

VACCINES

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1,000 agricultural workers at the clinic, according to the Morrow County Health Department.

Saito said state officials are looking to hold similar efforts statewide. State officials recently conducted a survey with 585 agricultural facilities that showed more than 21,000 workers were eligible for the vaccine.

“We’re working with our local public health authorities to connect agricultural, migrant and seasonal workplaces to see if they can do an event(s) like this” across Oregon, Saito said.

The clinic began two days after Morrow County received approval from the state to move ahead and start vaccinating farmworkers after sufficiently providing doses to all other eligible groups.

At least 20 counties, most of them east of the Cascades, received approval from the state last week, including Umatilla County.

The change also comes just in time for harvest season, which brings thousands of jobs to the area. Morrow County Public Health Director Nazario Rivera said harvest season can bring as many as 8,000 workers to the region annually.

“We want to make sure we get some of these vulnerable communities,” he said. “We know with the season changing to spring, a lot more farmworkers are going to be out there. So if we can get them now, before the season



Staff at a COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic at the Sage Center in Boardman administer doses of the COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.



A driver waits in an observation area after receiving a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during a vaccination clinic at the Sage Center in Boardman on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

starts, it’ll be a lot easier to get them vaccinated, rather than having to ask them to take time out of

their busy schedules to come get a vaccine.” It’s a workforce that drives the region’s

economy, but is widely known to place workers, many of whom are Hispanic and Latino, at increased risk of infection.

In Morrow County, Hispanic residents have accounted for 57% of the county’s total COVID-19 cases, according to data provided by county health officials earlier this month. About 38% of Morrow County’s population is Hispanic, according to 2019 U.S. Census data.

Similar trends have been reported in Umatilla County, where residents reporting Hispanic ethnicity accounted for 41% of the county’s total COVID-19 cases in 2020,

according to data from the county health department. The population also tested positive at a rate over three times higher than non-Hispanics, the data shows.

Saito said the event was a collaborative effort between a number of groups to immunize a community they recognize as a “priority population.”

“We know they’re exposed because they have to be close together when they work, and there’s been a lot of racism and injustice that’s happened over time,” Saito said, adding that “ending health inequities” is part of the state’s 10-year plan. “This is one of the ways we’re

making sure we have an equity focus and that we’re looking at those populations that have been disproportionately infected and who have historically been underserved.”

Officials have said working conditions in essential workplaces have been a driving factor behind the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on Hispanic communities nationwide.

“We have this whole row of processing plants, so (it’s) definitely a high-risk community,” Rivera said, looking out at the cars moving swiftly through the clinic, dwarfed by the large industrial facilities in the background.

Because of this, everything down to the scheduling of the daily clinics was geared to accommodate agricultural workers, partly because they often cannot take time off work to get a shot, Rivera said. He added that the health department engaged in a variety of efforts to inform residents about the clinic, like advertising it on local Spanish radio stations.

Similar efforts are ongoing in Umatilla County, where county health officials have been reaching out to agricultural facilities to bring vaccines to workers while they’re on the job.

Umatilla County officials have said they also want to hold similar efforts as the Morrow County clinic, particularly because the state brings more doses with them, which could help with the county’s dismal vaccination rates, which remain the lowest in Oregon, according to state data.

AMBULANCE

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him in Central Oregon,” Arvidson said in the release. “He’s a competent paramedic and is currently finishing up his critical-care certifications while on deployments.”

While Med Transport used to chiefly do interfacility transfers, the service got heavily into wildfire relief and, last year, doing vaccination clinics. Of late, Cariss said, he’s been to California and New Jersey doing such clinics.

“They’re all over the place,” he said. “Wherever the federal government asks to have resources sent.”

Med Transport is getting involved with a variety of activities to combat the pandemic. The press release mentioned COVID step-down units that, Cariss said, are



Med Transport takes trauma patients from local Eastern Oregon intensive care units and emergency departments to trauma centers throughout the Northwest.

field hospitals where lower-risk patients are sent while recovering from the

virus when hospitals are at capacity. “We did see some pretty

sick COVID patients, although they’re now on the road to recovery,” he said.

There also are COVID infusion centers, such as in California where the state health authority is trying experimental medication to help with symptoms of the virus, he said.

Cariss said in an interview that he’s only been with Med Transport since September 2020. He’s been living in Enterprise since 2017, primarily working as a paramedic, but also doing wildland firefighting.

He got started with Med Transport while working part time in eastern Umatilla County and Arvidson called where he was working looking for additional staff.

He said he likes the type of work since it gives him plenty of time off to spend with his wife.

“It’s not guaranteed work; it’s contract work,” he said. “It’s hit-and-miss stuff.”

He said it works well

since it’s just him and his wife.

“If I had kids, it’d be harder,” he said.

While it can be tough work with an element of danger, there are advantages.

“You get to see things you wouldn’t normally see,” Cariss said.

In Eastern Oregon, Med Transport has at least three other paramedics, the release stated. Bruce Cheeseman is based in La Grande, Nick Cripe is based in Baker City, and Mark Lewis is a recently retired firefighter paramedic from Pendleton.

“Some of our medics have done multiple deployments of 15-30 days and some have been out for over 90 days,” Arvidson said in the release.

For more information on Med Transport, visit <http://medtransporteo.com> or its Facebook page.

HEMP

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alfalfa hay, long considered the gold standard of animal forages, especially for dairy cows.

“Personally, when they told me about hemp, I didn’t even know what the plant looked like,” said Bionaz, an associate professor of dairy nutrigenomics at OSU. “The more we analyzed, we were really amazed by the nutritive value.”

Rich in protein, fiber and minerals, hemp biomass appears to have promise as a cheaper alternative animal feed. It could also provide hemp farmers with an added revenue stream, turning what was a waste product into a cash crop.

But therein lies the challenge, Bionaz said — hemp is not currently approved for animal feed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. He hopes their research will generate the data needed for the FDA to take that next step.

“The more I study the plant, the more I see data, I get more enthused about it,” Bionaz said.

The idea for the study traces back to 2019, when OSU first established the Global Hemp Innovation Center.

Jay Noller, the center director, approached Serkan Ates, an assistant professor specializing in sustainable pasture management, to discuss whether processed hemp byproducts could be fed to animals. Ates said he was intrigued, and partnered with Bionaz to examine the product’s nutritional content.

What they found was hemp biomass has roughly the same protein content as alfalfa, and roughly the same fiber content as barley. In some attributes, Ates said hemp was nutritionally superior to the traditional feeds.

“There was this great potential,” Ates said. “Many of the livestock farmers, they are interested in some sort of cheaper feed source.”

With those traits in mind, the team worked up several proposals and received more than 10 tons of donated biomass from two Oregon-based extractors.

Last year, Ates fed

the material to lambs for two months. Their diets included a mix of 10% and 20% hemp, along with a control group.

One question, Ates said, was whether the animals would even eat hemp. Not only did they eat it, but he said the group that was fed 10% hemp ate more than any other group.

The lambs have since been slaughtered, and their meat will be lab tested for the presence of residual cannabinoids such as CBD or THC.

Those results, Ates said, will be key for future FDA authorization of hemp as animal feed.

A second trial, this time feeding hemp to cows at the OSU Dairy Farm in Corvallis, is set to begin in late April. Similar to the lamb study, the team will feed hemp biomass to cows for two months, and then test for residual cannabinoids in the animals’ milk and meat.

In announcing the USDA grant for the project, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden said the research could potentially be a big win for farmers and ranchers across the country.

“This OSU research

will help to continue building the case for federal approval of hemp biomass on cattle farms, making a natural connection between two signature Oregon products — livestock and hemp,” Wyden said.

Jenifer Cruickshank, who works with OSU Extension Service as the regional dairy faculty for the Willamette Valley,

said she is also contacting ranchers and consumers to gauge public acceptance of consuming products from animals fed with hemp.

Cruickshank is working with Juliana Ranches, another extension specialist at OSU’s Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center in Burns, to survey producers. Their feedback will be included as part of the overall study.

When it comes to hemp, Ates said they are only at the beginning of what promises to be a vast area of continued research.

“It is a super exciting research area for all of us,” he said. “This is a byproduct that has a high potential, but it requires extensive research before it’s approved by the FDA and going into the food chain.”



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