

## Oregon sets sessions on jobless benefits

By **PETER WONG**  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — State officials have scheduled six sessions, starting Thursday, Oct. 14, for the public and businesses to weigh in on a rule allowing workers to keep some unemployment benefits even if they have barriers to their returning to work.

The temporary rule would let some workers continue to receive benefits despite their limited availability for work. Among the covered situations are caring for a sick family member and the lack of child care.

Under the rule, workers would have to seek alternate work if they are available at least one shift per day and 40 hours per week.

“This may require people to seek a different type of job, but one they have the skills and experience to do,” the Oregon Employment Department said in its announcement of the webinars.

The temporary rule follows after changes expired Sept. 26 to the longstanding requirements for people to be able to work and available to work. Those requirements were reinstated on Sept. 26, 90 days after the end of an emergency declaration that suspended them during the pandemic.

The department will conduct all six webinars by registration at [unemployment.oregon.gov/webinars](http://unemployment.oregon.gov/webinars). Sessions will run 90 minutes but may end earlier if there are no further comments.

Worker-focused sessions are planned at 2:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 14; noon Tuesday, Oct. 26; and 6 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 9.

Employer-focused sessions are planned at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 20; noon Wednesday, Nov. 3; and 9 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 17.

Simultaneous translation will be offered in Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian and Cantonese.

In addition to helping some workers offset part of their lost income with unemployment benefits, an agency statement said the rule would help communities where a large number of people have faced restricted work schedules because of the pandemic. Among them are people whose underlying health conditions may require them to limit their exposure to potential carriers of the COVID-19 virus.

Proposed legislation pending in Congress, sponsored by Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden and others, would require states to allow more flexibility in letting some workers retain a portion of unemployment benefits if they are otherwise able to obtain alternate work.



Falk's Mini Mart and gas station in Union, as seen on Tuesday, Oct. 12, 2021, has nearly finished its renovations, allowing gas to flow once more this coming weekend.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

## Nearly complete

### Upgrades at Union convenience store almost finished

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

UNION — Union motorists will soon be less alarmed when their gas gauges approach the empty mark.

The reason, Falk's Mini Mart is set to soon have its two gasoline pumps up and running again.

“We hope to have our pumps operating this weekend,” said Dennis Falk, co-owner of Falk's Mini Mart with his wife, Jodi.

Falk's Mini Mart has not been selling gasoline in Union since Aug. 19 because it has been replacing its underground gas tanks. Since then, the closest place for residents to purchase gasoline has been Cove, 8 miles north-east of Union.

The tanks at Falk's Mini Mart, which buys its fuel from the Sinclair Oil Corporation, that were replaced had been there since 1991. Falk said the tanks had been deteriorating.

“We needed new ones. It was time,” he said.

Falk said his store will be able to begin selling gasoline again as soon as it receives approval from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. He said Union residents are anxious for his store to sell gas again, and so is he. “I'm losing money,” he said.

Falk said that when his pumps are operating, as much as 8,000 gallons of gasoline are sold a day. Since he and his wife purchased the mini



Contractors prepare to install a new gas tank at the Falk's Mini Mart gas station in Union on Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2021.

Dennis Falk/Contributed Photo

mart in 2002, only one other Union business has sold gas, and that was for only a short time almost 20 years ago.

The location of Falk's Mini Mart, 363 N. Main St., has been a gas station for decades. Falk said he believes gasoline for cars has been sold there since the 1920s. Photos displayed in the store include one of a Texaco service station in 1948.

The building housing his mini mart is essentially the same one the Texaco station

was in. It still has the same outer shell, but the interior looks much different since it has been rebuilt three times, Falk said.

The replacement of the gas tanks is just a portion of the renovation work that has been done at Falk's.

Other work has included the replacement of underground electrical wiring and conduits and fuel pipes.

“Everything underground

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## EPA takes steps to protect salmon

### US Army Corps of Engineers required to cool water at Snake River dams

By **KEELY CHALMERS**  
KGW News

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Starting this spring, the Environmental Protection Agency will require Snake River dam operators to limit hot water pollution to help salmon survive. The change comes after an environmental group took the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to court to try and stop the warming.

The Corps owns and operates the dams on the Snake River, which is a major tributary to the Columbia River.

Over the summer, sick and dying salmon sought refuge in the Little White Salmon River just off the Columbia River. Video showed sockeye salmon covered in lesions and fungus — the result of water that was 71 degrees.

Long-time fishing guide Bob Rees said that temperature is way too hot.

“It's just flat out lethal to these wild salmon that come up into these rivers,” he said.

Rees has been a professional fishing guide for 31 years and he knows the Columbia River well. He also knows that the fish that swim in it are in trouble.

“Fish are dying in these waterways because of the lethal summer water,” he said.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said salmon exposed to water above 68 degrees have an increased risk of stress, disease and mortality.

“It's going to lead to extinction,” said Brett Vandenhuevel, the executive director of Columbia Riverkeeper.

The group has long maintained that the large reservoirs behind the dams are partly to blame for the warmer river water.

The group first sued the Corps back in 2013. Last week, they got a victory.

“For the first time ever, the federal dams on the Columbia now have to reduce the amount of pollution that they're creating,” said Vandenhuevel.

Rees and Vandenhuevel both said the change is long overdue. However, they stressed that this requirement is an important step in helping salmon survive a warming climate.

## Report: Agriculture remains a driving force in Oregon's economy

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

CORVALLIS — Throughout Oregon's economy, more than 15% of sales and 20% of jobs are tied in some way to agriculture, food and fiber, according to a new analysis by Oregon State University in partnership with the state Department of Agriculture.

The 27-page report provides an overview of the industry and recent trends. Researchers update the analysis every 5-6 years, with the last update in 2015.

Jeff Reimer, a professor of applied economics at OSU and co-author of the report, said the analysis also delves into the links between agriculture, food and fiber and other sectors of the economy that may not be apparent looking at raw statistics.

For example, the report shows that agriculture,



George Plaven/Capital Press, File

Agriculture continues to play a significant role in Oregon's economy, according to a new analysis.

food and fiber production is directly responsible for more than \$42 billion in sales and 371,300 full- and part-time jobs. That represents approximately 10% of total sales and 14% of jobs.

But after taking into account support industries such as agricultural inputs, transportation and

retail, the total shares grow to more than \$71 billion in sales and 531,422 jobs.

Bruce Sorte, an economist with OSU Extension Service, said he calculates the interdependence of economic sectors using an internet-based application called IMPLAN — an input-output modeling tool that can be used

for everything from french fries made in Hermiston to beef and potatoes grown in Klamath Falls.

While data from the latest USDA Census of Agriculture in 2017 shows Oregon eclipsed \$5 billion in farm gate value, Sorte said there is more to the story.

“Talking about agricul-

### OREGON AGRICULTURE BY THE NUMBERS

Some additional figures outlined in the Oregon agriculture, food and fiber economic analysis, published in August by Oregon State University:

- 16 million acres of land is farmed across Oregon.
- 225 agricultural commodities are grown statewide.
- 2,000-plus new farms have been established since 2012.
- 95% of farms in Oregon are family owned.
- 5.7% of Oregon jobs are on farms.

ture without talking about getting to the dinner plate misses a big part of it,” he said, “especially during this pandemic.”

### Rising exports

Oregon's agricultural exports have grown by 13.7% since 2015, with sales jumping from \$15.2 billion to \$17.3 billion.

Production of agricultural exports dipped slightly, from \$3.3 billion to \$3.1 billion. Though the analysis did not give a precise reason, it did mention the U.S.-China trade war that likely impacted exports

of wheat, hazelnuts, cherries and beef.

The decline was more than made up by increases in agricultural support services, food and fiber processing, with Oregon's food and beverage sector playing an outside role.

Sorte said Oregon is in a strong position to continue increasing agricultural exports as farmers become more efficient.

“The fact that acreage changes have been low, and yet the output on that acreage has dramatically increased ... we're

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