

Research explores dry farming possibilities

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

SALEM — Northwest farmers and researchers are exploring how to expand the use of “dry farming.”

Dry farming is a low-input approach to farming. Some farmers draw a distinction between “dry farming” and “dryland farming,” while others use the terms interchangeably. Those participating in the research use the definition of “irrigated once or not at all.”

Dry farming was more prevalent before farmers turned to irrigation, said Amy Garrett, president of the Dry Farming Institute and Oregon State University Extension small farms programs instructor. She’s met longtime dry farmers raising

crops that researchers weren’t aware could be grown without irrigation.

Crops include winter squash, tomatoes, dry beans, orchards, zucchini, melons, carrots and corn.

“As soon as you say, ‘These are the only crops you can dry farm,’ there’s always going to be somebody innovating...,” Garrett said.

More than 50 farmers are participating in research efforts involving crops ranging from vegetables to wheat.

Most of them are using small parcels, some as small as 1,000 square feet, Garrett said.

Water availability in the soil is the most important factor, said Alex Stone, OSU vegetable specialist. The more water-holding capacity in the



Oregon State University Dry Farming Project student research assistants Kelly Andrus, Asher Whitney and Meaghan Herlihy host a dry-farmed tomato tasting at the Corvallis Farmers Market.

soil, the more likely it is to produce a higher yield, she said.

Some dry-farmed tomato yields on some sites in Oregon were comparable to irrigated

yields in California, Stone said.

“You don’t have the irrigation expense and you can have lower weeding costs,” she said. Researchers are also ana-

lyzing profitability. Yields are lower, so the cost of dry-farmed produce tends to be higher, according to the Dry Farming Institute.

One goal is to entice customers to pay more for dry-farmed products than for irrigated products, said Emily Dick, project manager at the Washington Water Trust, a nonprofit dedicated to improving and protecting stream flow and water quality.

A pilot project involving 11 farmers developed a label for dry-farmed produce.

Benefits of dry farming for farmers can include lower weeding costs by 50% and lower input costs.

For consumers, benefits can include enhanced flavor and better storability, Garrett said.

The researchers have conducted taste tests comparing dry-farmed tomatoes, melons and berries to their irrigated counterparts.

About \$1 million has been devoted to research so far.

The researchers hope to find more funding for research, said Lucas Nebert, an OSU post-doctoral student. He hopes to start mapping sites where dry farming is likely to be successful.

Garrett thinks more recognition in the marketplace will lead to more demand.

“This year, especially with temperature extremes, water issues and the backdrop of the fires, people are thinking about how to adapt,” she said. “It’s not the solution (by itself), but it can be part of an adaptive strategy.”

USDA stands by killing of wolf pups

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

SALEM — USDA has rejected environmentalists’ request that its Wildlife Services unit stop killing wolf pups on all public lands.

The agency’s hunters and trappers in some states are called upon to cull wolf packs when they attack livestock, costing ranchers thousands of dollars.

The environmentalists in an Aug. 4 letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said they were “dismayed” to learn Wildlife Services in Idaho was involved in killing wolf pups on public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service is a part of USDA.

They claimed killing pups is not biologically sound or socially acceptable. They also referred to an Idaho law that took effect July 1 to allow more wolf harvest and more methods of killing wolves.

Moreover, “wolf pups pose no threat to domestic livestock — in Idaho or anywhere in the Western United States,” they said in the letter.

The letter was from the International Wildlife Coexistence Network, Western Watersheds Project, Living with Wolves, Friends of the Clearwater, Predator Defense, WildEarth Guardians, conservation educator Christine Gertschen, and the Center for Biological Diversity.

Jenny Lester Moffitt, USDA undersecretary for marketing and regulatory programs, said in an Oct. 1 response letter that it’s important that Wildlife Services managers have access to all available tools to effectively respond to depredation, and that lethal control methods are necessary in some situations.

“As such, we cannot stop using any legal, humane management options, including the lethal removal of juvenile wolves,” she wrote.

Wildlife Services personnel work carefully to remove “only those animals necessary to protect livestock, other agricultural resources, natural resources, human health and safety, or property,” she said.

Conservation groups said their request was prompted by Wildlife Services killing pups in response to complaints from a public lands rancher. The rancher had experienced depredation more than a year earlier. They said Wildlife Services started pursuing the pack in May, when an agent killed three pups at the den, and that the agency killed five more pups over the next two months.

Prudential seeks millions more from Easterday

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

SALEM — Prudential Insurance Co. claims the bankrupt Easterday estate owes it more than \$9 million, a demand opposing lawyers call unreasonable and if paid will come “out of the hide” of other creditors.

Eastern Washington cattleman Cody Easterday borrowed \$50 million from Prudential in 2020, about one year before he filed for bankruptcy as he was being investigated for defrauding Tyson Fresh Meats.

Prudential recovered with interest the loan out of the \$209 million that Farmland Reserve Inc. paid to buy Easterday farms in Benton County.

The New Jersey-based lender, however, says it’s still due nearly \$7 million because the 10-year loan was repaid early and \$2.1 million because Easterday’s bankruptcy triggered a 12% default interest rate.

Attorneys for the bankrupt Easterday businesses say there is no evidence early payment harmed Prudential and have asked U.S. Bankruptcy



Cody Easterday

Judge Whitman Holt in Yakima to deny the prepayment penalty and default interest.

The attorneys called the formula used to calculate the early payment penalty “unconscionable” and that every dollar paid in default interest is “a dollar that comes out of the hide” of other creditors.

On Wednesday, Prudential filed a brief responding to accusations it was being unreasonable. Cody Easterday — along with his wife and parents — were sophisticated borrowers who understood the nature of Prudential’s business, according to the brief.

“At its core, the prepayment formula employed by Prudential is ubiquitous in the real estate finance industry,” according to Prudential.

The two sides are due to appear in front of Holt on Oct. 20. The resolution will affect how much money is left for other creditors, including Tyson, who was defrauded out of \$233 million.

Easterday pleaded guilty to billing Tyson for buying and feeding some 200,000 head of cattle that didn’t exist. The Commodity Futures Trading

Commission says Easterday used the payments to cover losses from trading in cattle futures markets.

In a plea deal, Easterday promised to make restitution. His sentencing for wire fraud has been postponed until January to give him time to help sell Easterday assets and raise money for Tyson and other creditors. Prudential is at the head of the line because its loan was secured by three Easterday farms.

Prudential and Easterday temporarily set aside their differences this summer to allow Farmland Reserve, owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, to buy the farms without liens.

Prudential contends the prepayment premium was part of an eight-figure commercial loan and not “anything close to conscience shocking.”

Prudential and Easterday farms and ranches also are arguing over whether Prudential should be reimbursed for \$377,000 in legal fees and for a \$41,000 title report it obtained to make sure it knew everyone who had an interest in the farms in case of a lawsuit.

Equitable Life Insurance Co. made a similar claim related to loans it made to Easterday in 2015 and 2020. Equitable argued it was due \$3.2 million in prepayment premiums.

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