

COVID-19 restrictions create lines at BottleDrop

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STAFF WRITER

Long lines often snake around the outside of BottleDrop Redemption Center in Hermiston these days, but employees of the company say it likely has more to do with restrictions on submitting bottles than the economy.

Under COVID-19-related restrictions, prior to Phase 1 reopenings, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission suspended its requirement for retailers to accept beverage containers. People looking to turn in bottles and cans turned to BottleDrop instead, resulting in long lines.

"Total return volume has been down, but our redemption centers have been very busy," said Liz Philpott, who does public relations for BottleDrop Redemption Center. "We appreciate the public's patience and support as we continue to adapt our



The line at the Hermiston BottleDrop wraps around the front of the store and down the depth of the building on Friday, June 12, 2020.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

processes with regards to COVID-19."

Between Jan. 1 to March 31, BottleDrop processed approximately 249.6 million containers, according to com-

pany data, and Oregon's average recycling rate is above 80%, according to Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative. It is unclear whether long lines mean more recy-

cled bottles and cans because data for April and May have not been released. However, Philpott said it is likely more people are consuming beverages at home due to the pan-

dem, which can be a contributing factor to long lines.

"Many retailers stopped accepting container returns during the governor's stay at home order, which increased traffic to our BottleDrop locations — which remained open. BottleDrop is an essential service and lifeline for many Oregon residents," Philpott said.

What is clear, according to Philpott, is more people are using the Green Bag program than before. Users can purchase BottleDrop's green bags, fill them with recyclables and drop it off at one of their locations for cash and discounts from participating retailers.

Philpott said their locations have remained open and operational despite challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions.

BottleDrop implemented several COVID-19-related changes to stay open, includ-

ing the use of personal protective equipment, increased sanitation and cleaning protocols, and reallocation of staff. Social distancing protocols also contribute to extended lines at BottleDrop locations.

Total bottle and can submissions at the centers are down due to restrictions, Philpott said, but that's expected to change now that several counties in Oregon are under Phase 2.

"We expect more containers to be returned as counties begin entering additional phases in the governor's plan for reopening," she said.

According to OLCC, retailers have up to two weeks to once again accept beverage container returns once they enter Phase 1. However, certain restrictions remain in place, including limited hours of availability for redemption and no submissions during graveyard shifts.

SpudLove Snacks launches potato chip line with local potatoes

HERMISTON HERALD

SpudLove Snacks' new potato chip line will be made from organic potatoes grown at Threemile Canyon Farms in Boardman.

The line of chips are 100% "USDA-certified organic, Non-GMO Project Verified and certified Gluten-Free," according to a news release, and come in five varieties: Sea Salt, Barbecue, Sea Salt + Vinegar, Jalapeno and Cracked Pepper.

The snack company announced the launch of the chips with a commitment to donate potatoes to Farmers Ending Hunger every month. Farmers Ending Hunger is an Oregon nonprofit that started in Hermiston and collects fresh produce and other farm products for the Oregon Food Bank,



SpudLove Snacks' newest potato chips are made with potatoes grown in Boardman.

Photo contributed by SpudLove Snacks

which send the food on to local food pantries around the state.

"We're honored to be the beneficiaries of this generous partnership that helps

bring locally grown potatoes to families facing food insecurity throughout Oregon,"

John Burt, executive director of Farmers Ending Hunger, said in a statement.

Sheila Stanziale, CEO of SpudLove Snacks, said the monthly donation will be the company's way of supporting a nonprofit that "looks out for the needs of the most vulnerable in our community."

"We believe the best way to fight hunger is to provide nutritious food to those in need," she said in a statement. "And just as we work to take care of our community, we work equally hard to take care of the land at Threemile Canyon Farms through thoughtful, sustainable farming practices that ensures we can continue to grow the best quality potatoes."

According to the Oregon Food Bank, an average of 84,000 children a month in Oregon eat meals from emergency food boxes received from a food bank.

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