

# Commission hears Lost Valley woes

State officials say non-compliance rampant at troubled dairy farm

By David Sykes

Morrow County Commissioners were treated to a long list of problems last week encountered by state officials attempting to enforce environmental and other compliance rules violated in the short operating life of the now bankrupt Lost Valley Farms Dairy at Boardman. Four state officials were at the May 16 commission meeting to talk about the problems they've had trying to bring the 8,000-cow dairy into compliance with regulations required for its continued operation.

William "Wym" Matthews, the Confined Animal Feeding Program manager with the Agriculture Department in Salem told commissioners the permitting of the dairy was sound, and the construction rules were followed. But he said problems started immediately after the dairy began operation last year. Notices of non-compliance for various infractions were issued starting only one month after the facility started operation. "They were issued a large number of notices for a new facility," Matthews said, adding that state agencies in charge of enforcement haven't seen much cooperation from the dairy to resolve the problems. "We did not see them coming into compliance after the notices," Matthews told the commissioners. The dairy was permitted March 30 of 2017 and started operation one month after that.

Matthews said in response to the dairy's ignoring the notices, the state took them to court, and reduced the number of cows they could have to around 8,000. He said many of the issues were with the filtering system for waste water. "But none of the discharges ever entered the surface water," he emphasized. Matthews said the protection of ground water was extremely good at the dairy, pointing out that the dairy was well built to confine animal waste and said "his barns would have had to be 12-foot under water to contaminate the ground water. The area is surrounded by monitoring wells and all the lagoons are double lined with leak detectors." Matthews pointed out. He

said the dairy operation has been inspected on average "every week over the past year," adding they were still inspecting and were in fact on their way to the dairy to inspect following the commission meeting.

It was also pointed out what an "enormous amount" of bad press the whole dairy permitting process received, mainly because of its extreme opposition to construction and operation from environmental groups. But officials insisted the permitting process was done right, and that after opening the dairy just did not comply with its operating rules. Officials added that they did not know in advance there was going to be this amount of non-compliance, and had no way of knowing this was going to happen at the dairy.

The dairy, which is owned by California man Greg te Velde, is also having financial troubles and is currently in Chapter 11 bankruptcy and may be looking for a buyer. He has two other dairies in California that are not in bankruptcy. At an earlier Commission meeting, County Assessor Mike Gorman reported that Lost Valley Farms owes the county \$360,000 in back property taxes.

In reviewing what could have been done differently during the permitting process, commissioner Don Russell wondered if it may be a good idea for the state to require a bond from companies building an operation of such size, in case it does go broke. Commissioner Jim Doherty said he reviewed the county's earlier two letters, one written about environmental concerns the other urging permit approval, prior to the construction, but did not indicate he felt the county could have done anything different during the permit process. "We are ag based (here in Morrow County)," he said. "I am a cow guy. I have 700 plus cows, that's what I do. I am not against ag, but I am against bad ag," he said.

County planner Carla McLane said the state has said that at the county level, "We don't have the right to limit agriculture. And I

don't want to limit farms from farming, but it feels like we have had our hands tied, where is the balance?" she said of the dairy permitting process.

"We, as a county are not opposed to large scale dairies," Russell said. "We have large scale dairies already here that are some of the best managed in the world." Russell asked the state regulators if there was a chance someone else with the financial resources could purchase the dairy with its 40,000-cow permit and operate it? Matthews said that was possible, but it would have to be under a new permit. When the dairy was originally permitted it was projected that there would be 150 new jobs and \$50 million a year injected into the local economy.

To emphasize how much public interest, mostly from outside the local area, the dairy received during the permitting process, officials said they received a total of 4,280 public comments, the most on any project in history. Of those comments 1,041 came from outside the state of Oregon, 2,300 from Oregon but outside the immediate local area, and 813 comments even came from outside the United States. There were 85 comments from the local area, and of those the majority were overwhelmingly positive, officials said. Most of the comments coming from outside the area were negative. Don Butcher the Department of Environmental Quality Water Quality Permit Manager was also at the commission meeting and he said many of the negative comments were concerns about air quality, "which we did not deal with," he pointed out.

The four state regulators from the Water Resources, DEQ, and Department of Agriculture who attended last week's commission meeting, said they were scheduled to answer questions at a legislative subcommittee meeting Monday in Salem. That committee is headed up by Portland Democrat Senator Michael Dembrow, who is chair of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

books, improvements to historical/cultural buildings, kids' activities in parks and drama and musical workshops throughout Morrow County.

Anyone interested in helping to determine projects to be supported should contact grant administrator, Gayle Gutierrez at 541-676-5630 or email ggutierrez@co.morrow.or.us.

# Morrow County students join efforts to reduce tobacco use

According to a press release from Robin Warren, OHA TPEP Coordinator for the Morrow County Health Department, students are asking residents to participate in a social campaign to reduce tobacco use and vaping. Warren stated a student leader in a discussion group suggested a social campaign using a popular hashtag #NoTobacco during a discussion group at the Morrow education center.

Morrow County will be participating in World Health Organization (WHO) on May 31, in an effort to reduce tobacco use and vaping. In an effort to raise awareness, students are asking Morrow County residents to update their social media on this day to #NoTobacco.

Morrow County School District administrators and teachers are supporting these students' efforts and

have stated, "It is a great step in the right direction." Staff members at Morrow County Health Department are applauding the students for their ideas and efforts. Public Health nurses will be providing education in the schools throughout Morrow County. Several local businesses are joining to support by having Oregon Quit line brochures available and updating their Facebook pages for the day.

Published research studies have found that kids are twice as sensitive to tobacco advertising as adults and are more likely to be influenced to smoke by cigarette marketing than by peer pressure. One-third of underage experimentation with smoking is attributable to tobacco company advertising. One student leader from Heppner reported, "It's difficult to see other people smoking and they



don't want us to." Research shows students who view a parent or trusted adult smoking increased their chance of smoking by more than 20 percent.

"It is difficult to quit smoking once a person has started. We are here to support anyone who wants to make that choice for the students in their home or their community," said Warren.

For questions or information about the support campaign contact Public Health at 541-676-5421, call the Oregon Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visit www.quitnow.net/oregon.

# Heppner Track team competes at state



The Heppner High School track team back row: Coach Russ Nichols, Madelyn Nichols, Trevor Antonucci, Hunter Nichols, Alex Lindsay, Derek Howard, Makayla Silvia, Jayden Wilson, Jacob Wallace and Coach Laura Winters. Front row: Mason Lehman and Jackson Lehman. -Contributed photo.

Heppner track athletes competed in the state championship meet on May 17 and 18 at Hayward field in Eugene. Nine athletes qualified at the district meet, most in multiple events. After the highs and lows that come with any sporting event, the men's team walked away with a second place finish. Every athlete who competed stood on the podium, several with top standing.

Madelyn Nichols started the Heppner competition on Thursday, competing in the 3000m run and earning eighth place with a personal record time of 11:58.71. Nichols took eighth place again in a tough field in the 1500m run on Friday, again running a personal record time of 5:23.73.

Makayla Silvia high jumped 4'6" for eighth place, starting the field events off in the right direction. Jayden Wilson and Alex Lindsay competed in the long jump; Lindsay jumping 19'1" for sixth place and Wilson jumping 18'7" for eighth place.

Derek Howard threw the shot put 48'4.75" for

a third place finish and competed in the javelin and discus, earning 12<sup>th</sup> place in both.

Hunter Nichols ran a fast 3000m race on Thursday, earning second place with a personal record time of 9:05.20, followed in fourth place by teammate Trevor Antonucci, with a personal record time of 9:18.2. The two athletes again stood on the podium together in the 1500m run, with Nichols running for third with a time of 4:14.8 and Antonucci running for fifth with a time of 4:17.9. Jacob Wallace made finals in the 110m hurdles with a personal best time of 17.82 and ran a similar time in the finals to place eighth.

Alex Lindsay competed in two more jumping events on Friday. In the high jump, Lindsay cleared a height of 6'0", a personal record height and an effort that earned him third place. In triple jump, Alex took the lead early with a jump of 41'4", but no one was able to catch up. With a 41'11" jump in the finals, Lindsay secured his first place lead and won the competition.

Lindsay topped the podium and accepted his first place medal.

The final race of the day was the 4x400m relay. Alex Lindsay, Jayden Wilson, Mason Lehman and Hunter Nichols made up the strong team. Each leg ran their best and came into the last stretch in second place. Unfortunately, controversial contact with another team caused a fall, and Nichols diligently got up and finished the race. The team that caused the fall was not disqualified and Heppner took the podium in seventh place. Despite the tragic results of the race, the team celebrated a second place standing as a men's team and took home the trophy.

According to a news release, head coaches Russ Nichols and Laura Winters expressed their pride in the team after a successful season, and look forward to another strong team next year.

For full results of the state championship meet, visit athletic.net.

# Cultural Coalition seeking board members

Morrow County Cultural Coalition is seeking board members to help review and approve grant requests for cultural activities throughout Morrow County. The board meets

once a year, in October, to determine projects to be funded from the Oregon Cultural Coalition.

Projects supported in the past include art instruction, historical library

**WE WILL BE CLOSED**  
**MEMORIAL DAY**  
  
**MONDAY MAY 28TH**  
**HAVE A SAFE & HAPPY WEEKEND!**

**HATS OFF TO THE GRAD!**  
 - HALLMARK  
 - GIFT WARE  
 - FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS

**Murray's Drug**  
 217 North Main St., Heppner • Phone 541-676-9158 • Floral 541-676-9426

**Community Clean-up Day**  
  
 Organized by the City of Heppner  
**FREE DUMPSTER** for garbage collection available at the City yard on Riverside Ave.  
**Thursday May 17th through Monday May 28th.**  
**There will also be a spot to leave yard debris and burnable material.**  
**The City will not accept tires, hazardous waste or household chemicals.**  
**City of Heppner residents only**  
**Please contact the City of Heppner for more information 541-676-9618.**

*please join us*

Please Join Us for a  
**Meet & Greet Open House** welcoming  
**Caroline Jackson, New Director of Pioneer Memorial Home Health & Hospice**  
 Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 4 to 6 p.m.  
 Main St. Office, Heppner

Heppner Gazette-Times  
 P.O. Box 337  
 Heppner, Oregon 97836.