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INSIDE AREA FARMERS SEE RECORD RAINS IN AgriBusiness



MORROW COUNTY

County provides water filters to counter high nitrates

Installation of first of 350 reverse osmosis systems began July 14

BY ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — From her bed, Jane Kurtz of Boardman expressed gratitude for a new filtration system that went into her home.

"I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart," Kurtz said to plumber Tory Uskoski, Morrow

County Commissioner Jim Doherty and Ana Pineyro, the county's communicable disease and emergency preparedness coordinator. "You guys are awesome."

On July 14, Kurtz received the first of 350 systems planned to go out to Morrow County homes to address high nitrate levels, according to Doherty.

"We're going to ease into it," the commissioner said of the installations.

Three would take place on July 14, and Doherty said he expected

six installations a day in the following week. He described the process as "taking baby steps," with installers carefully approaching the project and learning potential problems.

Addressing the nitrate problem

Morrow County commissioners declared a local state of emergency on June 9, following the testing of wells and the discovery of water that contained nitrates above healthy consumption levels. Since then, further testing has been

performed and other home drinking water has been deemed unsafe, with nitrate levels above 10 parts per million.

This applies only to some well water. The city of Boardman has verified its water is safe to drink. There are private well owners who have tested their drinking water and found it to be safe, too.

Concern remains, though, for people whose well water is rich in nitrates. Many of these people have taken advantage of clean water that has been made available to them

at sites, including Sam Boardman Elementary in Boardman. They also have sought free testing, available at Boardman Foods in Boardman, among other locations.

Installing the first filters

Tory Uskoski, Blue Mountain Plumbing plumber, and Travis Gaines, assistant, installed the first of the filters. They said the devices are reverse osmosis systems with 2.5-gallon storage tanks.

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B2H update

Energy Facility Siting Council discusses project at Friday meeting

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

SALEM — The latest review of moving the massive Boardman to Hemingway power transmission line from proposal to reality is this week.

Originally proposed in 2010, the B2H line travels from the Longhorn Substation in Boardman to the existing Hemingway Substation in Idaho. Primarily 500 kilovolts, the line would be approximately 300 miles long. Idaho Power Co. is primary energy producer behind the project.

The Oregon Department of Energy's Energy Facility Siting Council meets Friday, July 22, and B2H is on the docket. The council plans to go over the proposal for the project and its application history and conduct straw polls to determine if any changes need to be made. This review is the latest step in a checkered past for the transmission line.

The meeting

The July 22 council meeting will not be the final one; instead, it serves as an update point for the history of the line, which the council has officially labeled as contested since 2020 due to public opposition.

According to a summary of the B2H line project on the Oregon Department of Energy's website, 37 exceptions — public complaints on the lines — were filed to the department. In most cases, there are only a few exceptions filed.

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BLUEWIND BERRY FARM'S
‘BERRY’
BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

An inflatable scarecrow waves and screeches a warning Friday, July 15, 2022, to winged berry snatchers over customers Nelly Ochoa, left, and Terri Deleon at Bluewind Berry Farm outside Milton-Freewater.
Sheila Hagar/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — The first time Argentina-born Gabriel Alarcon ate a blueberry, it was from a local supermarket. He and his farming partner and wife, Heather Alarcon, had just invested sweat, equity and money into planting rows of the fruit on their property on County Road, which weaves around the outskirts of town.

"I planted blueberries without knowing what a blueberry tastes like," Gabriel Alarcon said with a generous laugh.

"The first one I tasted was from Safeway, and I got so depressed I wanted to plow it all under."

That was 10 years ago, and if ever there was a summer to reward their perseverance, it's this one.

This is the seventh harvest for Bluewind Berry Farm, and it is a doozy. The berries, rounded to nearly bursting, are sweet from the tip of the tongue to the back of the throat.

"This year, they are so heavy the branches are to the ground," Gabriel Alarcon said.

The couple, parents of three boys from 28 to 17, have been married 30 years and undertaken a variety of adventures.

"I was 19. We met when I was 15, and he was 17. I went to boarding school in Argentina," Heather Alarcon said.

"Actually my roommate was interested in his roommate, and they set us up on a double date."

She was there as a part of a family tradition. Her father, Ole Oleson, a longtime Seventh-day Adventist pastor, set out on his own overseas quest at age 16. Thus when his teenager wanted to follow good friends back to their homeland and attend school in that country, parental resistance was easily overcome, Heather Alarcon said.

Such travel has given the Alarcons an appreciation for The Rocks District American Viticultural Area — what the soil here does for wine, it is doing for blueberries, Gabriel Alarcon said.

The accumulation of sediments trapped by the hills surrounding Milton-Freewater results in rocky ground ideal for lending unusual character to wine grapes, he said.

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