

Where uncertainty grows

Farmers worry who will control escaped genetically engineered bentgrass

By Sean Ellis
EO Media Group

Eastern Oregon farmer Jerry Erstrom scouts for patches of genetically engineered creeping bentgrass on the banks of an irrigation ditch June 14.

It doesn't take him long to find one. And then another, and another.

The bentgrass was genetically engineered to withstand applications of glyphosate herbicide, which makes it difficult to kill.

Farmers such as Erstrom worry it will ultimately take over the countryside, clog irrigation ditches and affect shipments of crops to nations that don't accept traces of genetically modified organisms, or GMOs.

"I've been doing weeds for 25 years and I promise you in five years this (county) will be inundated with it," said Erstrom, chairman of the Malheur County Weed Board.

The bentgrass was meant for golf courses. Instead, after escaping from field trials 13 years ago, it has taken root in Malheur and Jefferson counties and ignited a debate about who should be responsible for controlling it in the future.

Scotts Miracle-Gro Co., which was developing the grass for use mainly on golf course greens, said it is committed to collaboratively working with growers and irrigation districts to control and eradicate the grass where possible.

But some farmers believe a 10-year agreement Scotts



EO Media Group/Sean Ellis

Malheur County farmer Jerry Erstrom points out a genetically engineered creeping bentgrass plant June 14 on an irrigation ditch bank near Ontario. The grass, which was genetically modified by Scotts Miracle-Gro Co. to resist the Roundup weed killer, escaped from field trials in 2003 and has taken root in Malheur and Jefferson counties in Oregon and part of Canyon County in Idaho.

recently reached with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will allow the company in a few years to essentially walk away from any responsibility for controlling the plant.

"I think Scotts should be liable for what they did but they are pretty much walking away from it," said Malheur County farmer Rod Frahm. "Personally, I think since they created the problem, they should take care of it."

Scotts 'committed'

Molly Jennings, director of public affairs for Scotts, told Capital Press in an email that claims the company is walking away from its responsibility are unfounded. "We are commit-

ted, and have been, to a collaborative, long-term management plan with local landowners, irrigation managers and others."

In an email response, USDA Public Affairs Specialist Andre Bell also rejected the notion that the agreement allows Scotts to walk away from the problem.

Scotts, in conjunction with Monsanto Corp., was developing the genetically modified creeping bentgrass to be resistant to glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, Monsanto's popular weed killer.

But the grass escaped from field trials in 2003 due to what USDA describes as a "wind event" and took root in Malheur and Jefferson counties in Oregon.

According to Jennings, two wind storms resulted in seed heads scattering from the field trial control area in August 2003.

The plants were identified outside the control area in 2004.

Scotts has been surveying for and controlling the plant for several years.

According to Scotts, the company identified 424 plants in Malheur County and 441 plants in Jefferson County during spring spraying this year. A small number of the plants were found in Canyon County, Idaho, which is adjacent to Malheur County.

10-year agreement

During a March meeting with a top USDA official and Scotts representatives, some local farmers and irrigation district representatives challenged the terms of the agreement, reached in September.

The agreement requires Scotts to continue to survey for and try to eradicate the bentgrass in 2016. In years 2 and 3, the company must provide technical assistance to affected farmers and irrigation districts and provide incentives for the adoption of best management practices to control the grass.

The company will also conduct outreach and education programs.

In years 4 through 10, Scotts will pull back a little while continuing to analyze the situation, educate growers and provide technical assistance, Sid Abel, assistant deputy director of USDA's Biotechnology Regulatory Services, said during the March meeting.

Sales figures could make pot Oregon's most valuable crop

By Eric Mortenson
Capital Bureau

Sales and tax figures collected by state agencies may finally solve one of Oregon's long-running farm crop questions: whether marijuana is indeed the state's most valuable crop, as cannabis advocates have always maintained.

Tight controls and reporting requirements by the Oregon Department of Revenue and Oregon Liquor Control Commission should result in accurate information about pot, said Bruce Pokarney, spokesman for the state Department of Agriculture. The department compiles an annual list of the state's most valuable crops.

The temporary sale of recreational marijuana by medical marijuana dispensaries became legal in Oregon last October. Dispensaries charge a 25 percent tax on sales. When licensed recreational retailers begin operating in January the state tax will be 17 percent.

The information, however, poses another head-scratcher. Most agricultural statistics published by the ag department come from the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, or NASS. Although it's now legal in several states, the feds still classify marijuana as an illegal drug. Dave Losh, Oregon state statistician for NASS, said the agency won't include marijuana in its annual crop statistics due to federal policy.

For the same reason, people can't use water from fed-

eral projects to irrigate marijuana, he said, and such things as Natural Resources Conservation Service programs can't be applied to pot crops.

Pokarney, of ODA, joked the department might have to put an asterisk beside the pot crop value in its annual report. "We will have sales numbers, but I don't know how we would report it," he said.

Oregon crop statistics from 2014 list cattle and calves as the state's top agricultural product, at \$922 million value. Greenhouse and nursery plants was second at \$829 million, and hay was third, at \$703 million.

Seth Crawford, an Oregon State University sociology professor who teaches a pot policy class, estimated in 2015 that Oregon's marijuana crop had an annual value approaching \$1 billion.

Meanwhile, the OLCC continues to process license applications as entrepreneurs seek opportunities in the state's recreational cannabis market.

As of June 21, there were 723 applications to grow pot in Oregon. Of those, 122 were in Jackson County and 91 were in neighboring Josephine County. Southern Oregon has long been the state's cannabis production hotbed, legal or illegal. The tri-county Portland area, including Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, accounted for 250 of the license applications.

Of processing facilities, 25 of the 82 license applications were from Multnomah County, as were 69 of 193 retail outlet applications.

Church Services In Grant County

GRACE CHAPEL
Evangelical Methodist
154 E. Williams St.,
Prairie City • 541-820-4437
gracechl@ortelco.net
Pastor Michael Harvey
Early Worship 8:45 a.m.
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Worship 11 a.m.
Evening Worship 6:30 p.m.
WEDNESDAY
Prayer 8 a.m.
THURSDAY
Bible Study 6:30 p.m.

Seventh-Day Adventist Church
SATURDAY SERVICES
JOHN DAY
110 Valley View Dr. - 541-575-1216
Head Elder.....541-575-2914
Bible Classes (all ages).....9:30 am
Worship.....11 am
LONG CREEK
E. Main Street - 541-421-3033
Head Elder.....421-3468
Bible Classes (all ages).....2 pm
Worship.....3 pm
Tune into
3 ANGELS BROADCASTING
KSPL 98.1 FM
Blue Mountain Cable, Channel 2
Antenna; Digital Channel 15
& UHF Channel 8

Cornerstone Christian Fellowship
139 N.E. DAYTON STREET, JOHN DAY
541-575-2180
Sunday Worship Service
10 am
Pastor Levi Manitsas
cornerstonejohnday@gmail.com

John Day Valley Mennonite Church
Meeting every Sunday
at Mt. Vernon Grange Hall
Sunday School.....9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship...10:50 a.m.
Pastor Leland Smucker
Everyone Welcome • 541-575-5507

St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Morning Prayer.....10 am
(1st, 3rd, 5th Sundays)
Eucharist & Sunday School.....10 am
(2nd & 4th Sundays)
139 S. Washington,
Canyon City
541-620-1436

New Life Bible Church
2 Corinthians 5:17
Every Sunday in the L.C.
Community Center
(Corner of Second & Allen)
Begins at 4:10pm
Contact Pastor Ed Stuttmann at
541-421-3888

MT. VERNON PRESBYTERIAN Community Church
SUNDAY SERVICE.....9 am
SUNDAY SCHOOL.....9 am
541-932-4800
EVERYONE WELCOME

Prairie Baptist Church
238 N. McHaley St.
Prairie City
Pastor David Hoeffner
541-820-3696
www.prairie-baptist-church.com
Sunday School for all ages 9:00 am
Sunday morning worship 10:30 am
Awana (Oct.-Apr.) 3:00 pm
Youth Group 5:30 pm

VICTORY BAPTIST CHURCH
KJV Independent
Fundamental • Premillennial
Terence K. Crabb, Pastor
A Bible-believing Church
"He that hath the Son hath life..." 1 John 5:12
Sunday School 9:45 am • Sunday Preaching 11:00 am
Junior Church 11:00 am • Sunday Evenings 7:30 pm
Wednesday Bible Study & Master Club 7:00 pm
Saturday Men's Prayer Meeting 7:00 pm
108 S. Washington Street, Canyon City
541-575-2688 or 541-575-0844

JOHN DAY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Sunday Worship • 9AM
(541) 575-1326
johndayUMC@gmail.com
126 NW Canton, John Day
Like us on Facebook!

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church
Corner of S Canyon Blvd and SW 2nd
Mon. - Fri. Mass - 12:05 pm
Saturday Mass - 5:00 pm
Sunday Mass - 9:00 am
Confession: Saturday 3:30-4:30 pm
Anytime by appointment 541-575-1459

St. Anne
Monument - Sunday at 12:30 pm
St. Katherine
Dale
1st & 3rd Sundays at 2:30 pm
Office Hours
Monday - Friday 9 am - 12 Noon

Living Word Christian Center
Hwy 26 Mt. Vernon
Celebration of Worship
Sundays 5:30pm
Kids Classes 0-6th grade
Midweek Bible Study
Thursdays 6:30pm
Kids 0-6th grade
PASTOR SHARON MILLER
541-932-4910
www.livingwordcc.com

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
Sunday School.....9:30 am
Sunday Worship Service.....10:45 am
Sunday Evening Service.....6:00 pm
Children & Teen Activities
SMALL GROUPS CALL FOR MORE INFO
Weekdays: Sunshine Christian School
521 E. Main • John Day • 541-575-1895
www.johndaynazarene.com

Historic Remnant Church
Preparing for Jesus to come
Meets Saturday at Mt. Vernon Grange Sabbath School.....9:30 am
Church Services.....11:00 am
541-620-0340

Redeemer Lutheran Church
Come Worship with us at
627 SE Hillcrest, John Day
1st & 3rd Sunday Worship
& Communion10 am
2nd, 4th & 5th Sunday Worship10 am
Wednesday Evening Bible Study.....6 pm
For information: 541-575-2348

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School.....10 am
Church.....11 am
Afternoon Service.....1 pm
No Mid-week Services
Pastor Ray Isenberger
300 W. Main, John Day
541-575-1355

Strawberry Mountain CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship
Sunday Services10 am
Seneca Outreach.....2 pm
Midweek Services also available
170 SE Dayton, John Day
2nd & Ave. D, Seneca
541-620-0976

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday School.....9:45 am
Sunday Worship.....11 am
Sunday Evening Bible talk.....6:30 pm
Saturday Men's Study.....7 pm
Full Gospel- Come Grow With Us
541-575-1202 Church
311 NE Dayton St, John Day
Pastor Al Altnow
www.fcjohnday.com