

Coronavirus pandemic shears sheep industry

Pendleton
Woolen Mills
temporarily shuts
down operations

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

SALEM — Demand for lamb, wool and pelts is tanking in response to the coronavirus pandemic, industry representatives say, and prices are following suit.

It's having a tremendous impact on the industry, said John Noh, president of Idaho Wool Growers Association and a board member of the American Sheep Industry Association.

Wool has become unsaleable because the agency in New Zealand that does commercial testing of U.S. wool has closed due to coronavirus. Trade to major wool buyers in Italy and China has shut down, as has the pelt trade to primary markets in Turkey, China and Russia. Some trade was shut down to a degree before coronavirus, but it's even worse now, he said.

A large portion of the lamb market is restaurants and cruise ships, and they aren't operating. The timing is particularly difficult, as Easter is a main event for lamb sales.



A band of sheep grazes in the foothills of Boise, Idaho. The coronavirus outbreak has hurt the markets for lamb and wool.

Grocery trade is up, but that's for the lesser cuts of shoulder and ground meat. Sales of the more expensive middle meats are at a standstill, he said.

On top of that, the second-largest U.S. lamb packer, Mountain States Rosen, filed for bankruptcy, and its kill rate is way down.

In addition, Pendleton Woolen Mills has temporarily shut down its operations, he said.

"It's about as rough as I've

seen it in my 30 years," he said.

Mountain States Rosen filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on March 19 with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Wyoming, citing lost sales due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to court documents. Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code protects a company from the threat of creditors' lawsuits while it reorganizes its finances.

A spokesman for Pendleton Woolen Mills said the company closed its mills in Washougal, Washington, and Pendleton after an employee at the Washougal mill tested positive for COVID-19. The mills are closed until further notice.

Prices paid to producers are rapidly falling. Fat lambs, which were selling for \$1.45 to \$1.50 a pound, are now as low as \$1.25 — "if you can find somebody who will buy

them," Noh said.

Processing for the Easter holiday will end Friday, and he expects to see a sharp drop-off in both numbers and prices, he said.

Thirty days ago, the industry was short 30,000 head in the lamb feedlot inventory. It was looking like slaughter would stay current with good demand, he said.

But now things are shaping up for a glut ahead and no markets, he said.

The coronavirus outbreak is more than a disruption, he said, it's wreaking havoc on all industries but even more on small industries, such as the sheep business.

"It's such a small specialty market, we have a hard time moving our product as it is," he said.

Noh's flock just finished lambing, and he's apprehensive about the road ahead when it's time to sell his lambs for finishing in August.

"We're looking at very poor prices this fall," he said.

Right now, California sheep producers are bearing the brunt of the weak market. Lambs are ready for market, but they're having a hard time getting anyone to buy, he said.

Dave Johnson, vice president of marketing for Equity Cooperative Livestock Marketing Association, can attest to that.

"Finding a home for sheep in this climate is pretty tough," he said.

He's been trying to auction a load of 375 lambs that have been grazing on alfalfa pasture in the Imperial Valley. They were born in May 2019 in the Mountain West and put on pasture in California in December 2019. They're now ready for the feedlot, he said.

Up to 100,000 lambs are grazed in the Imperial Valley each winter and are ready for feedlots in February and March, sometimes the first part of April, he said.

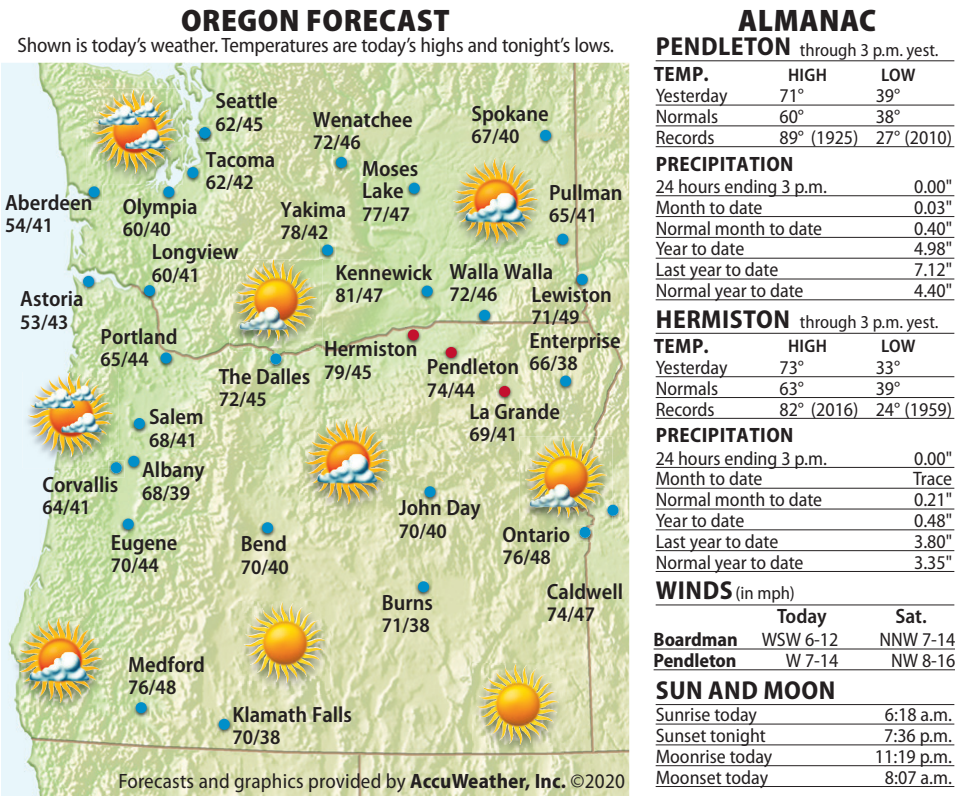
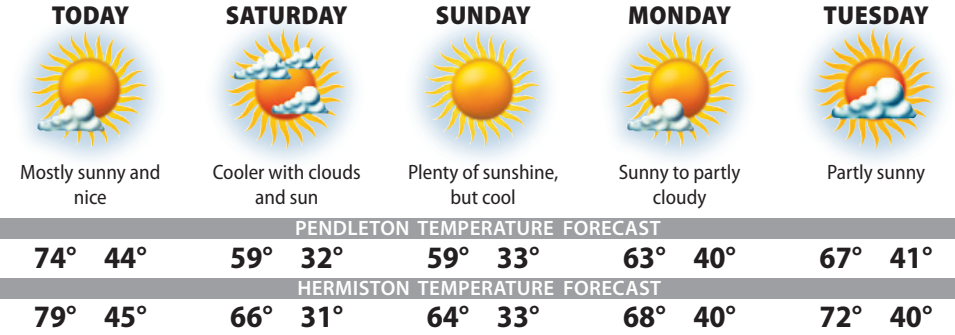
He's tried to auction the one load of lambs the last couple of weeks, but there are no bidders and it's hard to get price discovery. Fortunately, it's an online sale and the lambs weren't trucked to an auction yard; they're still on pasture, he said.

"It's a unique problem. I've seen it before, and I'll probably see it again. We'll find a home for them eventually," he said.

But he has no idea when — coronavirus is uncharted waters. The lamb market is a niche market and might not come back as fast as other markets, he said.

Most lamb typically goes to the restaurant trade. Now it has to pivot to retail sales, and packers have to package it differently, he said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

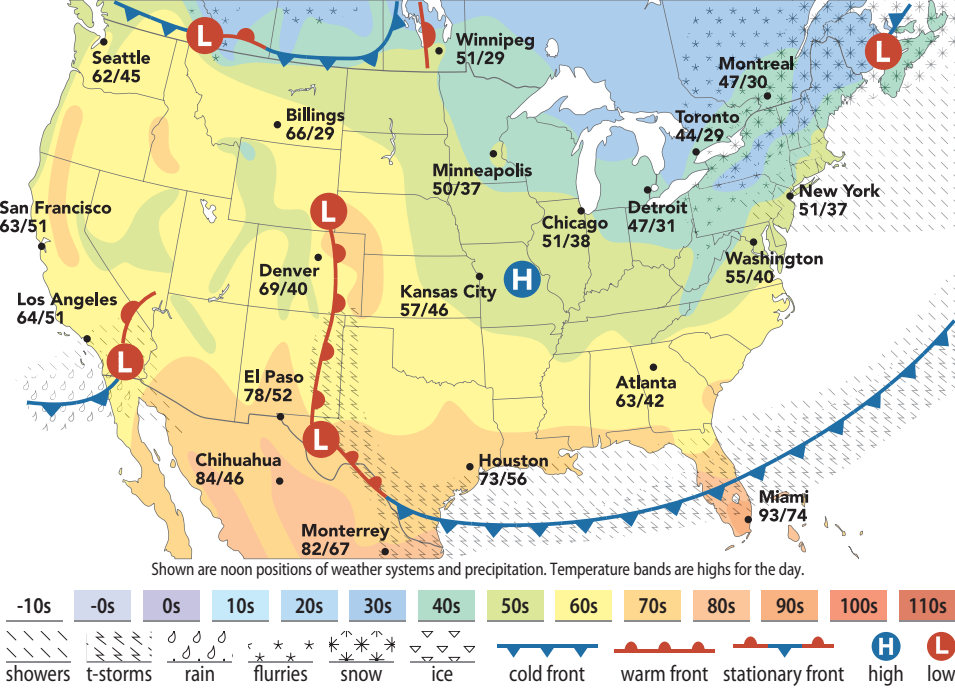


NATIONAL EXTREMES

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



OSAA cancels spring activities

By BRIAN RATHBONE
EO Media Group

WILSONVILLE — In the days leading up to Wednesday, the executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association, Peter Weber, began drafting a press release that he had never envisioned having to write — the cancellation of all OSAA spring activities for this year.

"We are heartbroken for the kids, especially the seniors," Weber said in a phone interview with *The Bend Bulletin*.

It was inevitable that once the school year was canceled, the high school spring sports season would soon follow suit.

Gov. Kate Brown

announced during a press conference on Wednesday afternoon that Oregon schools would remain closed for the remainder of the academic year. Within an hour of the school cancellation, the OSAA canceled the spring sports season as well.

"That was the conversation that the board had last week in anticipation that this might happen," Weber said. "Basically, it authorized us that if (Gov. Brown) does close down the schools, then we would take immediate action to cancel the spring activities."

The OSAA made it official Wednesday evening that all activities would be canceled.

"We had maintained

hope for an abbreviated spring season to help bring a sense of normalcy to these uncertain times," Weber wrote in the press release. "Now more than ever, we need to apply the lessons learned through participation in education-based activities — teamwork, sacrifice, and resilience — and play our role in adhering to the public health guidelines. We all look forward to the day we will play again."

The cancellation should come as no surprise. Since the OSAA canceled the remainder of the winter sports season, the state's high school governing body had made it clear that any more school closures would likely spell the end of spring activities.

Teen who killed sleeping man will serve about 7 years

EUGENE — A Eugene teen, who beat a man to death in 2018, has become the first to be sentenced under a new law designed to keep teens accused of serious crimes in Juvenile Court.

Jonathan Daniel Kirkpatrick, now 18, admitted during a Tuesday hearing that he killed Ovid Neal, a 56-year-old homeless man, *The Oregonian/OregonLive* reported. Kirkpatrick's crimes — murder, first-degree robbery and second-degree assault — are offenses that for adults carry long mandatory minimum sentences.

Kirkpatrick was initially charged as an adult, but the law underwent a significant change while his case was pending and he was returned to juvenile court because the crimes occurred when he was 16.

Lane County Circuit Judge Jay McAlpin ordered Kirkpatrick into the custody of the Oregon Youth Authority. The most he could serve is about seven years because the state

cannot hold or supervise juvenile offenders past their 25th birthdays.

Human remains found near Sweet Home are that of woman with brown hair

SWEET HOME — Human remains that were found near Sweet Home are that of a woman with short brown hair, authorities said.

Linn County Undersheriff Paul Timm said Wednesday that detectives and the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office have been investigating since his office got a call Friday about remains found on a U.S. Forest Service road about 13 miles east of Sweet Home.

The agencies have tentatively identified the remains as belonging to a white woman between the ages of 30 and 50.

She is believed to have had brown hair that was short and wavy. Investigators are continuing work to make a positive identification and cause of death.

— Associated Press

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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