

Food

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a very difficult position.”

On Friday, a line of vehicles stretched down Southeast Ninth Street and part of Highland Avenue in Hermiston as people lined up to get a free 20-pound bag of potatoes and 5-pound bag of onions from AgriNorthwest and River Point Farms.

Area farms that are part of Farmers Ending Hunger have also pledged to double donations to the Oregon Food Bank this year.

Reports of destruction of milk, eggs, animals, potatoes, onions and other products by farmers in some parts of the country has caused outrage by people who wonder why food is going to waste when unemployment is skyrocketing and people are struggling to feed their families. But farmers featured in such stories have defended the practice, saying in many cases there are logistics that stand in the way of donating their product to food banks.

With milk, for example, most dairies don't pasteurize the milk themselves, meaning they would have to donate it raw, which would be a health hazard. They also don't have packaging capabilities for take-home portions, and most food banks have limited refrigeration capacity.

At Threemile Canyon Farms outside Boardman, the farm's diversity of operations has allowed it to make adjustments.

General Manager Marty Myers said some fields that would have grown produce that are now in low demand will instead be used to grow feed for the cows on the farm's dairy side. In normal circumstances, the farm would purchase that feed from elsewhere and save that land for more lucrative crops.

“We're fortunate to have the dairy business also,” he said.



Rows of 20-pound bags of potatoes and 5-pound bags of onions from AgriNorthwest and River Point Farms sit ready for distribution at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hermiston on Friday afternoon.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Myers said Threemile Canyon Farms isn't having to dump its milk down the drain.

The farm serves Tillamook's Boardman plant, and dairies that sell to retail businesses instead of restaurants or schools are doing better than the ones that were supplying now-shuttered operations. Myers said even on the restaurant side, things aren't as bad with milk as they are with some products.

“A lot of milk goes into cheese or pizza, and a lot of those services have adapted with delivery,” he said.

Myers noted the next problem farmers will start facing is on the meat side. Major meat-packing plants have started having to close due to outbreaks of COVID-19 among staff.

“That is a bottleneck,” he said.

That issue is playing out in Umatilla County's backyard. Walla Walla County Department of Community Health said in a news release Friday that a Tyson



Joshua Bunting checks in with a driver while handing out free 20-pound bags of potatoes and 5-pound bags of onions from AgriNorthwest and River Point Farms on Friday.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Fresh Meats plant there has seven employees who have tested positive for COVID-19, including one who lives in Umatilla County.

The release stated that all of the employees developed their symptoms before April 8, and the company has since stepped up its mitigation efforts.

“To date, Tyson leadership at every level has been engaged and cooperative,” the county stated. “How-

ever, if at any point we see they are not implementing efforts to fidelity, we will take further action and potentially close the plant until it is safe to reopen.”

For growers whose biggest crops come later in the year, there are still a lot of unknowns about what prices and demand might look like.

Don Walchli of Walchli Farms in Hermiston said COVID-19's effect on the

demand for watermelon, or the labor to harvest it, is a “tough question.”

“It's hard to say because we're not in full swing on that side. ... Just like everyone else, we'll have to wait and see,” he said.

At the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, interim director Clive Kaiser said there have been a few experiments that have been put off because they aren't hiring their usual help for the summer, but faculty are still doing “really good work.”

“Everything we're doing is really closely aligned with what the growers want. We haven't heard they want anything different,” he said. “The demand is not going away for good agricultural research.”

He said they're making health and safety a priority at the station, with protective gear, telecommuting and new social distancing policies limiting labs and vehicles to one person at a time.

BTW

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Oregon drivers will not be required to remove stud-tires on their vehicles until May 15.

The normal deadline for removing the winter-driving tires is April 1, to reduce the damage the tires cause to roadways. But the Oregon Department of Transportation extended the deadline to May 15 this year in light of COVID-19

Hermiston-area residents continue to support Good Shepherd Health Care System employees during this public health crisis. This week Good Shepherd thanked the anonymous couple who posted a huge “Thank you for being here” sign across the street, and Dutch Bros, which sent 360 energy drinks over for staff.

As people spend more time at home, and on social media, Hermiston Police Department is warning them to be cautious about what information they give out online. “Fun” quizzes asking people questions like their first pet's name, their favorite teacher or the street they grew up on can be a way for scammers to determine answers to a person's security questions they use to reset their password on bank accounts, email or websites.

The department also thanked Shiki Hibachi Sushi for donating 250 masks for officers to use while out doing their jobs.

Umatilla County Fire District 1 will offer a live tour of a fire station on Thursday at 10 a.m. on the district's Facebook page. The tour will include a look inside of Station 22 on Puntin Center and Diagonal Road, and a look at a fire truck and ambulance kept there. The district plans to post other videos in the future of its other stations.

5 STEPS FOR SAFE DIGGING

Working on an outdoor project? Careless digging poses a threat to people, pipelines and underground facilities. Always call 8-1-1 first. Here are five easy steps for safe digging:

Source: call811.com



Know what's below. Call before you dig.

1. NOTIFY

Call 8-1-1 or make a request online two to three days before your work begins. The operator will notify the utilities affected by your project.

2. WAIT

Wait two to three days for affected utilities to respond to your request. They will send a locator to mark any underground utility lines.



3. CONFIRM

Confirm that all affected utilities have responded to your request by comparing the marks to the list of utilities the 8-1-1 call center notified.



4. RESPECT

Respect the markers provided by the affected utilities. The markers are your guide for the duration of your project.



5. DIG CAREFULLY

If you can't avoid digging near the markers (within 18-24 inches on all sides, depending on state laws), consider moving your project location.



U&C UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Hermiston Office
750 W. Elm Ave.
Hermiston, OR 97838
(541) 567-6414

Boardman Office
400 N.E. Eldrige Drive
Boardman, OR 97818
(541) 481-2220

www.UmatillaElectric.com