

Watermelon season running late this year

Sales are just beginning, growers report, due to weather

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

The first few Hermiston watermelons are starting to hit the stands, but watermelon season isn't in full swing yet.

"We're starting very slowly," said Jack Bellinger of Bellinger Farms.

Bellinger said on July 9 that they had put a few watermelons out in the Bellinger Farms store south of Hermiston, but they weren't shipping them out quite yet. He said that he had planted about a week earlier than usual this year, but some "questionable weather" had

slowed things down.

The wind storm that swept through west Umatilla County and north Morrow County on the last day of May damaged watermelon crops around Hermiston, including some damage to Bellinger fields.

"I've never seen a wind storm do that to a watermelon crop before," Bellinger said.

The weather wasn't the only interesting thing this spring — farmers have also been having to deal with the effects of COVID-19. Bellinger said luckily between his "core crew" of people who usually

See Melons, Page A10

"I THINK THE CROP LOOKS REALLY GOOD SO FAR, IT'S JUST BEEN SET BACK A LITTLE BIT FROM NORMAL."

Patrick Walchli, of Walchli farms. Harvest is set to start July 20, he said.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Hermiston seedless watermelons sit in cartons outside of the Bellinger Farms store on Highway 395 in Hermiston in 2019

UPDATES

Face covering rules expanding

Face masks must be worn outdoors when social distancing is not possible and private gatherings must be limited to no more than 10 people, Gov. Kate Brown announced Monday, July 13.

The new rules to fight the COVID-19 pandemic go into effect Wednesday, July 15, expanding the July 1 directive that face masks be worn inside public places.

In keeping with her long-standing policy, Brown said that she was relying on public cooperation rather than any enforcement of the additional rules.

"I am not going to set up the party police," Brown said.

State health officials have said the growth of virus cases in Oregon in recent weeks has been driven by clusters of social gatherings, often involving people who are under 40 years of age.

Workplace outbreaks are also a concern.

Brown said she believed most Oregonians were following the face covering, social distancing and enhanced hygiene efforts that health officials advocate. She called those who willingly ignore the efforts "outliers."

"We are at risk of COVID-19 getting out of control in Oregon," Brown said. "Each of us needs to take immediate action to slow the spread of this disease."

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission will continue to inspect businesses and can issue citations. Brown said she did not know how many citations resulted from enforcement efforts over the July 4 weekend, when 800 were inspected for compliance.

The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration is investigating nine bars that the OLCC forwarded to the agency over concerns of noncompliance.

By Gary A. Warner, for the Oregon Capital Bureau



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Felipe Olvera, left, bags orders as Emily Robles checks for the next order at C&D Drive-In in Boardman on Tuesday, July 14, 2020.

Saving local jobs

Paycheck Protection Program helps businesses stay open

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

As the federal government releases more information about the Paycheck Protection Program, the stimulus money for businesses affected by COVID-19 is being credited with helping save thousands of jobs in Eastern Oregon.

Jennifer Leighton, owner of C&D Drive-In in Boardman, said the money the business got from the PPP helped prevent her from needing to lay off workers or cut hours to make up for reduced revenue when the diner had to go to take-out only in the early days of the pandemic.

"It helps us feel that we're going to be OK, that we're going to have that cushion to fall back on," she said.

On July 6, after several media companies filed lawsuits for information on where the PPP money was going, the Small Business Administration released the names of all businesses that had received loans of more than \$150,000. The nonprofit news organization ProPublica organized the information into a searchable database available to the public.

According to that database, there were 65 companies with

headquarters in the Hermiston ZIP code that received at least \$150,000 from the Paycheck Protection Program. That list does not include companies that have sites in Hermiston but are headquartered somewhere else, such as the *Hermiston Herald's* parent company EO Media Group, which received a PPP loan to temporarily reverse the 10% pay cut all employees were given in March due to lost advertising revenue from COVID-19.

Some of the entries for the 65 companies in Hermiston's ZIP code did not list the numbers of jobs preserved by the loan, but those that did self-report a number added up to 1,574 jobs protected during the 60-day period of the loan.

Four companies headquartered in the Umatilla ZIP code received loans of more than \$150,000, adding up to 102 jobs that those companies reported they retained.

Boardman's ZIP code turned up nine results, adding up to 293 jobs that the companies reported retaining. Companies and nonprofits in south Morrow County, including Morrow County Grain Growers in Lexington and Morrow County

See Jobs, Page A10



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Emily Robles flips an egg while preparing lunch orders at C&D Drive-In.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

The C&D Drive-In in Boardman is one of several businesses in the region to have received a Paycheck Protection Program loan.

INSIDE

A3 ▶ City of Hermiston plans new parks and trails in Hermiston

A7 ▶ Some restaurants voluntarily close or revert to take-out in response to COVID-19 numbers

A7 ▶ Good Shepherd Health Care System experiments with drive-thru COVID-19 testing

A9 ▶ Rep. Greg Smith discusses special session in virtual town hall