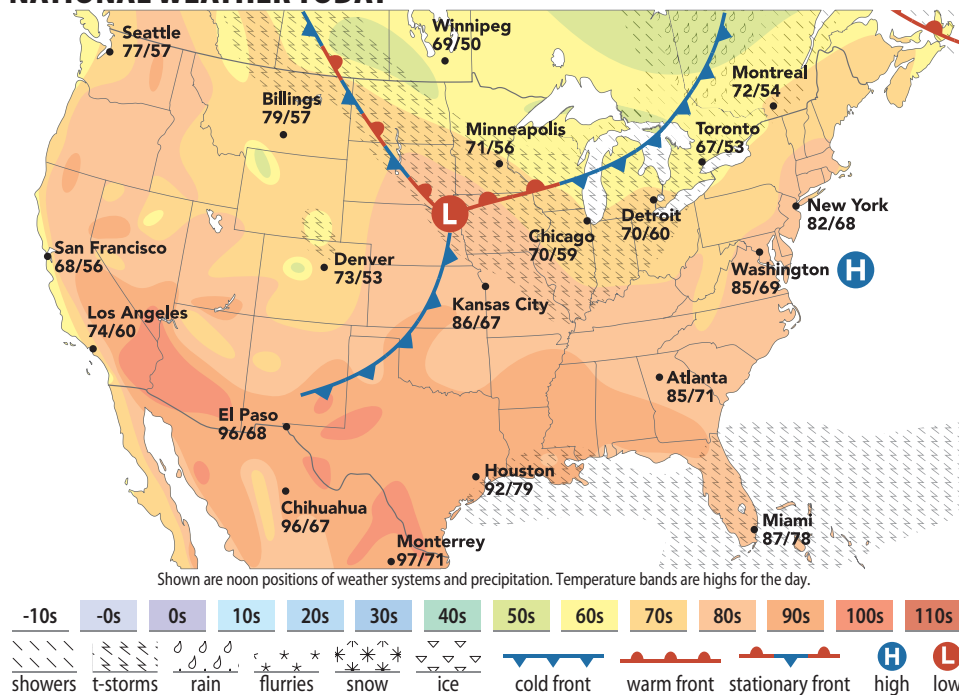
Sunrise today	5:05 a.m.
Sunset tonight	8:46 p.m.
Moonrise today	7:14 p.m.
Moonset today	4:09 a.m.

Full Last New First
June 17 June 25 July 2 July 9

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 104° in Needles, Calif. Low 29° in Embarrass, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



OREGON IN BRIEF

Bend man presumed drowned after canoe overturns in reservoir

BEND (AP) — Authorities say a 29-year-old Bend man is presumed drowned after a canoe he was in with a friend tipped over in Wickiup Reservoir southwest of Bend.

The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office says deputies were sent to the Davis arm of Wickiup Reservoir Thursday morning after receiving a drowning report.

The sheriff's office says the two men were camping and went out in a canoe with a dog.

The sheriff's office says the canoe overturned at about 2 a.m. and that a 24-year-old Bend man and the dog swam to shore. The other man remained missing Thursday evening.

The sheriff's office says searchers found gear from the canoe on the lake floor and that a search will continue.

The sheriff's office said alcohol is believed to have been a factor and that neither were wearing lifejackets.

Grand Ronde tribes to purchase Blue Heron paper mill

PORTLAND (AP) — The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde plan to purchase the shuttered Blue Heron paper mill and more than 1 mile of land along the Willamette River upstream.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported purchasing the lands would give the tribes easy access to the river for ceremonial fishing and room for potential commercial development.

Grand Ronde Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy says they were not far enough in the process to say if the land would be used for commercial development, but have aspirations to develop the land.

Kennedy told Willamette Week Grand Ronde has no plans to build a casino in Oregon City if the land purchase is completed.

Kennedy said the tribes are midway through the purchase process but did not specify when the actual purchase would be made.



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