

Heat, smoke may not diminish potato harvest

Early season yields are looking about average thus far

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
EO MEDIA GROUP

Months of intense heat and smoky skies are not expected to diminish Oregon's potato crop, with farmers across the state predicting average to above-average yields heading into the bulk of harvest.

Bill Brewer, CEO of the Oregon Potato Commission, said the overall impact of wildfire smoke is yet to be determined in spuds, but he has not heard of any major setbacks or problems with quality.

Hot weather can be hard on certain potato varieties, such as Russet Burbank — the gold standard for french fries — though in general, Brewer said he anticipates a roughly average harvest statewide and good quality potatoes.

"The higher heat during the summertime has been a bit of an issue, only on select varieties," Brewer said. "So



Potatoes ride a conveyor belt into a cold storage facility outside of Hermiston in 2014.

HH FILE PHOTO

far, I have not heard any other negatives about other growing conditions."

About 70 percent of Oregon potatoes are grown in the Columbia Basin around Hermiston and Boardman. Potatoes ranked as the sev-

enth-most valuable agricultural commodity in the state in 2017, raking in \$176.9 million.

Marty Myers, general manager of Threemile Canyon Farms near Boardman, said the growing season

got off to a good start with warm weather early in the spring. Crews began harvesting early season potatoes on July 10, and Myers said yields have generally been very good.

Threemile Canyon

Farms grows 9,000 acres of mostly conventional and some organic russets, all for local food processors. Myers said it is still too early to tell if triple-digit heat and smoke in July and August has impacted full season potatoes. Harvest just began Sept. 12, and will likely run through Oct. 20-25.

"Early season was very warm, and things looked pretty good," Myers said. "Then summer heat comes in like it does every year and knocks us back a little bit. ... We always know it's going to get hot over the summer, and at periods we're going to have smoke."

Brewer said he believes the smoke does have an effect on potato production, blocking sunlight needed by the plants and possibly altering taste, but more research is needed to back up anecdotal evidence.

Dan Chin, who runs Chin Family Farms Organic outside Merrill in the Klamath Basin, theorizes the smoke actually helped his potatoes this year by lowering the heat and causing the plants to put more energy into the tubers. He started harvest-

ing Sept. 12, and said both size and quality are looking good.

"Just looking at it last year and this year, we're seeing a little trend that the smoke didn't really hurt our sizing and yield as much as we thought it might," Chin said.

That being said, Chin said they definitely do not want smoke every year, which makes it harder for employees to work outside.

Mark Ward, chairman of the Oregon Potato Commission, farms 160 acres of potatoes on the north edge of Baker City. He is targeting Sept. 24 to begin harvest, and like others, expects to see solid yields.

Ward exclusively supplies potatoes to Simplot for making french fries. He said this summer's heat, including five days of triple-digit temperatures, may increase the likelihood of sugar ends, a defect in potatoes that results in unappealing brown ends.

"We won't know that until we deliver some potatoes," Ward said. "If you were managing your water properly, you should be OK."

Lost Valley Farm founder jailed Friday on drug charges

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
STAFF WRITER

The founder of Oregon's second-largest dairy found himself Friday in Hermiston police handcuffs.

Hermiston police arrested Greg te Velde, 60, on accusations of felony methamphetamine possession. The resident of Tipton, California, was not alone. Police also arrested Sarah Cook, 38, of Hermiston on accusations of felony meth possession as well.

Officers contacted the pair late Friday during a traffic stop in the parking lot near her apartment complex at 630 S.E. Sixth St., according to Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston.

"Officers discovered suspected methamphetamine and smoking devices in plain view," he stated, and te Velde was in possession of \$7,400 cash. The police chief also reported to Velde "admitted to buying and using methamphetamine earlier in the evening with Cook."

Officers detained the pair and searched the vehicle, where they found several grams of what appeared to be methamphetamine. Police arrested

te Velde and Cook for the drugs and booked them into the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton. Officers also seized the \$7,400 and cited te Velde for driving while suspended and failing to drive on the right.

"This arrest was the start of the weekend for the team of officers that was late shift," Edmiston said in an email. "Our officers were extremely busy making several drug and DUII arrests. We are aware Mr. Tevelde is facing numerous charges from more than one entity. We have been in consultation with the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office."

Court and police records also use the name Tevelde.

Te Velde founded the Lost Valley Farm, near Boardman, plus two dairies in California — GJ te Velde Ranch in Tipton, and Pacific Rim Dairy in Corcoran. He also got himself into a slew of financial, personal and legal troubles, including accusations of drug use and patronizing prostitutes.

The California bankruptcy court in September wrested control of the farms from te Velde and appointed a trustee to oversee their operations.



Greg te Velde



Sarah Cook

Mooney will be appointed Hermiston superintendent

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The Hermiston School Board will appoint a full-time superintendent on Wednesday.

The Hermiston School District published an announcement after the board's work session Monday that it will hold a special meeting Wednesday, and will appoint interim Superintendent Tricia Mooney to the full-time position.

The district held a meet-and-greet with Mooney on Monday, where community members were invited to hear her talk about her background in education and the Hermiston area, and ask her questions about her vision for the district.

Several district staff members and administrators were in the crowd of about 30, as well as some parents and community members.

She said in addition to addressing capital needs, she hopes to continue making the district a focal point of the community, for sporting events and other activities.

"I believe the district will play a pivotal role in the economic development of the community," she said.

Audience members focused on Mooney's plan



Tricia Mooney

to handle a growing student population and overflowing facilities, as well as her plan to get a bond passed.

Mooney said with the rate of growth the district has been experiencing, the schools will always have some modulars.

But she said the district is also looking at boundaries, as crowded classrooms mean some students have had to go to schools other than their "home" school.

A community member also asked Mooney about her plan to improve graduation rates in Hermiston, which, as of the last assessment in January, was at 66 percent, 10 points behind the state average.

Mooney said the district has been changing its approach, and cited the hire

of a graduation coach to help keep freshmen on track, as well as learning how to reach parents and get them involved in their students' educations.

The board was set to meet at 8 a.m. Wednesday to vote on the appointment.

Mooney has been serving as interim superintendent since July 2017, when then-superintendent Fred Maiocco, a brigadier general with the U.S. Army Reserves, left for active duty expecting to be back in January 2019. Maiocco resigned in August 2018, after informing the board that his term of service had been extended until January 2020.

The board also has a new vacancy, after it accepted the resignation of one of its members at Monday's work session.

Jason Middleton read a letter informing the board that he was resigning immediately, saying that personal and work commitments would prevent him from devoting time to the role.

He added that he had recently been elected to the Oregon Wheat Commission, a group that advocates for wheat issues at the state level.

Middleton, a region manager for United Grain Cor-

poration in Pendleton, has served on the board since 2008. He was first appointed to a position vacated by Roger Bounds.

He praised the district and its teachers, and said he was glad for the opportunity to observe the work teachers do.

"Being a school teacher is probably the most noble profession there is," he said.

The board is accepting applicants to the vacant position until Friday, Oct. 5. They will review the applications and interview candidates at their regular school board meeting Oct. 8, and appoint a new member on Oct. 22.



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