

Panda Express opens in Hermiston



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Hermiston residents wasted no time lining up for lunch after Panda Express opened its doors on Friday at 1530 N. First St. At noon, the restaurant was busy and a line of cars extended from the drive-thru window through the parking lot. The “fast casual Chinese” restaurant purchased the former Stockman’s Steakhouse building this summer and tore it down to build the new building.

USDA taking comments on program rule

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Farmers and ranchers have until Feb. 18 to provide feedback on proposed changes to one of the USDA’s most widely used conservation programs.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP, awards cost-sharing contracts with agricultural producers to help pay for things like improving irrigation efficiency, restoring pasture or managing woodlands for wildfire resilience.

EQIP is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. It was first authorized in 1996, and renewed again under the 2018 Farm Bill.

NRCS posted a draft assessment of the revised program rules in the Federal Register on Dec. 17. The agency is considering several changes to EQIP that officials say will adapt to new resource threats, such as greater weather volatility and drought, while making funding more available to beginning farmers.

Jay Gibbs, acting state



EO Media Group file photo

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is seeking comments on updates for EQIP.

conservationist for the NRCS in Oregon, described EQIP as the agency’s bread-and-butter initiative for healthy working lands.

“I view farmers as our first conservationists,” Gibbs said. “There is a huge benefit of conservation to society as a whole. We, as Oregonians, value clean air, clean water and open spaces, and landowners provide those benefits to society.”

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, NRCS awarded 2,452 contracts with landowners through EQIP totaling \$49.6 million and 1.2 million acres.

Projects might include converting fields from flood

irrigation to sprinklers to save water; building cross fences in livestock pastures to allow for better grazing and animal distribution; planting cover crops to prevent soil erosion; or building seasonal high tunnels, similar to greenhouses, that allow farmers to extend their growing season.

“It can be very costly to do some of these things,” Gibbs said. “This helps offset the cost of that.”

Gibbs said the interim EQIP rule contains language specifically targeting new and beginning farmers. With the average Oregon farmer now 60 years old, an

estimated 10.5 million acres of farmland is expected to change hands over the next 20 years.

NRCS is required under the interim rule to provide an advance payment option for beginning farmers, as well as other historically underserved producers, while raising the cost share rate for buying materials from “not more than” to “at least” 50%.

The interim rule also calls for expanding EQIP to include “new or expected resource concerns, adapting to, and mitigating against, increasing weather volatility, and addressing drought resiliency measures.”

“The concerns we’re seeing here today are far different from what they were 20 years ago,” Gibbs said. “Every Farm Bill, the agency has an opportunity to make some changes to the program.”

EQIP applications are accepted on a continuous basis, and evaluated based on priority resource concerns. NRCS will make available \$1.2 billion nationwide for producers in fiscal year 2020.

U.S. consumer spending up 0.4% in November

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans increased their spending in November at the fastest pace in four months, and income growth rebounded to its strongest gain since August.

The Commerce Department said Friday that consumer spending rose at a 0.4% annual rate last month, led by a jump in spending on durable goods, like autos. It was up from a more modest annual gain of 0.3% in October, and it was the best showing since July.

Incomes rose 0.5% after a weak reading in October, reflecting a surge in hiring last month in which employers added 266,000 jobs, the most since January.



AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

Horacio Ment shops at a Kohl’s store in Colma, Calif. The Commerce Department issued its November report Friday on consumer spending, which accounts for roughly 70% of U.S. economic activity.

Economists are expecting growth of around 2% in the current October-December quarter, similar to the 2.1% gain of the third quarter.

Consumer inflation, as measured by the Federal Reserve’s preferred price gauge, was 1.5% in Novem-

ber compared with 12 months ago. That’s still well below the Fed’s 2% annual inflation target, and it helps validate the central bank’s decision to keep interest rates low with little fear of igniting inflation.

The Fed has highlighted below-target inflation as a reason it could cut its benchmark short-term rate three times this year to aid an economy that was being slowed by uncertainties from the U.S.-China trade war and a global slump. The central bank has signaled that it expects to keep rates unchanged through 2020.

Last month’s 0.4% increase in consumer spending was led by a 1% surge in spending on durable goods, such as autos and appliances.

The saving rate edged up to 7.9% of after-tax income in November, compared with 7.8% in October.

\$49M deal struck to buy NORPAC facilities

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — The bankrupt NORPAC cooperative has struck a deal to sell its Oregon processing facilities for \$49 million to Lineage Logistics, a Michigan-based cold storage firm.

While the processing plants in Brooks, Salem and Stayton are included in the asset purchase agreement between NORPAC and Lineage Logistics, it’s unclear whether the latter two facilities will continue to be used for food processing.

Agribusiness entrepreneur Frank Tiegs said he’s planning to lease and operate the Salem facility temporarily, but plans to eventually buy the Brooks plant from Lineage and consolidate processing operations there.

“Our plan is to only operate Brooks,” said Tiegs, who owns 15 processing plants and farms more than 100,000 acres in the Northwest.

Tiegs said he’s also planning to buy the Stayton facility to “gut the plant out” by reusing or selling the equipment within it, and may potentially tear down the structure. Lineage Logistics would retain the corporate offices in Stayton, as well as the cold storage facility in Brooks, he said.

As for Lineage Logistics’ long-term plan for the Salem

facility, Tiegs said he’s unsure what the company wants to do with it. Several representatives of Lineage Logistics did not reply to requests for comment as of press time.

At this point, the asset purchase agreement is only tentative, as it must still be approved by a bankruptcy judge and the Oregon facilities may still be subject to competing bids.

When NORPAC declared bankruptcy in August, Tiegs had intended to buy all of its facilities in Oregon as well as its plant in Quincy, Washington, for \$155 million, but later backed out of the deal.

He recently ended up agreeing to buy the Quincy plant for up to \$107 million

after prevailing in a bidding war against the J.R. Simplot Co., a major agribusiness company.

The series of transactions with Lineage made sense to Tiegs because he didn’t want to own all of NORPAC’s assets. “They made it so the numbers worked for me,” he said.

The continued operation of NORPAC’s Oregon facilities for food processing is important for farmers in the Willamette Valley, who have long sold vegetable crops to the cooperative.

Also at stake are the fate of 1,400 people who worked at the Oregon facilities and were issued layoff notices during NORPAC’s bankruptcy.

BRIEFLY

Mirasol Family Health Center gets new manager

HERMISTON — Mirasol Family Medical Center has a new clinic manager.

Irma Solis, a Hermiston High School graduate, began her role there earlier this month.

Solis said in a news release that she has always had a love of health care and a desire to help those in need.

“At first, I wanted to become a pediatrician, but after getting my first degree, I decided I wanted to effect change in an administrative role,” she said.

She said her personal mission fits “perfectly” with Mirasol Family Health Center, which is part of the Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic network of care.

The clinic provides “whole-person care to those who are underserved, regardless of their ability to pay, citizenship, or socioeconomic status.”

Solis has been a part of the Hermiston community for nearly two decades and lives there with her husband and three children.

In her free time, she enjoys reading to her children before bed, running, baking and crochet.



Solis

banks are fortunate to have this accomplished group of bankers leading the Community Banks of Oregon. Their commitment and passion for community banking will be invaluable to our organization and the communities we serve,” said Linda Navarro, president and chief executive officer of CBO and the Oregon Bankers Association.

CBD-only retailer opens in La Grande

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon’s first CBD-only retailer, Nugget CBD, is officially open for business in La Grande and held a grand opening on Friday, according to a press release.

According to the release, Nugget CBD’s stock includes “a premiere selection of natural pain relief, health and wellness product,” which include “tinctures, oils, topicals, edibles, vape products, pet products and more.”

The release also states that Nugget CBD is a family-owned and “family friendly business” whose team is there to help educate and pair customers with CBD products that “help improve their lives in a clean and friendly environment.”

Nugget CBD is open Monday-Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. Active military members and veterans receive a 10% discount, according to the press release.

An online menu with pricing options is available at www.NuggetCBD.com.

2 Eastern Oregon businesses hit with DEQ penalties

SALEM — Two regional businesses were issued penalties from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality for November, a DEQ press release announced on Thursday.

Umatilla’s Fastrack Inc. was fined \$26,757 for a storm water violation stemming from a failure to monitor or implement a control plan, while Hep-pner’s Miller Manufacturing was fined \$413 for an air quality violation resulting from a failure to submit its annual report on time.

The violations were two of 20 issued by the DEQ in November, which ranged from Miller Manufacturing’s fine to a Portland business that was fined \$141,285. The department’s November penalties totaled \$443,914.

According to the press release, organizations and individuals have 20 days from Thursday to either pay or appeal the fine. A portion of the penalty may be offset by funding a separate project that benefits the Oregon environment.

— EO Media Group

BEO president elected as banking board officer

HEPPNER — Jeff Bailey, president and CEO of Bank of Eastern Oregon, was recently elected as secretary/treasurer of the Community Banks of Oregon Board of Directors.

A native Oregonian, Bailey has spent more than two decades with the Bank of Eastern Oregon. He’s also active in the Heppner Chamber of Commerce and Willow Creek Economic Development Group.

Other board officers elected to the CBO, which represents banks headquartered in Oregon, were Ron Green, chair (Oregon Pacific Bank, Florence), and Kenneth D. Trautman Jr., immediate past president (People’s Bank of Commerce, Medford).

Also, new four-year directors elected during the Dec. 6 election included Randy Compton, Kate Salyers and Jim Schlotfeldt. Those re-elected to new four-year terms were Trey Maust and Joseph J. Postlewait. Others currently serving on the board are Jarrett Stuchlik and Craig Wanichek.

“Oregon’s community



Bailey

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