

Supply:

Continued from Page 4

“You don’t know how long it would take to get parts,” he said.

Defrees said he’s also trying to be spare with fuel, in deference to record-high prices, but he noted that farmers and ranchers can hardly avoid using vehicles that aren’t exactly fuel-efficient.

Dan Butterfield, with Butterfield Farms in Wallowa County, said he’s more concerned about production costs than he is about water supplies, even as the drought continues to plague much of the West.

“Wallowa County usually takes pretty good care of us,” Butterfield said. “The water doesn’t bother me nearly as much as the fuel prices and fertilizer costs.”

Both Butterfield and another Wallowa County farmer, Kevin Melville with Cornerstone Farms, said they have had to stock up on fertilizer for their crops because they are uncertain if the product will be available later in the season, and, as a result, they are doing so at a much greater cost to themselves.

Melville, who was doing maintenance work on machinery during March, said in addition to the increase in costs of chemicals and fertilizers, the farm is being impacted by delays in getting items to complete equipment repairs.

“We’re working on machinery this time of year. Most parts are available, but it might take a month to get something where (before) it might take two days,” he said, adding there is a limit to the number of some parts that can be purchased.

Melville said a nitrogen fertilizer Cornerstone uses was purchased in abundance in advance, largely because of the concern of later availability.

“We bought one-third of our nitrogen fertilizer needs last fall,” he said. “We knew the prices were going up, and we had the storage for it.”

Melville said fertilizer that sold for \$250 per ton a year was up to \$470 in the fall of 2021. On March 10, 2022, the price was \$770 per ton, he said.

For now, commodity prices are also higher, which helps offset some of the costs to the farmers. However, there is worry about a decrease in prices — something that is out of their control.

“With our higher inputs (now), that will definitely be a concern,” Butterfield said.



Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

Kevin Melville, of Cornerstone Farms Joint Venture, checks the amount of salt that has accumulated in a line off a fertilizer storage tank at the farm near Enterprise on Thursday, March 10, 2022. The Melvilles purchased a considerable quantity of fertilizer last fall, knowing the price would drastically increase, but they also knew it was perilous to store it over the winter because salt can collect, so they watered it down.

Melville agreed.

“It’s always challenging when you have a super-high-cost production year like this, and then the prices do fall off,” he said.

Mark Bennett, a Baker County commissioner who also owns a cattle ranch in the southern part of the county, near Unity,

described the combination of drought and the rapid rise in production costs as a “perfect storm of crises hitting simultaneously.”

He said in early March that after placing an order for fuel the price jumped 50 cents per gallon once, and then again, before he even received the fuel.

Don Wysocki, a soil scientist with the Oregon State University Extension in Umatilla County, said uncertainty about crop prices exacerbates the challenge of rising production costs.

See Supply, Page 6