

New application submitted for Easterday Dairy

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
STAFF WRITER

Plans to reopen Oregon's second-largest dairy are back on the table, with a third owner at the helm.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture received a new application from Cole Easterday to operate the dairy near Boardman. Cole's father, Cody Easterday, was forced to withdraw his application on July 15.

It is the latest development for the property formerly known as Lost Valley Farm, which opened in 2018 and closed less than a year later due to repeated violations of its confined animal feeding operation, or CAFO, permit.

Former owner Greg te Velde eventually declared bankruptcy and the site was sold in 2019 to the Easterday family, which ran several farming businesses around Pasco.

However, Cody Easterday ran into legal troubles of his own and pleaded guilty earlier this year to defrauding Tyson Foods in a "ghost cattle" scheme, selling more than 200,000 animals that existed only on paper.

He agreed to pay \$244 million in restitution and



EO Media Group File

The former Lost Valley Farm outside Boardman, which Cole Easterday proposes to reopen.

faces up to 20 years in prison for felony wire fraud. Sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 5.

Meanwhile, both Easterday Farms and Easterday Ranches have filed for bankruptcy, and Cody Easterday's sons — Cole, Clay and Cutter — purchased controlling interest in the family's dairy business, known as Easterday Dairy LLC.

Since Cody Easterday is no longer listed as the dairy's operator, ODA required Cole Easterday to

submit a new CAFO permit application subject to the agency's review.

The new application is similar to the old. It calls for 28,300 total animals, including 9,700 mature dairy cows, 8,600 dairy heifers and 10,000 non-dairy cattle.

Liquid manure will be stored in open-air lagoons for up to 111 days each year, with a capacity of 86.8 million gallons, and solid manure will be kept year-round on an impervious soil pad.

Easterday agreed to clean up the property under ODA supervision. Under te Velde's ownership, Lost Valley Farm had racked up 200-plus violations of its CAFO permit related to manure and wastewater management.

One condition of the cleanup permit includes ongoing soil testing to monitor for nitrates, which at elevated levels can impact human health.

The proposed dairy is within the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area, which the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality designated in 1990 for having elevated levels of groundwater nitrates.

While no animals are allowed on site, Cody Easterday had been growing potatoes and other vegetables at the dairy while awaiting the outcome of his CAFO permit application, according to the state agriculture department.

The agency stated in a news release that it issues water quality advisories "when there is a risk of violating permit conditions, and is a proactive notification to alert the owner-operator that steps must be taken to prevent violations."

Another condition of the dairy cleanup requires the Easterdays to monitor each of 11 groundwater wells every quarter.

During the most recent round of testing, the agriculture department reported one of the wells exceeded the allowed level of nitrates.

"ODA is advising the operator on how to reduce nitrate levels," the agency stated, adding regulators will now require monthly well tests and reduced applications of nitrogen fertilizer and irrigation water on crop circles closest to the affected well.

Cole Easterday did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

A coalition of environmental groups continues to oppose the project, and urged the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Gov. Kate Brown to reject the Easterday permit.

"No matter who the applicant is," coalition organizer Kristina Beggen said, "Easterday Dairy will produce dangerous methane emissions, hijack scarce groundwater resources, and pollute the air and water of frontline communities already struggling with the impacts of the pandemic."

Umatilla Electric Cooperative hits 2,000 days without an accident

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**
STAFF WRITER

HERMISTON — Every morning, families across Umatilla County click their lights on, flip the switch on their coffee makers and take showers warmed by an electric current. Their workplaces are air conditioned and laptops charged by wires threading through the county's golden countryside — wires with enough voltage to kill with a simple mistake.

The men and women at Umatilla Electric Cooperative work with these live wires every day so we can enjoy these simple pleasures. While the worst workplace injuries in most industries might be a joint injury or broken bone, those working with these currents face a different kind of danger.

"These guys miss the wrong thing and it kills them," said Chris McMahon, UEC's administrative safety assistant.

But over the last nearly 5-1/2 years, or 2,004 days to be exact, Umatilla Electric Cooperative has avoided all accidents leading to lost time, which McMahon described as an accident where someone injures themselves during work-related duties and is not able to work.

This is not a simple achievement with electrical work posing such a risk for injury or death. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 75 fatalities in the five years between 2014 and 2019 in the electrical power transmission, control and distribution industry alone. This number does not include nonfatal injuries.

Another Bureau report in December 2020 found there were 750 fatalities related to exposure to electricity across all industries from 2015 to 2019.

"The motive to constantly be learning and to be diligent in what we do is paramount in what happens," McMahon said, "because the simplest of mistakes can easily kill somebody."

Whether working on construction, doing repairs or making sure trees are pruned away from high-voltage power lines, the dangers are persistent — especially as brutal heat continues to pound the Pacific Northwest and puts a strain on the state's electrical system.

There also is a potential for a backfeed of electricity from somebody running a generator because their



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Matt Ellis, a lineman with Umatilla Electric Cooperative, positions equipment atop a utility pole in Hermiston on April 7, 2021. UEC recently celebrated 2,000 days without an accident leading to time off work.

power went out. When employees go out to do a simple repair there may be dangerous levels of electricity from the generator that unintentionally flows backward towards workers.

"It's a day-to-day occurrence that these guys are constantly in that environment," McMahon said.

"I stand with Umatilla Electric employees who have demonstrated safety for their community and safety for one another," said Robert Echenrode, UEC's gen-



Echenrode



McMahon

eral manager and CEO. "In my years in the utility industry, this is a milestone I am most proud of and want to express to each employee my appreciation for continuing to keep safety at the front of their minds and reaching this incredible achievement."

According to McMahon, UEC made safety a top priority to make it so far without injuries, starting with hiring people with the right mindset and who are cautious about their work.

"It's a culture of safety that

we develop here at Umatilla Electric," McMahon said.

While they have their daily actions, procedures, policies and safety meetings, UEC employees also study near misses. Whether it is their own near misses or those in other facilities, the information is accessible and open to review.

"A near miss is essentially something that potentially could have been a lost time accident, but it was not just due to the grace of God," McMahon said. "We're able to look at that and learn from other people."

On Tuesday, July 27, its 2,000th day without an accident, UEC held a celebratory dinner for employees and families at the Maxwell Event Center, Hermiston. The cooperative had employees anonymously vote for someone they felt went above and beyond and embodied the safety culture in the organization and named Glen Saul the Umatilla Electric Safety Champion.

"They've shown that they can do this," McMahon said. "They got it down. They understand and they're constantly practicing."

"Collectively it takes everybody to be able to do something like this and to constantly be engaged in what happens each and every day," McMahon said, "because complacency kills."

Police respond to multiple crashes over weekend

HERMISTON HERALD

The Oregon State Police had a busy weekend responding to car crashes, including four where people were hospitalized with injuries.

On Thursday, July 29, a driver lost control while attempting to stop his car and rear-ended another vehicle near milepost 24 on Highway 207, OSP reported. Robert Alan Shaffer, 21, from Lexington, was injured and had to be taken to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston.

Then, July 30, three vehicles crashed near milepost 179 on Interstate 84. The crash occurred when a car merged onto the interstate from exit 177 and another car failed to yield to the right of way, police reported. The cars sideswiped another vehicle traveling east.

Police cited the driver who failed to yield. The passenger of the car that was sideswiped was injured and taken to Good Shepherd.

On July 31, a vehicle carrying four people crashed and rolled. One passenger was hospitalized at Good Shepherd.

State police arrested the driver, Stephanie Michelle Ramirez, 19, of Umatilla, for driving under the influence of intoxicants, three counts of reckless endangering and one count of possessing alcohol as a minor. A breath test showed her blood alcohol content to be 0.13%,

state police reported.

Local emergency services also responded July 31 to a crash on Vansycle Road near Helix.

East Umatilla Fire and Rescue responded to reports of the crash just past 6 p.m. Residents reported hearing a loud bang and a car alarm and smoke coming from the vehicle after it landed in a ditch.

Officials transported one victim to a local hospital, according to East Umatilla Fire and Rescue.

And Oregon State Police reported a crash that occurred July 31 at about 10 p.m. ejected one person.

The report from OSP was sketchy on details, but a car collided with the side rear bumper of another car, sped off the road and rolled, coming to a stop upright. The crash ejected one person, who OSP reported was unresponsive and had to be taken to Pioneer Memorial Hospital, Heppner.

The state police report did not provide a location for the crash, which involved a man and woman from Hermiston, a man from Umatilla and a 10-year-old boy from Hermiston.

The person who was ejected was later scheduled to be transported to Oregon Health & Science University, Portland. A preliminary investigation revealed alcohol was a contributing factor in the crash, according to state police.

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