

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

EO Media Group

Free personal protective equipment available for ag sector

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown has directed approximately 1 million KN95 masks and 5,000 gallons of hand sanitizer for farmworkers and agricultural producers.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture in a press release Tuesday afternoon announced critical personal protective equipment is available at no cost to the agricultural community to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

For Malheur, Baker, Grant, Lake, Harney, Union, Wallowa counties, call 541-889-5274 for details.

This critical personal protective equipment is available at no cost to the agricultural community to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Supplies are limited and available until distribution is complete.

The equipment and distribution is the result of collaboration between Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon State University Extension, Oregon Emergency Management, Oregon National Guard and county partners.

Market opening comes with modifications

JOSEPH — The Wallowa County Farmers Market's opening day looked a little different this year.

While there was fresh produce, jewelry and more, according to a press release from the market, vendors and customers had to follow social distancing rules and other coronavirus protocols.

The market opened Saturday next to Stein's Distillery in Joseph.

Vendors stood behind tables between themselves and the customers, maintaining a distance of 6 feet. Customers also could not bag or handle produce or displays. Instead, customers had to ask vendors for permission to touch sale items. According to the press release, market staff or volunteers have the task of reminding customers of these requirements.

The market also is eschewing music or special events.

The market runs every Saturday, from May 23 to Oct. 10. For more information, or to learn how to become a vendor, visit the farmer's market website at www.wallowacountyfarmersmarket.com. Or call the market manager at 541-838-0795. The email address is wallowacountyfarmersmarket@gmail.com.

USDA to provide \$1 billion for rural businesses and ag producers

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue recently announced the department is making available up to \$1 billion in loan guarantees to help rural businesses meet their working capital needs during the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, agricultural producers that are not eligible for USDA Farm Service Agency loans may receive funding under USDA Business & Industry (B&I) CARES Act Program provisions included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

In addition to expanding eligibility to certain agricultural producers, the changes allow USDA to:

- Provide 90% guarantees on B&I CARES Act Program loans.
- Set the application and guarantee fee at 2% of the loan.
- Accept appraisals completed within two years of the loan application date.
- Not require discounting of collateral for working capital loans.
- Extend the maximum term for working capital loans to 10 years.

B&I CARES Act Program loans must be used as working capital to prevent, prepare for or respond to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The loans may be used only to support rural businesses, including agricultural producers, that were in operation on Feb. 15, 2020.

USDA intends to consider applications in the order they are received. However, the department may assign priority points to projects if the demand for funds exceeds availability. Program funding expires Sept. 30, 2021.

La Grande to get more fiber optic services

Zipty Fiber investing \$500 million to improve internet services in the Pacific Northwest

By Dick Mason
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — La Grande residents will have more opportunity to get on the fastest lane of the information superhighway.

Zipty Fiber, a telecommu-

nications company, earlier this month purchased the Pacific Northwest portion of Frontier Communications. One of Zipty Fiber's first projects involves the installation of fiber optic cable in 13 cities, including La Grande. Installation work is

beginning, and in 45 days some portions of La Grande will have fiber optic cable, according to Dan Miller, a Zipty Fiber spokesperson.

He said La Grande's fiber optic installation will be finished by the end of the year.

"Most portions of La Grande will then have access to fiber optic service," Miller said.

Zipty will be installing the

fiber optic cable with major assistance from Wholesail Networks, a Northwest-based, privately held telecommunications and internet infrastructure company. Zipty Fiber earlier acquired Wholesail Networks and has been working with it on internet projects for the past six months.

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Photo courtesy of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

A trail camera in January 2016 caught this image of two adult wolves from the Walla Walla Pack in northern Umatilla County. It has been 11 years since a pair of wolves killed lambs and a calf in the Keating Valley of Baker County. Today, most of Oregon's wolves still live in the state's northeast counties — Umatilla, Union, Baker and Wallowa.

Working to protect livestock

ODFW, Umatilla tribes, ranchers work together to quell losses

By Katy Nesbitt
for the EO Media Group

PENDLETON — As cows and their young calves are turned out onto spring pastures in the Blue Mountains, ranchers are struggling to protect their herds from predators.

It's been 11 years since a pair of wolves killed lambs and a calf in the Keating Valley of Baker County. Today, most of Oregon's wolves still live in the state's northeast counties — Umatilla, Union, Baker and Wallowa.

"In any square inch of land northeast of Interstate 84, one can assume there is a wolf near cows," said Greg Rimbach, district biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Pendleton field office.

By increasing human presence, ranchers and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation allotment managers aim to quell livestock loss following several investigations of dead cattle found since the end of April.

"The tribe has been up there almost every day helping haze wolves and checking cows," Rimbach said. "One producer

was so concerned, he is now up there every day."

According to Rimbach, a rancher has seen up to three wolves running together in the grazing pastures near Cabbage Hill. One producer is even camping out overnight with the cattle to deter losses.

Carl Scheeler, a wildlife program manager for the tribes, said the tribes support the use of nonlethal measures first and foremost. Wolves have made the reservation their home for nearly a decade.

"We've had wolves for quite a while and we knew the reservation would be the center of wolf activity, and they seem to keep up against the interstate," Scheeler said.

In February, OR-85, a nearly 1-year-old wolf, was collared on the Umatilla reservation. According to Rimbach, over the past few weeks he's been tracked between the Interstate 84 weigh scales on Cabbage Hill and Meacham, a 10- to 12-mile distance cross-country.

The first investigation this spring of a dead calf on the reservation was in the Telephone Ridge area on April 30. That morning, a rancher found a dead calf on his allotment while checking his cattle. The following day, he found another dead calf in close proximity to the first calf. Both calves were

2-½ months old and weighed approximately 150 pounds.

Despite evidence the calves were bitten before they died, evidence of wolf tracks and scat observed less than 100 yards from the carcass locations, along with radio-collar data that showed a wolf in proximity to the carcass locations on April 29 and April 30, the calves' deaths were determined "probable" wolf-caused incidents by ODFW biologists.

Less than two weeks later, biologists were back on Telephone Ridge to investigate a 10-year-old, 1,300-pound dead cow. The carcass had been heavily scavenged with all internal organs consumed and little muscle tissue remaining. Rimbach said the scene had lots of bear scat, indicating at least one of the scavengers was a bear. Because there was no evidence of a predator attack on the carcass or at the scene, the cause of death was determined to be "unknown."

The following day, May 12, a range rider found a dead, 3-month-old calf on Telephone Ridge. The carcass had been heavily scavenged with all entrails and most muscle tissue consumed. Due to the lack of hide and muscle tissue remaining, ODFW biologists

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Lawmakers provide funding for new rules

By George Plaven
Capital Press

SALEM — A portion of Oregon's federal COVID-19 relief funds may go toward reimbursing farms to comply with more stringent worker protections heading into the busy summer harvest season.

Oregon OSHA, the state's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, issued a temporary rule April 29 covering three main areas — field sanitation, labor housing and transportation.

Among the provisions, farms must provide roughly double the number of portable toilets and handwashing stations in fields and orchards. Beds must also be spaced 6 feet apart in labor camps or separated by an impermeable barrier, such as Plexiglass or heavy plastic sheets, to maintain social distancing.

The regulations were originally scheduled to take effect May 11, but Oregon OSHA delayed enforcement until Monday, June 1.

As farms scramble to buy bathroom trailers and retrofit housing units, the Oregon Legislature's joint emergency board met May 15 to discuss how the state will spend more than \$1.3 billion from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security, or CARES, Act.

Part of the fund, \$415 million, was set aside for local governments and tribes. Of that, \$200 million will go to cities, counties and tribes to pay for personal protective equipment, contact tracing, testing capacity and farm sanitation and housing.

Nikki Fisher, press secretary for Gov. Kate Brown, said the governor "continues to believe it is vital to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our agricultural industry and workforce."

She said the office is evaluating further policy and funding proposals to address stabilizing and securing food sources, while still protecting workers.

Who USDA's farm aid package leaves behind

By Sierra Dawn McClain
Capital Press

SALEM — The USDA began opening applications Tuesday for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, known as CFAP, which will deliver \$16 billion in direct payments to farms hurt by the pandemic.

Farm Service Agency branches will handle applications.

"It's been a collective breath of relief. Things will continue to be tight, but this will mitigate those first-quarter losses," said Shelby Myers, an economist for the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Many industry leaders have expressed excitement about how the relief package will help agribusinesses. But some say CFAP's structure is flawed and excludes thousands of farmers and ranchers in crisis.

CFAP outlines some exclusions clearly. Ineligible commodities include sheep more

than two years old, eggs and layers, soft red winter wheat, hard red winter wheat, white wheat, rice, flax, rye, peanuts, feed barley, Extra Long Staple cotton, alfalfa, forage crops, hemp and tobacco.

Northwest wheat growers say they are concerned because hard and soft red winter wheat, along with soft white wheat, account for the majority of wheat grown in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

State and national wheat associations are calling on USDA to make all wheat classes eligible for CFAP aid.

"We are struggling with cash flow like all other farmers and ranchers throughout the nation," Clint Carlson, Oregon Wheat Growers League president, said in a statement.

Some major agricultural sectors, like poultry growers, went unmentioned.

"Poultry is the big one on our minds and the minds of our



Photo contributed by the National Young Farmers Coalition

Experts say producers for organic, local and premium markets are more likely to face obstacles when applying for CFAP aid. Many are young and first-generation farmers.

members," Myers said.

The American Farm Bureau, she said, is talking with USDA to understand why poultry producers are not eligible for aid.

Bill Mattos, president of the California Poultry Association, said his members will not

submit comments yet requesting inclusion, but will seek aid in a possible phase four relief package.

Other sectors, including aquaculture, cut flowers and nursery products, were also excluded.