

Vaccinations months away



Ellen Morris Bishop/Wallowa County Chieftain, File
Avey Van Doozer and Tami Lambrect of the Bar-B Ranch in Wallowa County in March 2019 check to be sure all is well with the calf they just vaccinated and tattooed. Farmworkers are among the groups that will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine starting in Phase 1b of the state's vaccine rollout plan, but they won't be the first in line.

Food sector workers not in essential group with substantial risk of exposure

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

SALEM — The COVID-19 vaccine rollout is underway in Oregon, but it could be months before farmworkers and others in the food sector receive a vaccination.

Health care workers are first in line. Phase 1a — the current phase — includes workers in hospitals, health care providers, residents at long-term care facilities, emergency medical service providers and first responders. The Oregon Health Authority, or OHA, estimates this includes between 300,000 and 400,000 individuals.

According to OHA, farmworkers will be eligible in Phase 1b — but they won't be first in line.

The group to receive first priority in Phase 1b will include childcare workers and K-12 school and school district staff statewide. According to Marc Siegel, spokesperson for the state Department of Education, Oregon has about 80,000 K-12 staff and 30,000 early childhood education and childcare staff who would be eligible.

Siegel said vaccinations for these groups are likely to start in early to mid-February.

After school staff, others eligible in Phase 1b will include “workers who are in industries essential to the functioning of society” with “substantially higher risk of exposure.”

Anne Marie Moss, spokes-



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press, File
Farmworkers at Willamette Valley Vineyards in Turner. Farmworkers are among the groups that will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine starting in Phase 1b of the state's vaccine rollout plan, but they won't be the first in line.

person for the Oregon Farm Bureau, said farmers, ranchers, farmworkers and others in the food sector should meet this definition.

But OHA has not yet decided which occupations will come first.

OHA has assembled a COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee to decide which populations will receive priority.

The committee includes 27 representatives from health services, universities and groups representing marginalized populations. A representative from PCUN, a union for farm-

workers, is on the committee.

In a Zoom news conference Friday, Jan. 8, Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen told reporters the committee will recommend the rest of the priority groups by the end of January.

Several farm groups, commodity associations and food processing companies have sent letters to Gov. Kate Brown and OHA asking for their workers to receive high priority.

In a letter, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue urged the governor to highly prioritize vaccines for “private sector

workers from farm to fork.” James Schneider, president of Oregon Seed Association, asked the governor “to make our workers a priority.”

But even if farmworkers move toward the front of the line, officials say it could be several months before they receive vaccines.

As of Jan. 10, just 2.5% of Oregon's total population has been vaccinated, and the state is behind schedule.

According to OHA data, Oregon was supposed to vaccinate 100,000 people by Dec. 31. As of Jan. 10, 104,595 vaccinations had been administered, 4,828 of which were second doses.

OHA says officials are developing plans to ensure that Oregonians will be able to access vaccine administration statewide.

As early as Jan. 12, Oregon National Guard medics and other troops will arrive in Salem to help administer and coordinate vaccines.

According to Allen of OHA, both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are being used. The Moderna vaccine is 94% effective two weeks after a person receives the second shot, and the Pfizer vaccine is 95% effective one week after the second shot.

OHA has no plans to require the COVID-19 vaccination, but officials strongly recommend vaccination for the health and safety of the community.

2020 was a banner year for the SBDC

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center in 2020 helped businesses create 171 jobs, retain 375 more and accumulate more than \$12 million in capital.

SBDC Director Greg Smith released the center data showing totals going back eight years. He said the numbers reflect much of the center's work helping businesses obtain federal COVID-19 financial relief, including through the federal Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans.

But the numbers also show a big drop in how many clients the center served in 2020 compared to 2019.

The number of clients the La Grande-based SBDC served has fluctuated some since 2013, when it worked with 154 clients, but the total generally trends up. The center in 2017 served 192 clients,

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Why is there a lumber shortage in the U.S.?

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

Many parts of the U.S. are facing lumber shortages — and experts say the problem is acute in the West after 2020's devastating wildfires.

Industry experts say several events led to the lumber shortage: lockdown orders and closures, new safety protocols that slowed production at mills and a spike in home remodeling while Americans were quarantined followed by a massive wildfire season.

“The industry is normally like this fine-tuned machine. A lot of events (in 2020) disrupted it,” said Cindy Mitchell, senior director of public affairs at the Washington Forest Protection Association, or WPFA.

Cumming Corp., an international cost consulting firm, said wildfires along the West Coast “have led to a significant spike in certain material prices.”

According to the Oregon Forest and Industries Council, or OFIC, a trade group representing

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Truck stop opens at Farewell Bend, a remote section of I-84

Area between Baker City and Ontario had lacked truck facilities since 2011

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



Peyton Scow Photography/Contributed Photo
The new TravelCenters of America truck stop recently opened at Farewell Bend, along Interstate 84 about 50 miles southeast of Baker City.

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, opens 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, in June 2013, for \$450,000.