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Interpath Laboratory has solved its supply chain issues to bring more COVID-19 testing capacity to Oregon.

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BY THE WAY

School district offers more Chromebooks

Hermiston School District is offering more Chromebooks to families with multiple students.

The district first checked out one of the devices per family, but is now offering up to three per family if the family has more than three students. Staff will be available to check out devices the rest of the week between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. at the district offices, 305 SW 11th St.

Families without internet access can also pick up paper packets of work.

Are you starting a new business, moving your business to a new location, under new management or have other business-related news to announce? Starting May 6, the **Hermiston Herald** is increasing its focus on economic development, including business, agriculture and housing, and we're looking for new story ideas. Send your story ideas and tips to editor@hermistonherald.com. We're also adding a regular opinion page that will include letters to the editor, which can also be sent to the above email

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FARM TO TABLE, FREE



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Church members help to load bags of potatoes and onions into cars during a free food distribution at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hermiston on Friday afternoon.

Farmers adjust as pandemic changes what people eat

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

When the COVID-19 pandemic changed life in the United States, it changed what people eat, too.

The sudden, unexpected shifts in demand caused by people eating at home more often have left some farmers in a difficult position.

"Potatoes, onions, milk are all taking a beating," said Pat Tolman, vice president of AgReserves, the parent company of agricultural holdings that include AgriNorthwest and River Point Farms outside Hermiston.

The farms' customers include restaurant chains, but with restaurants closed or doing reduced sales via take-out, Americans are eating far fewer onion rings and French fries than normal. Tolman said processing plants in some parts of the country are struggling to stay open, adding volatility to the market.

Corn has also taken a hit, as ethanol plants that previously converted corn into fuel have shut down as demand and prices for fuel have dropped. Milk is in lower demand from restaurants and schools, while fruits and vegetables seem to be a "mixed bag," Tolman said.

He said the bright spot in the industry might be wheat, which is doing well as quaran-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
A line of cars stretches through the parking lot and down Southeast Ninth Street and part of Highland Avenue on Friday, as people wait to pick up free bags of potatoes and onions at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hermiston.

tinued Americans are alleviating boredom by baking. Flour is hard to find on grocery store shelves, but the nature of agriculture is such that a new crop can't be produced in a day or two, just like it is too late for some farmers to change what they planted.

"Some farms, because of their normal rotation, have been able to make adjustments," Tolman said. "Others already had plants in the ground, and that puts them in

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ONION ROASTED POTATOES

2 pounds potatoes
1 large onion
1/3 cup olive or vegetable oil
Salt and pepper
2 cups of shredded cheddar or pepper jack cheese
Preheat oven to 450°. Slice potatoes lengthwise into strips roughly an inch thick. Slice onion into strips as well. Place potatoes and onion into a 9x13 casserole dish. Drizzle oil over the top and add salt and pepper (or other favorite seasonings that go well with potatoes). Mix until vegetables are coated. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 35-40 minutes until potatoes are soft. Remove foil and sprinkle cheese over the top. Bake for about five more minutes until cheese is melted.

Travel between Umatilla and Tri-Cities sparks concern

By JADE MCDOWELL
and ALEX CASTLE
STAFF WRITERS

When Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and her Washington counterpart, Jay Inslee, started issuing executive orders to stop the spread of COVID-19, worried rumors flew around social media in Umatilla that the Interstate 82 bridge over the Columbia River would close.

As deaths from the virus rise in the Tri-Cities area, however, some Umatilla and Hermiston residents have started thinking it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep possible carriers on the Washington side of the river.

"We are hearing complaints," Umatilla City Manager David Stockdale said. "The most complaints are from folks who are concerned that they are seeing a lot of Washington plates at the golf course."

Umatilla County's case numbers rose to 28 on Tuesday, and the release of the health department's weekly location trends map showed Hermiston is still the local hotspot with more than 10 confirmed cases, while Umatilla has between five and nine.

Though higher volume of case numbers can be correlated to greater access to testing in the area, Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said nearly every investigation into a confirmed case has revealed some sort of recent out-of-county travel. The Hermiston-Umatilla area's proximity to the Tri-Cities has likely played a role in the early trend, Fiumara said.

"We draw these arbitrary lines between counties and states, but the virus doesn't care which side of the border you're on or which side you came from," Fiumara said.

The Benton Franklin Health District has, as of Tuesday afternoon, announced 727 confirmed

cases of COVID-19 and 38 deaths in the two Washington counties where Pasco, Richland and Kennewick are located, about 30 miles from the Oregon border.

Stockdale said some community members who have called city hall are worried that Washington residents are bringing COVID-19 into town with them to use the city's golf course, marina and other facilities. Golf courses are closed in Washington but have been allowed to remain open in Oregon, and while all fishing is banned in Washington, fishing in Oregon has been restricted to in-state residents only.

Stockdale said a bigger worry than visitors might be that many Umatilla residents work in essential services in the Tri-Cities.

"They still commute back and forth, and so we are concerned about that," he said.

He said the city is doing what it can to limit the spread of COVID-19 among residents, including closing city-owned facilities, such as parks and the library, and working with the school district on encouraging people to stay 6 feet apart when picking up meals and educational packets delivered

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