

Government shutdown strains farm country

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS

EO Media Group

A wall is standing between farmers and ranchers and the government assistance and insurance they need to keep their operations intact.

The standoff between President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats over funding for a wall on the Mexican border has stalled funding for USDA and shut down “non-essential” activities.

But many of those services are critical to producers, including financial and technical assistance and access to market data.

“Many of the activities deemed ‘non-essential’ by USDA are absolutely essential to family farmers this time of year,” Andrew Jerome, communications director for National Farmers Union, said.

Producers have bills to pay, and they need the cash flow provided by loans and Market Facilitation Program payments that come through Farm Services Agency offices, he said.

“They need USDA data to make informed decisions when planning for the coming year,” he said.

On top of that, they need government experts back at their desks working on implementation of the new farm bill and on expanding



EO Media Group File/Capitol Press

Farm groups say the partial government shutdown has stopped or delayed important services the USDA provides.

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Andrew Jerome, communications director for National Farmers Union

sales of higher level blends of ethanol, he said.

“The longer this shutdown goes on, the worse off conditions get for family farmers and ranchers who need a strong 2019,” he said.

The shutdown is impacting producers in a lot of dif-

ferent ways, John Newton, American Farm Bureau Federation chief economist, said.

All FSA loans have stopped, and that also impacts loans from major lending institutions that lean on those loans in approv-

ing commercial loans. Other FSA payments have also stopped, and getting money in a timely fashion is important for growers, he said.

Several reports, including the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates, winter wheat seeding and a

weekly export report, were due out, and those are pretty critical in making planting decisions, he said on Friday.

USDA is unable to implement the new farm bill, make program payments or prepare for program enrollment, he said.

The first payments for the new Dairy Margin Coverage program were supposed to go out in February or March. Signup for the Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs for major field crops needs to happen in the spring, he said.

Signup for those programs will be retroactive once the government reopens, but producers still won’t get payments for several months, he said.

These are some of the issues that have come to the surface, but there could be a lot of other issues producers are dealing with, he said.

Fortunately for livestock producers, mandatory price reporting and meat inspections are continuing, Colin Woodall, senior vice president of National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, said.

But a lot of producers are waiting on FSA payments to make investments or purchases. In some cases, producers have FSA checks in hand but they have to be signed by a local FSA official — and those offices are closed, he said.

There is also the risk that cattle inventories and market analysis and trend reports won’t be done and the industry might not be able to get that data back, he said.

“It’s anybody’s guess how much longer this could last. I think as it continues, there’ll be more things pop up,” he said.

Oregon state government weathering the shutdown storm

By Aubrey Wieber

Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon state government has yet to see deep impacts from a three-week federal government shutdown, but some Oregonians are feeling the pinch.

Saturday the shutdown became the longest in U.S. history at 22 days. With President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats unwilling to budge over funding for a wall on the southern border, there does not appear to be an easy exit in sight.

In late December, about a week into the shutdown, Elizabeth Craig, spokeswoman for the Oregon Department of Administrative Services, said state agencies that receive funding from their shuttered federal counterparts could weather the storm for about another week without making any adjustments.

But some federal payments have continued during the shutdown, and the state has reserves to keep others afloat. This week, Craig sent the Oregon Capital Bureau an update on agencies and programs that rely on federal dollars.

Craig has previously said the state would seek to recoup any extra money it has to shell out during the shutdown.

The partial government shutdown has frozen opera-



EO Media Group file photo/Blue Mountain Eagle

The Oregon State Capitol in Salem. The partial shutdown of the federal government could cause a cash flow hiccup for the state of Oregon.

tions for the federal departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Justice, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, State, Transportation and Treasury.

Some state programs should be fine through the federal fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, as long as the closed agencies keep making payments. Others could be impacted earlier, possibly at the end of the month.

One area of concern is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, also called welfare. That program provides cash payments for low-income families with children to pay for things like high rent costs. The Department of Human Services has money to keep the program afloat through the month, but could run into issues if the shutdown extends into February.

Another impact is on the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, which trains first responders such as police and firefighters. Grant reviews have paused, and classes at the National Fire Academy are cancelled.

Despite the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development being closed, payments are still being made for low-income housing vouchers. However, Craig noted funding could dry up if the shutdown continues.

So far, the state’s natural resource departments have been relatively unimpacted, but if the shutdown extends to February, that will likely change. The feds owe \$18 million in reimbursements to the Department of Forestry, forcing the state to use lines of credit charging interest to fund operations.

The Department of Environmental Quality can go unchanged until March, at which point it would have to dip into reserve funds to sustain itself until the end of June, when there would be a shortage.

Oregon’s alcohol industry could potentially be impacted, as the federal government cannot approve any new beer, wine or spirit labels. That means those new products can’t enter the market during the shutdown, but Craig reported that has so far only impacted one wine label.

Just because state gov-

ernment is staying afloat doesn’t mean Oregonians aren’t hurting. Friday marked the first missed paycheck for furloughed federal workers, with news reports claiming some were forced to find creative ways to pay bills, such as extending lines of credit or dipping into college savings accounts.

Private industry can also depend on the federal government, especially the agricultural industry.

Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, said he had a meeting set up with U.S. Fish and Wild-

life to talk about wolf depredation on Oregon cattle, but it got canceled due to the shutdown.

“The situation that is occurring is a really, really tough situation,” he said. “A lot of cattle are getting maimed and killed.”

Rosa also said this time of year is when federal loans and programs that fund things like seeding and equipment purchases are renewed, but that money has temporarily dried up.

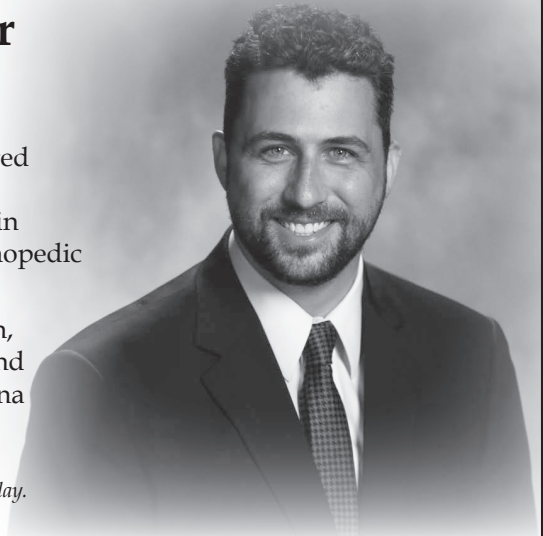
“I’ve had several comments and calls about that,” he said. “It’s pretty frustrating.”

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