

SPRING RAIN | WALLOWA COUNTY

Damp spring leaves growers optimistic about hay crop

By JEFF BUDLONG AND
BILL BRADSHAW

Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — The recent run of rain combined with steadily increasing temperatures has many ranchers and farmers feeling good. But for a group that has battled the extremes in recent years, they are remaining cautiously optimistic.

“We bank up feed this time of year, and to have moisture and cool weather to provide for sustained growth between late May and early June really set us up for the year,” said Todd Nash, a Wallowa County rancher and president of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association. “From my side of the fence, and the cattle’s side of the fence, it could rain

all summer as far as I am concerned.”

The spring moisture helped ease the concerns of ranchers and farmers who endured cold weather that slowed the growth of forage in April and May.

“I DON’T THINK ANYBODY’S COMPLAINING ABOUT EXTRA MOISTURE. IT’S BEEN A BLESSING BOTH FOR THE STOCKGROWERS AND US.”

— Mark Butterfield, chairman, Wallowa County Hay Growers

“The forage has bust loose and it is wonderful to have it again because we were without last year,” said Nash, noting the extremely hot, dry summer of 2021, which included record-breaking heat in late June.

This year, by contrast, with significant

snow falling in the mountains even into early June, the snowpack is strong and will lessen the burden on those who rely on melting snow to irrigate their fields and pastures. Nash said that hauling water for live-

stock will be unnecessary unlike the past few years, unless it is a common practice for a rancher.

“(Hauling water) is not a normal practice for Wallowa County,” he said. “It only happens in extreme years.”

Despite the abundance of forage that has grown, it can come with a downside. When it begins to dry in July and August, it brings the all too familiar threat of wildfire with it, Nash said.

Nash said the moisture is a benefit for Wallowa County farmers because their crops tend to be harvested later than in neighboring counties, but he has heard some concerns of crop rust, plant diseases caused by pathogenic fungi.

Making hay

With the faucet finally slowing down at the end of June, and warmer temperatures arriving, farmers who grow alfalfa and timothy grass were able to get their first cutting in.

See Hay, Page 15



Cattle graze in a pasture below a farmhouse along Dobbin Road south of Enterprise on Thursday, June 23, 2022.

Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain