

\$10 million grant program considered for Oregon meat processors

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon meat processors could vie for \$10 million in grants under a bill that seeks to build on a state inspection program authorized last year.

House Bill 2785 would create a grant program overseen by the state's Department of Agriculture to invest in constructing, expanding and upgrading meat processing facilities.

The proposal aims to help meat processors who'd operate under the ODA's state inspection program, which would regulate these facilities for in-state commercial meat sales.

Once the state inspection program is fully functional and approved by the federal government, meat from these facilities could also be sold in interstate commerce.

The proposed grant program would also invest in meat processors who want to be directly inspected by USDA, which would permit their products to cross state lines regardless of the state inspection program's status.

An amended version of HB 2785 being considered by the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee would carve out \$300,000 for upgrades to Oregon State University's meat science lab and make \$9.7 million available for grants.

Lawmakers revived the state inspection program last year after the coronavirus outbreak disrupted the operations

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Oregon ranchers seek to head off some brand fee hikes

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon ranchers hope to forestall at least some of the maximum fee hikes proposed for the state's brand inspection program, which faces a budget shortfall.

The state's Department of Agriculture wants to raise the maximum brand inspection fee from \$1 to \$1.50 per head of cattle and increase several other fees for other program services.

Without adjusting its fee structure, the brand inspection program is "projected to go into the red" in the 2021-2023 biennium, said Lauren Henderson, ODA's assistant director. The program needs another \$700,000 per biennium to maintain its current service level.

While members of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association's "clearly understand the value" of the program — which deters theft and improves traceability — the proposed fee hikes have left them with "sticker shock," said Rodger Huffman, the group's treasurer and former ODA brand inspection official.

"The livestock business has a lot of costs that are out of our control," Huffman recently testified before the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee.

The OCA is instead urging lawmakers to raise the cap on brand inspection fees to \$1.35, rather than \$1.50, and leaving the \$25 application fee and \$100 renewal fee in place rather than doubling them. The group would accept other fee increases proposed by ODA.

"We're in a commodity where we're unable to pass those fees onto anyone else and the commodity has been in decline since

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Tim Osterloh, owner of the video game and hobby store Clank-Tronix, poses for a photo Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, in the renovated backroom of the La Grande shop. Osterloh used the money from a federal CARES grant to help build an education center resource — specifically textbooks and books on home schooling resources for families.

Getting some CARES

Federal COVID-19 relief grants are helping 94 businesses in Union County

By **ALEX WITTWER**
and **PHIL WRIGHT**

The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Dozens of Union County businesses have been using federal COVID-19 relief to cover the bottom line and improve operations.

David Arnold with the Eagle Cap Excursion Train said the grants filled crucial funding gaps.

"It's not a whole lot of money, it's not a huge grant, but for people to have enough to get by and not worry so much is really important," he said.

The excursion train was one of 94 Union County businesses that received a total of \$735,409 in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security funding for COVID-19. The funds came from the state to Union County in December. County Commissioner Donna Beverage at the time explained the state asked counties to focus on using the CARES funding to help small businesses.

The grant program divided the funding into two tiers.

Tier 1 applicants received a total of \$504,586.50. These were businesses that lost revenue in the two freezes Gov. Kate Brown put into effect in 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Six fitness clubs and health businesses received funding, along with 34 food service operations and 11 venues or events qualified for Tier 1 grants. The majority — 40 — received \$11,103.25, including the Eagle Cap Excursion Train. The other 11 received less. The Elgin Museum and Historical Society received the lowest grant, \$750.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Jesse Cimon, who runs the music and art venue HQ with Christopher Jennings, poses for a portrait in the studio space in downtown La Grande on Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021.

Tier 2 applicants received the remaining \$230,822.50. These 43 businesses were hurt by one of the freezes or demonstrated their revenue was down 25% or more for at least one month between March 1 and Nov. 30 compared to 2019 due to COVID-19. The funds went to retail shops, personal and professional services, medical and health care operations and lodging businesses.

All but two of the grants were for \$5,556.65. The exceptions were the Cove-Union-Powder Medical Association, Union, which received \$500, and Howell's Nursery, La Grande, which received \$2,500.

Arnold said the grant helped the excursion train cover the cost of track work and train maintenance. And it provided a financial cushion.

"We've lost a lot of revenue, because we're not running the passenger train, so this helps cover the loss of revenue, primarily, that's one of the big effects so it was very much appreciated," Arnold said.

Ten Depot Street in La Grande was among the restaurants to receive a grant. Owner Sandy

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Friends to get friendlier with beer sales

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Want a beer or wine with your lunch? Friends Restaurant and Pub plans to add limited alcohol sales to the menu, said proprietor Bree Gladden.

The Enterprise City Council endorsed the liquor license Monday, Feb. 8, and Gladden still is working out the details with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission office in Pendleton. She said Wednesday, Feb. 10, she hopes to begin liquor sales by March.

Although the "and Pub" part of the cafe's name hasn't been emphasized since she opened in April 2019, it's always been part of the plan.

"It's been registered as Friends Restaurant and Pub since the day I opened," she said. "We planned on adding alcohol at some point in the future. We just didn't want to start with that. We had a very

minimal amount (of capital) to get started in the first place and we just wanted to get open first. We didn't have all that for the liquor license fees and the inventory. We had just enough to get opened and get started. ... It's been set up for a bar, always."

The new liquor license will not include hard liquor, although that could be in the future, she said.

"I'm hoping that by next month we'll be able to serve beer and wine and champagne, but we're not going to have hard liquor right now. I only applied for a limited license," she said. "You know, beer, wine, red beers — all that good stuff."

Gladden said the food menu consists largely of hash browns, eggs, toast, homemade corned-beef hash, home-cubed steaks, hand-breaded chicken-fried steaks, homemade soups, home-smoked meats, smoked cheese

and some new barbecue items.

"A lot of the stuff we do, we do in-house," she said, and the menu could change down the road.

Gladden and her co-owner husband, Dustin Gladden, are parents of three children, ages 3 to almost 7.

"They require a lot of energy and a lot of attention, as well," Bree Gladden said.

Dustin Gladden occasionally helps out, but Bree Gladden largely runs the operation with the assistance of five employees.

Friends is open seven days a week, from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. As yet, Gladden doesn't have plans to expand into the dinner realm.

"At first, we will probably just have a special Friday and Saturday," she said. "Right now, with it being slower, I work a lot. It would be too much to work all day for 10 hours and then to do the evening as well, with three

kids and all the other stuff."

She said she envisions possibly trying a limited dinner menu at some point, at which time she'll seek customer feedback on what menu items they'd like to see included.

"At first, we'll just feel it out. ... We'd like to try dinners, but we're not going to jump right in and lose a bunch of money," she said. "I want to make sure people are interested in coming for dinner and get people's feedback."

As for the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that affected nearly all businesses, Friends was no different and it is surviving well. Gladden said the shutdowns last spring and in November definitely hit the business.

"It hurt a lot. The first time we were forced to shut down, it was before we were open for a whole

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