

Hemp takes center stage at Farm Fair

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
EO MEDIA GROUP

For years, the Hermiston Farm Fair has been a destination for potato, grain and vegetable farmers in the Columbia Basin to learn about new research and technology.

Add industrial hemp to the list of crops featured at this year's 46th annual seminars and trade show.

As hemp continues to gain ground across Oregon, scientists and regulators presented their latest findings about the versatile plant during a half-day seminar Dec. 4, covering everything from federal regulations to managing pests and diseases.

Gary McAnich, program manager for the Oregon Department of Agriculture, discussed the state's role in overseeing hemp production and complying with interim rules recently issued by the USDA.

"We try to treat hemp just like any other crop," McAnich said, though he added there are caveats due to its close relationship to marijuana.

The 2018 Farm Bill officially classified hemp as



Capital Press File

Hemp grows in an Oregon field.

an agricultural commodity, removing it from the list of Schedule I drugs. ODA has issued hemp grower licenses under a pilot program since 2015 under the previous Farm Bill.

Since then, the state has gone from 13 registered growers and 105 acres to 1,957 growers and 63,684 acres as of Nov. 7. That includes 112 registered growers in Eastern Oregon, including Umatilla,

Morrow, Union, Wallowa, Grant, Baker, Malheur and Harney counties.

"We saw a big explosion in 2019 as a result of the 2018 Farm Bill being put into place, McAnich said.

ODA already complies with several major provisions of the interim USDA rules, McAnich said, such as tracking acreage and testing plants for levels of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC. By definition, industrial

hemp cannot exceed 0.3% THC.

However, the agency has only been testing for delta-9 THC — the main psychoactive component in cannabis that gets users high. Under the USDA proposal, it calls for testing "total THC," taking into account other compounds that can convert to delta-9 THC when heat is applied.

McAnich said the agency will switch to testing for

total THC beginning in 2020. But hemp harvested in 2019 will not be re-tested under the more stringent standard, meaning growers will not have to worry about potentially losing some or all of this year's crop.

The USDA regulations also call for testing hemp within 15 days of harvest, as opposed to 28 days under the Oregon rules, compressing the timeline for growers.

McAnich said his phone has been ringing off the hook with concerns about differences between the state and federal plans.

"This is the time right now to provide comments (to the USDA)," he said.

Meanwhile, the 2019 growing season was the first opportunity for researchers at Oregon State University's Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center to take a closer look at studying the hemp growing around the region.

Ken Frost, a plant pathologist at the station, gave a presentation about diseases they observed in hemp based on samples brought into the plant clinic at HAREC.

"Early on, we had some cooler temperatures. Things were a little wet," Frost said.

"We saw a whole lot of root rot, and things like that."

Frost said the region did see some gray mold later in the season — though not as bad as the Willamette Valley and Southern Oregon, where rainy conditions threatened to ruin whole fields.

The clinic focused primarily on soil-borne fungal diseases like fusarium root and crown rot, which causes poor root development, stunting and wilting of hemp plants, as well as curly top virus, a disease carried by an insect known as the beet leafhopper.

Curly top virus can cause hemp leaves to become brittle and distorted, while reducing yield.

To manage the disease, Frost said growers should closely monitor insect and weed populations and remove affected plants if possible. They can also use rotation crops or adjust planting dates to improve soil health and avoid fungal infections.

"I think most people are still learning about this on the fly," Frost said. "We hope to accumulate more knowledge and provide that back to growers in the future."

Umatilla County prepares for change in traffic stops

By **JESSICA POLLARD**
STAFF WRITER

Lawyers and law enforcement agencies alike are still processing a recent Oregon Supreme Court ruling that changes how police conduct traffic stops.

The ruling, issued Nov. 15, affects what types of questions that law enforcement officers can ask during the "unavoidable lull" that occurs during a regular traffic stop within the handful of minutes it might take for someone to track down their proof of insurance and registration in a crowded glove box.

The Hermiston Police Department is prepared to comply, according to Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston.

"This is going to further hinder the ability to stop potential criminal activity in motion," He said. "So much contraband is in motion all the time in vehicles."

He said the ruling could eventually cause a decline in DUI enforcement.

The ruling follows a criminal case involving the Beaverton Police Department.

An officer lawfully pulled over defendant Mario Arreola-Botello for failing to signal during both a lane change and turn. While Arreola-Botello was searching for paperwork, the officer asked about the presence of weapons and drugs in the vehicle, and if he would consent to a search.

Arreola-Botello — who primarily spoke Spanish, according to the ruling — agreed to the search. The officer found a baggie of methamphetamine, and an arrest ensued. Arreola-Botello was charged with possession of meth, despite his attorney motioning to suppress the evidence obtained during the search and later appealing the conviction — the argument being that the



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Some law enforcement agencies are changing how officers conduct traffic stops following an Oregon Supreme Court ruling that changes what questions an officer can ask after pulling someone over.

questions leading up to the search were irrelevant to the traffic stop and lacked constitutional justification.

The Oregon Court of Appeals rejected the argument set forth by Arreola-Botello's attorney, but this ruling overturned that decision.

Various studies that show people of color are more likely to have their vehicles searched during traffic stops.

"Our conclusion today — that all questioning must be reasonably related to the purpose for the traffic stop — will ensure that an officer's questions are not based on such biases," the ruling states.

Days after the ruling was issued, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission released traffic stop data from 12 of the state's largest law enforcement agencies. The report showed that people in minority groups are slightly more likely to be cited during a traffic stop than white people. The Portland Police Bureau was twice as likely to search black people than white, according to the data.

Data on medium and smaller agencies will come out in the next two years, according to the commission.

Edmiston said he felt the Hermiston Police Department drives away from bias.

"We're really proud of the fact that we have a force that is proportional to the community," Edmiston said.

According to 2018 Census Bureau estimates, Hermiston's Hispanic or Latino population is at 36.7%.

He said that almost 26% of officers with the department are bilingual.

Kara Davis, assistant director of Intermountain Defenders Inc. in Pendleton, said the ruling could reduce discrimination. She said sometimes it's something related to another culture or a lower class that can draw an officer's attention. "They're not going to ask a random lawyer if they have weapons on them," she said, adding that when she took on possession cases, about half of them started with traffic stops.

The ruling doesn't affect an officer who requests a search based on reasonable suspicion — the smell of alcohol on someone's breath, or the sight of packaged drugs on the passenger seat, for instance.

"I wish the public knew they had the right to say no to anything the officer requests voluntarily," she said. "People get nervous around police officers. That if they say no, they'll look guilty."

Umatilla School District sees unprecedented absences due to illness

By **JESSICA POLLARD**
STAFF WRITER

Parents at the Umatilla School District are well aware — flu season has arrived.

In a letter to parents last week, Superintendent Heidi Sipe said McNary Heights Elementary School was seeing "unusually high rates of illness," and some children had confirmed cases of influenza — the flu.

"This is a first. We've definitely had trends with illness," she said. "But we've never had this level of absences due to illness before."

On Dec. 3, Sipe said, 24% of students were absent from the elementary school. She added that during the long Thanksgiving weekend, custodial staff at the school sanitized desks and surfaces hoping to stop the spreading sickness in its tracks. But when students returned that Monday, more than 25% of students were nowhere to be seen.

On Thursday morning, about 19% of students were still missing from classes. Kids returning to school after illness absences are getting their temperatures checked.

"Now, it's much better than it was," Sipe said on Wednesday afternoon. "But those are still really high absentee numbers."

The school is asking parents to keep children with minor symptoms like congestion and coughing home. On its website, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists fever (but not always), coughing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches and headaches, fatigue and occasionally vomiting or diarrhea as possible symptoms of influenza.

Unlike a cold, the symptoms of influenza are often sudden. The flu can be



Fiumara

Sipe

deadly for seniors, children under 5 and people with chronic medical conditions like diabetes. The CDC estimates up to 26,000 children under 5 are hospitalized in the U.S. each year for influenza.

Sipe said the high school and middle school saw up to 16% of their student bodies absent on Wednesday.

The district contacted the Umatilla County Health Department last week.

"Anytime there's a larger than expected absence, and there are students (with) a lot of matching symptoms, then schools will reach out to us," said Joe Fiumara, director at the health department.

He said the county didn't have precise data about whether all of the ill students at McNary Heights were battling influenza, but when the vast population has similar symptoms, the health department can make an educated guess that the flu is spreading.

He said the health department can provide the schools with guidance and next steps about cleaning and notifying parents. In most cases, he added, it's up to the district on whether they'll close the school because of high illness numbers.

When absentee numbers are really striking, the health department will step

in and urge a closure.

At the Hermiston School District last Wednesday, absences ranged from 9% at Highland Hills Elementary School to 15% at the high school.

Superintendent Tricia Mooney said it can be hard to say, with the recent Thanksgiving holiday, what exactly is causing absences.

"We do know the flu is going around. We put information out to parents and staff about what to look for. Our custodial staff is taking extra care," she said.

On Monday night, Scott Depew, director of secondary education for HSD, gave Hermiston city councilors an update, noting that the school district was still seeing a lot of kids sick, but staff were being diligent in sanitizing everything.

Fiumara noted flu season usually takes off at the end of December and early January across Oregon. He said he noticed it tends to hit the eastern part of the state earlier.

"Across the state, hospital visits regarding influenza are beginning to increase. It's that time of year, it looks like it's peaking a little sooner than last year," he said. "It's never too late to get your flu shot."

Fiumara said this year, Influenza B seems to be coming up as a predominant strain and it is included in this year's flu vaccine.

"We don't really have data yet on how good of a match (the vaccine) is, but it looks like it could be a good match," he said.

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