

Farmworker safety program comes in under budget

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

SALEM — A program to reimburse Oregon farms for complying with costly COVID-19 worker protections came in well under budget during the 2020 harvest season.

State lawmakers are now considering what to do with millions of dollars that are leftover.

Oregon OSHA, the state's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, implemented emergency rules last spring to strengthen field sanitation, housing and transportation protocols at labor-intensive farms, such as fruit orchards and vineyards.

In response, Gov. Kate Brown allocated \$16 million to the Food Safety and Farmworker Security Program, which provided direct payments to farmers for the expense of meeting the OSHA rule — things like buying or renting additional portable toilets, reconfiguring cabins to ensure 6 feet of social distance, and arranging more buses to transport workers to the field.

As it turns out, \$16 million was more than enough. Just \$5.6 million was spent before the program expired on Dec. 31, 2020, leaving \$10.4



George Plaven/Capital Press, File

Oregon OSHA implemented a temporary rule to protect agricultural workers from spreading COVID-19, including a provision requiring one portable toilet for every 10 workers in the field. A state program to help farmers buy equipment has expired with millions of dollars left over.

million remaining, according to a Jan. 5 report from the Oregon Department of Administrative Services to the Oregon Legislature's Joint Emergency Board.

It is not precisely known what will happen to that money now. In a statement, Nikki Fisher, press secretary for Brown, said the state is discussing priorities for ongoing COVID-19 relief.

"There is a clear need to continue to work to protect migrant and seasonal farmworkers during the COVID-

19 crisis," Fisher said. "And we know that there are growers who are doing the best they can to mitigate the spread."

The Food Security and Farmworker Safety Program was intended to help Oregon secure its food supply chains while minimizing health risks for frontline workers, Fisher said. It was administered by the state Watershed Enhancement Board, in collaboration with the state's Department of Agriculture, Health Authority and Hous-

FSFS funding by county
The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board awarded 305 applications statewide for funding through the Food Safety and Farmworker Security Program, providing direct payments to reimburse farms for COVID-19 worker protections. The number of approved applications are broken down by county:

- Hood River — 50
- Marion — 49
- Yamhill — 29
- Wasco — 24

- Clackamas — 17
- Washington — 11
- Linn — 8
- Polk — 7
- Multnomah — 6
- Umatilla — 6
- Lane — 5
- Malheur — 4
- Douglas — 3
- Klamath — 3
- Jackson — 2
- Josephine — 2
- Benton — 1
- Jefferson — 1

tation, as farmers had to roughly double the number of portable toilets and hand-washing stations available to workers.

Some 14% of the applications were for housing modifications to ensure workers' beds would be 6 feet apart or separated by an impermeable barrier, such as Plexiglass. The remaining 12% was for providing additional transportation, since workers had to be spaced 3 feet apart inside vehicles.

Hood River and Marion counties accounted for nearly one-third of the applications awarded. The crops that were covered represent a vast swath of Oregon agriculture, including pears, cherries, wine grapes, hazelnuts, sweet potatoes, onions, corn, nursery stock, Christmas trees and hemp.

"We feel pretty confident, reaching out through (the media) and agricultural organizations, that we got to the folks who needed the program," Loftsgaarden said.

Jonathan Sandau, special assistant to ODA Director Alexis Taylor, said nobody was turned away from the program.

"We were prepared, hopefully, for whatever came at us," Sandau said. "I think we were able to provide complete assistance."

ing and Community Services Department.

Meta Loftsgaarden, OWEB executive director, said 228 farms participated in the program, estimating at least 21,000 farmworkers benefited from enhanced safety measures.

Initially, the program had strict caps in place to ensure there would be enough funding left for late-season crops. Once it became clear that would not be an issue, Loftsgaarden said those caps were lifted and the program was expanded to cover the cost of face masks and other personal protective equipment.

Approximately \$1.85 million was authorized in

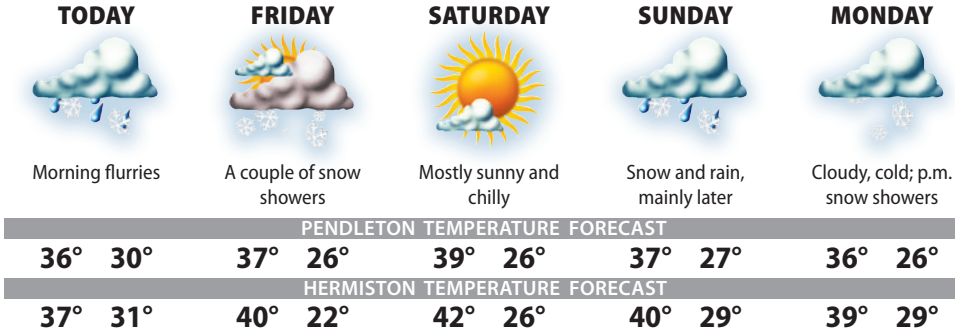
direct payments for farms. ODA and Oregon State University also partnered to distribute 3 million free KN95 masks for agricultural employers with support from the program.

Despite coming in well under budget, Loftsgaarden said she is confident the program was marketed aggressively for producers to take advantage.

"We never in this state, or in this country, have run a program like this," she said. "None of us knew up front what the ultimate cost was going to be."

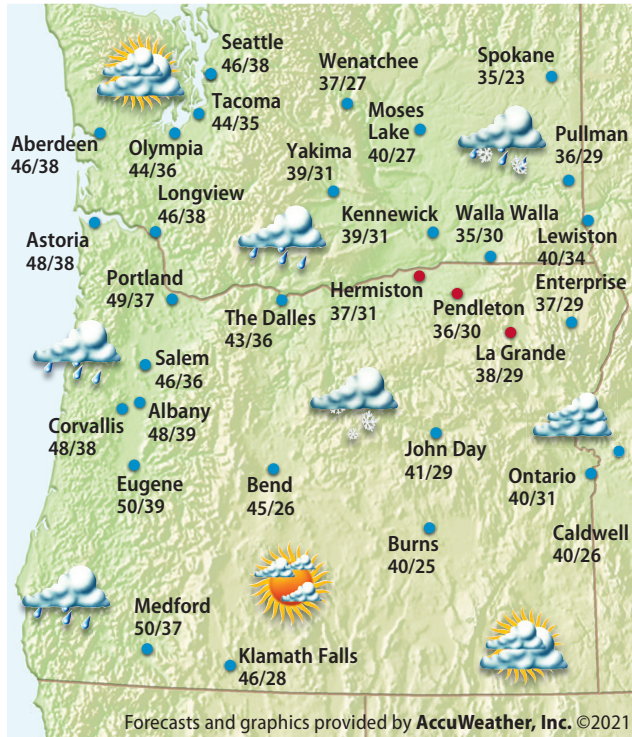
OWEB funded 305 total projects through the program. The vast majority, 74%, were for field sani-

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	42°	28°
Normals	42°	28°
Records	67° (1968)	-18° (1930)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m.

Month to date	0.44"
Normal month to date	1.00"
Year to date	0.44"
Last year to date	0.86"
Normal year to date	1.00"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	43°	25°
Normals	42°	29°
Records	60° (2010)	-32° (1930)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m.

Month to date	0.34"
Normal month to date	0.84"
Year to date	0.34"
Last year to date	0.13"
Normal year to date	0.84"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Fri.
Boardman	NNE 4-8	NNE 4-8
Pendleton	NNW 4-8	NW 4-8

SUN AND MOON

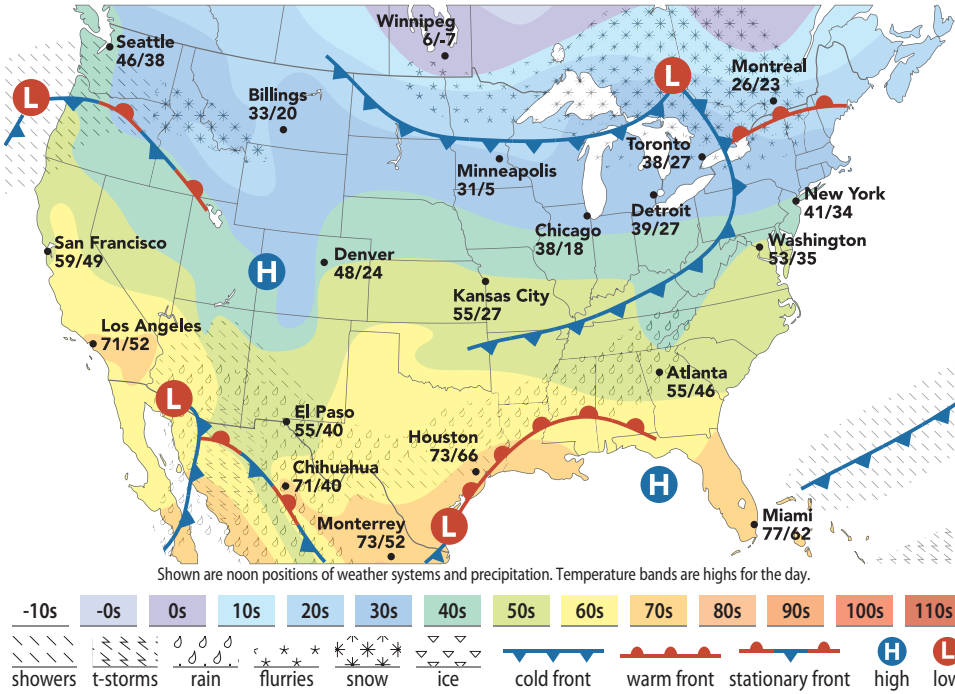
Sunrise today	7:28 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:46 p.m.
Moonrise today	11:40 a.m.
Moonset today	12:58 a.m.

Full Last New First
Jan 28 Feb 4 Feb 11 Feb 19

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 78° in Fullerton, Calif. Low -17° in Silver Bay, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Truck stop opens at Farewell Bend

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

FAREWELL BEND — A dark and remote stretch of Interstate 84 east of Baker City is considerably brighter in 2021.

Plus you can buy fried chicken. And there are fuel pumps and restrooms for potentially more pressing needs.

The Huntington Travel Plaza, part of the national TravelCenters of America network, recently opened beside the freeway at Farewell Bend, about 50 miles from Baker City.

The plaza fills a retail void dating back nearly a decade in the mostly unsettled 73-mile stretch of freeway between Baker City and Ontario.

The former truck stop at Farewell Bend, which included a motel, closed in May 2011 and the buildings were later removed.

That truck stop opened in the 1970s.

For much of the time since the truck stop closed, the only place to get a meal and

gas between Baker City and Ontario was at Huntington, which is about a mile off the freeway about 5 miles north of Farewell Bend.

Karam Singh of Vancouver, Washington, owns the new 12,000-square-foot travel plaza, operating as a franchisee under TravelCenters of America.

"I'm looking forward to becoming part of this community, bringing new jobs to the area and offering drivers a new place that is like home," Singh said.

The new travel plaza employs about 50 people, said Tina Arundel, director of communications for TravelCenters of America in Westlake, Ohio.

"There is a need for our services on this busy stretch of highway in Oregon," said Barry Richards, TravelCenters of America president.

Unlike the previous truck stop, the new Huntington Travel Plaza does not have a motel. It does include two restaurants — Champs Chicken and Naughty Chile Taqueria — with a third, the

Huntington Bar and Grill, opening soon.

Other amenities include 150 parking spots for semi-trailers and 40 for cars, eight diesel fueling and 12 gasoline fueling stations, and a 3,000-square-foot travel store that includes fresh deli items.

For commercial truck drivers there is a lounge, six showers, a fitness room and laundry.

A truck service center is scheduled to open in 2022, Arundel said.

The 40-acre travel plaza is in Malheur County, just east of the Baker County border.

The Singh family, which owns three gas stations in the Portland area as well as convenience stores, will buy the property from Amin Alibhei of Atlanta, who manages the company that owns the property, Deep Singh told the *Baker City Herald* in September 2020.

Alibhei's company bought the property in October 2019 for \$775,000, according to the Malheur County Assessor's Office.

The land previously sold for \$450,000 in June 2013.

IN BRIEF

Blue Mountain Land Trust doubles its protected acreage

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The Blue Mountain Land Trust, a local nonprofit, recently acquired a conservation easement on 6,798 acres in Oregon, doubling the agency's protected acreage across Southeastern Washington and Eastern Oregon.

The Land Trust, aimed at protecting fish and wildlife habitat, forests, grasslands and agricultural land in the Blue Mountains by collaborating with communities and landowners, purchased the Wheeler County easement in December 2020 from Terry and Peggy Long.

The now-protected acreage will provide protection and preserve the habitat for elk, mule deer, upland birds and other wildlife in the area and will reduce the threat of development that could disrupt the area's habitat and

geologic features, the Land Trust announced last week.

The property is in Mitchell, adjacent to the Painted Hills National Monument, the release stated.

The acquisition took more than three years. Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and Natural Resources Conservation Service are the project funders working with the Blue Mountain Land Trust, the release stated.

The property contains 3.1 miles of Bear Creek, an Endangered Species Act-listed salmon, and steelhead spawning stream. Restoration efforts have been underway by the property owners, working with other partners, such as The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District.

— *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*

CORRECTION: In the Page A1 story "CTUIR leadership applauds DOI pick," published Tuesday, Jan. 19, the story misspelled the names of Don Sampson and Sam Kash Kash.

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