

MILTON-FREEWATER

Asparagus farmer loses week's crop to frost

By EMRY DINMAN
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — On a 13-acre patch off Stataline Road near Milton-Freewater, farmer Felipe Jimenez examines asparagus stalks that had pushed their way up through frost-cracked earth, only to be ruined by unseasonable cold weather.

Successive freezing nights have blackened the purple asparagus — a sweeter, thicker and more tender variety that commands a higher price than green spears. The three green varieties Jimenez produces have yellowed and shriveled, frozen in place.

Jimenez Farms has operated in the Walla Walla Valley for around 10 years, selling primarily to area groceries and direct to consumers from the farm.

Every year around this time, Jimenez said he loses some portion of his crop to a late-season freeze. But as the frosty nights continued to add up last week and into the Easter weekend, he said this is the worst he's seen in at least the last five years.

"This is the worst," Jimenez said. "They just been coming up and then to be frosted up — we lost all this harvest. We lost all of it."

While the plant itself will eventually rebound with



Milton-Freewater farmer Felipe Jimenez checks some temperature-damaged asparagus in his fields, Friday, April 15, 2022, near Stataline Road.

Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

warmer weather, the ruined spears have no commercial value, costing both Jimenez and the fieldworkers that would otherwise be outside harvesting daily.

Optimally, Jimenez' asparagus can be harvested continuously for two and a half months, he said. Between a series of below-freezing nights and the time it will take the plants to recover, he estimates he's lost over a week of that harvest time.

With the entire region experiencing a mid-April bout of winter weather, many crops have been in danger of cold damage, from stone fruit to berries, tomatoes to eggplants. While asparagus

roots are better insulated against the cold, the spears that would make their way to the dinner plate are particularly sensitive to freezing temperatures, Jimenez said.

"These plants don't survive in cold at all."

Unable to make money from the current crop, Jimenez said he won't bother paying to have the frozen asparagus cut and thrown away.

"I just let it fall down, wilt down completely, and it will die out," he said. "It's not worth putting money into it. Too much money. The price went up for labor, and it's not easy."

In a smaller patch of ground across Jimenez's

driveway, rows of Walla Walla sweet onions stood tall, having apparently withstood the cold weather these last few nights. But a neighboring row of garlic was not as lucky, with the leaves of around half of the plants having shriveled up.

Still, dealing with bad weather is part of being a farmer, Jimenez said.

"I'm happy, because, even if you lost so many pounds, we'll survive when they start coming back," he said.

"But this is the worst one for the past five years," he added, pointing east to the Blue Mountains. "You don't see snow like this in April up there."

Stanfield mayor dies of heart attack, leaves grieving city

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — Thomas McCann, Stanfield mayor and beloved community leader, died Saturday, April 16, of a heart attack. He was 84.

"He had a really lengthy service to the public," Stanfield City Manager Benjamin Burgener said.

The city of Stanfield website has a list of McCann's public work. He was president of the Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police, president and board chairman of the Oregon Special Districts Association, Stanfield Fire District firefighter, Stanfield chief of police, Umatilla County Marine Patrol deputy sheriff and more.

The website states he had 37 total years of law enforcement experience, as well as crediting him for being a family man. Mayor McCann was married to his wife Sharone McCann for more than 50 years and had five children, as well as many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

On Tuesday, April 19, Sharone McCann shared recollections of her husband. His favorite restaurant was El Erradero, she said, and "he always looked forward to the annual Fourth of July celebration and announcing the parade."

"He meant everything to me," she said.

Sons Travis McCann and Terry McCann said they were hurting, only days after their loss.

Tom Pollard, the mayor's eldest son, spoke of his grief, too.

"There are no words for what I'm feeling right now," he said.

Other loved ones are voicing their heartache, too, as many people are leaving comments on Sharone McCann's Facebook page. They express deep feelings, using words like "kindness," "dear friend," "special," "gentle," "lovable" and more to describe the man and his behavior.

"My heart hurts," one post reads.

Coming to Stanfield to serve

According to Burgener, McCann came to Stanfield in 1977 from Arizona, where he served as a narcotics officer. In 1992, he left the Stanfield police and became mayor in 1995.

"His life was in public service," Burgener said. "He looked for ways to serve the community, protect the community and improve the community his whole life."

McCann brought many projects to his city.

"Most recently, we've been working through our downtown repaving project with (the Oregon Department of Transportation)," Burgener added. "The improvements, which we're still undergoing, will bring in lights, add sidewalks and make for a better business and community environment for the city."

McCann also was a "big proponent" of a proposed veterans memorial, Burgener said.

"He was beloved by all, probably one of the best mayors I've ever served around," Burgener said. "He loved the city, got involved and did everything he could for the city."

This death was unexpected, Burgener said. McCann had heart issues, he added, but he and others were shocked by his passing and were not ready for it. McCann's death is hitting Stanfield hard, he said.

Always ready to step up

Jerry Carlson, Stanfield finance director, recalled his years of working with McCann.

"I started a little bit after he started with the city in 1979, when he was police chief and I was hired to be city recorder," Carlson said. "So I've been working with him as mayor and as police chief for a lot of years."

He said McCann was a hard worker, who would "dive in and do what was necessary" to complete a task.

"When the city was flooded, it required people to stay up all night," Carlson said.

McCann was one of those people who was up all night, only to work the next day.

Carlson spoke of other times when McCann went the extra mile. When the city was short various officials, Carlson said, McCann stepped in.

"He was never shy about helping out," Carlson said.

He added he will miss his friend, but that the rest of the town will miss him, too.

Selecting a new mayor

McCann had more than two years left on his term.

Burgener said the Stanfield City Council will discuss options for selecting a new mayor at the city council meeting Tuesday, April 19.

According to Burgener, the council will discuss whether to appoint a fellow councilor to fill the role or select a different person from their community.

HERMISTON

DEQ: Lamb Weston plant polluted groundwater

BY ALEX BAUMHARDT

Oregon Capital Chronical

HERMISTON — Lamb Weston's French fry production plant in Hermiston has been discharging too much nitrate-loaded water onto area farms, according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

The wastewater flowing from the plant has contaminated the groundwater, causing nitrate levels in some nearby wells to measure four to seven times the safe limit set by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, according to DEQ.

The state agency on March 31 warned the company that it faced enforcement action for contaminating the groundwater.

It was the second such

notice issued to the company in recent months. In November, DEQ told the company it had been discharging too much tainted water on area farmland and faced enforcement action for that as well. The agency doesn't disclose such notices on its website or otherwise publicize the findings until an enforcement has been made.

The notices ask the company about what steps it intends to take to cure the violations. For the most recent notice, Lamb Weston has 45 days. The agency then will consider whether to require corrective action or fine the company, according to Laura Gleim, public affairs specialist at DEQ.

The Hermiston french fry plant is Lamb Weston's second largest plant in the Columbia River Basin. As of 2019, the plant had more than

500 employees who made nearly 750 million pounds of frozen potato products annually, according to Lamb Weston's website.

Company officials could not be immediately reached Monday, April 18, for comment.

The violations were discovered when the plant applied to renew its water discharge permit from DEQ. The permit allows the plant to recycle water used to wash and process potatoes, which come into the plant covered in soil and fertilizers. The facility distributes the wastewater to nearby farms as a source of nutrient-rich water for irrigation.

But Lamb Weston over-applied the water on farms 75 times between 2016 and 2020, according to compliance reports that DEQ reviewed. During that

time, 189 tons of nitrate in excess of permitted levels were applied in an area already deemed a vulnerable groundwater management area.

Such areas receive extra resources and planning from DEQ and designated committees in the area to reduce groundwater contamination.

DEQ said in its notices that wells down slope from where Lamb Weston's nitrate-rich wastewater was applied had levels of nitrate between 36 and 79 parts per million. EPA limits for safe drinking water are no more than 10 parts per million.

Nitrate is difficult and expensive to remove from water, and for those who rely on wells for their drinking water, getting rid of nitrate requires filters that cost thousands of dollars.

BOARDMAN

Gunfire leads to standoff, three surrender to SWAT

East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — A call Monday night, April 18, about gunshots in Boardman led to a standoff and subsequent arrest of three suspects.

Miguel Gutierrez, 26, of Boardman, Noe Francisco Sanchez, 21, of Boardman, and Joseph Daniel Simpson, 18, of Pendleton, now are in the Umatilla County Jail.

Boardman police in a news release reported Morrow County Dispatch at 10:14 p.m. April 18 received a report of gunshots in the area of Northwest Boardman Avenue and West

Second Street, Boardman.

The caller reported hearing eight to 12 gunshots and seeing a dark-colored sedan leaving the area.

Boardman police and Morrow County sheriff's deputies checked the area and found the vehicle. During the investigation, officers found a vehicle in the area had been shot multiple times.

Officers located three suspects at a residence on Allen Court, Boardman, according to the news release, and as law enforcement approached, one suspect ran inside the residence.

Officers made multi-

ple attempts to get them to surrender, but they refused, Boardman police reported, so local law enforcement contacted Oregon State Police SWAT and asked for its help.

"The suspects refused to surrender for approximately five hours," according to the news release, but they eventually gave up to the SWAT team.

Boardman police then arrested Gutierrez, Sanchez and Simpson and booked the trio into the jail in Pendleton on charges of unlawful use of a weapon, first-degree

criminal mischief and reckless endangering of another person.

According to the online jail roster, police also arrested Sanchez for felon in possession of a weapon and for a felony probation violation, while Gutierrez faces an additional charge of fourth-degree assault.

Celebration of Life for Ryan Neal

The family of Ryan Neal has been touched deeply by the outpouring of love, care and concern after our loss. Thank you for reaching out; we have been uplifted by hearing from each and every one of you.

A celebration of life will be held outdoors on May 7, 2022, at 3 p.m. at the Marker 40 Golf Club, 78873 Toms Camp Road, Boardman, Oregon.

Gary, Kathy, Rochelle, Ari and Sonja



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