

# VALLEY FARM LIFE

A Special Supplement to  
the Prosser Record-Bulletin  
and Grandview Herald

July 18, 2012



Farming in  
and around  
the Yakima  
Valley



# Recycling agricultural containers

By Victoria Walker

Northwest Ag Plastics (NWAP), Inc. is contracted to collect and granulate plastic pesticide containers for the agricultural industry in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon with subcontractors in Oregon and Idaho that help carry out this program.

Recyclable plastic can include plastic containers that held pesticides, micro-nutrients, adjuvants and cleaners. Dedicated to environmental stewardship for all pesticide users, NWAP also recycle plastic containers generated from other industries such as golf courses and lawn and tree care companies.

“We have been recycling containers since the early 1990s here in Washington State,” said Steve George, owner. Recycling agricultural containers came about in the early 1990s from concern industry and regulators had that the containers were not being properly decontaminated and not being disposed of properly.”

The greatest advantages to recycling these plastics are; Recycles a product for a second life, increases grower environmental awareness and saves growers the costs of landfill ‘tipping’ fees.

“NWAP is dedicated to environmental stewardship for all pesticide users, we also recycle plastic containers generated from other industries such as golf courses and lawn and tree care companies,” says George.

“Recycling containers is the one of two legal ways to dispose of plastic containers, and is much better than putting them in the landfill. Most people would agree that recycling and reusing is better than throwing away. Some retail

markets such as Costco and Walmart are now requiring growers to participate in environmental programs if they want to market through them,” said George.

The Agricultural Container Recycling Council (ACRC) provides funding for recycling activities and research for plastic uses. It is supported by the major chemical manufacturers.

“The ACRC sponsored recycling program is one of the best voluntary efforts in the country supported by EPA and many state regulatory agencies including Washington State Depts. of Ag and Ecology. Last year we took in a record amount of plastic and we are on track to do so again this year,” says George.

In Oregon, Agri-Plas, Inc. based in Brooks Oregon provides services for Western and Central Oregon. In Idaho, the Idaho Department of Agriculture carries out the program.

Container recycling is provided at no charge. For more information go to [www.nwagplastics.com](http://www.nwagplastics.com)



Photo submitted

This is one of the NWAP chippers. It grinds containers to a small, bulk commodity. The chips are sold to re-manufactures to help maintain the recycling program.

## WSU Monarch Butterfly Project underway with help from Washington State Penitentiary offenders

Gilbert London stands in front of a blue plastic food-storage barrel converted into a Monarch butterfly-rearing cage. Inside, roughly two dozen opaque-green chrysalises hang from milkweed plants like living jewels. In roughly 10 days, the chrysalises London helped to raise will yield the iconic adult butterflies with

orange-and-black wings. He and five other Washington State Penitentiary offenders will tag the butterflies soon after that, readying them for their release as part of a study by Washington State University entomologist David James. The Monarchs will be free to leave then; London will not.

London has been locked up at the penitentiary for 25 years of a life sentence. He doesn't say what he did to get there. Instead, he talks about what he likes best about raising the Monarchs. He refers to a passage from the Bible that describes shedding an old skin to become a new creature. London points to a small,

shriveled, black husk at the bottom of the blue barrel, hardly worth looking at twice. Except that the Monarch once occupied this skin and then shed it to become something else. Something better.

“And that's what a lot of us are trying to do too,” London says.

### 'Incarcerated Citizen Science'

David James, driving to the penitentiary earlier Friday morning, discusses the project that began in June. Fittingly, he's wearing a white T-shirt with Monarch butterflies on the front, the lightness of the shirt setting off skin tanned from many

See More **MONARCH BUTTERFLY** on page 3

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From **MONARCH BUTTERFLY** on page 2

summer days in the field. In the backseat of his Prius, a small carrier enclosed in a dark bag houses a lone male Monarch with a tag. He will show the WSP offenders how to tag the butterflies they're raising when he arrives in Walla Walla.

James's expertise revolves around *Danaus plexippus*, the Monarch as it is scientifically known, which translates to "sleepy transformation" in Greek. He reared and tagged thousands of Monarch butterflies in Australia during the 1980s. Twelve research papers and his doctoral dissertation resulted from that experience.

"I have a long history with this creature," he says, his English accent softened and skewed somewhat by his time in the outback.

Many studies and tagging programs chronicle the migration of eastern U.S. Monarch populations, but not much has been learned about the butterfly's activities in the west. According to James, Pacific Northwest Monarchs likely spend their winters along the California coastline. Then in January and February, they begin flying north and east to establish breeding populations in milkweed patches mostly within California. These newly hatched Monarchs continue to migrate north and east in April and May into Oregon, Washington, Idaho and southern Canada and produce another generation or two before making their way back to California in late summer and fall.

No one knows why they go to California, James says. The theory is that western Monarchs use day length as their cue that winter is coming. But tagging programs done on this region's butterfly population have been largely confined to overwintering colonies in California. Tagging Pacific Northwest Monarchs while they are migrating will provide more answers. It's possible, too, that some end up in the famous Mexican overwintering colonies.

James's project may also help to determine why Monarch populations in California have substantially decreased in the last decade. The WSU entomologist has also noted reduced sightings of Pacific Northwest Monarchs during the summer—just a handful the past two years. The culprit for the decline appears to be loss of breeding habitat and milkweed because of increased agricultural activity and urban expansion.

Droughts in the west may also be responsible for habitat loss. If scientists and the public want to conserve and increase Monarch populations, they need to know where spring and fall butterflies fly to in the Pacific Northwest and what routes they take.

So why is James's study starting at the penitentiary in Walla Walla? In Washington, bringing science and prisons together isn't new. Since 2008, the Sustainability in Prisons Project, a partnership between Evergreen State College and the Washington State Department of Corrections, has teamed up inmates, prison staff and scientists to help restore endangered species and habitats. The program also promotes sustainable prison operations through energy conservation, recycling and more.

Inmates from four Washington correctional facilities have raised Oregon spotted frogs, Taylor's checkerspot butterflies and native prairie plants—in addition to developing valuable job skills, confidence and a restored connection with nature.

Washington State Penitentiary isn't among the four facilities participating in the Sustainability in Prisons Project, but Associate Superintendent Chris Bowman and other prison administrators have initiated sustainability efforts at Walla Walla nonetheless. After reading about the Oregon spotted frog success, Bowman asked Tamara Russell, clinical director of WSP's Residential Mental Health Unit, about starting a butterfly conservation project with WSP offenders.

Russell learned about James's work as director of WSU's Vineyard Beauty with Benefits Project, which seeks to use native plants to beautify vineyards—and attract beneficial insects like native bees and butterflies as well as predators for pest control. She contacted James about whether he had a research project involving butterflies that WSP inmates could participate in. And that's how "incarcerated citizen science," as James dubs it, began for WSU and the penitentiary. Bowman couldn't be more pleased.

"It's been a really exciting program and has had a positive impact," he says. "Our goal is to give the inmates something to look forward to when they wake up in the morning."

"From a mental health standpoint, this has been very beneficial for the inmates," Russell adds. "We know that having an activity that allows inmates to give back to the community helps alleviate depression from long-term incarceration. It gives them a focus and a purpose for their lives. They're involved in something bigger than themselves that has meaning."

**The Butterfly Wranglers**

Bruce Bushey remembers picking tent caterpillars from his grandfather's cherry orchard as a kid, so handling the Monarch caterpillars at the penitentiary is familiar to him. He and other WSP offenders working with James and Russell have been careful to keep the Monarch containers clean and to not touch the caterpillars with their fingers when moving them, using paintbrushes and paper instead. The result is that out of the 600 Monarch eggs that James sent to WSP, about 450 caterpillars are now pupating. A great return for the inmates' first time raising Monarchs.

"It's so fast. It's just a fascinating process," Bushey says. "What I've learned, I'll pass on to other inmates."

More inmates are interested in participating in the Monarch-rearing program, though it didn't start that way. Gilbert London admits that he took a lot of ribbing in the beginning; some offenders asked him if he was going to add a butterfly tattoo to those he already has.

But now the men are asking London about the butterflies' progress. He and others involved in the project have a new nickname that reflects their newfound knowledge and skills: The Butterfly



By Connetta Jean

Down a old gravel road  
On a hill I go home  
To visit the reasons  
I don't feel alone...  
Where good people love me  
Cause I'm one of their own.  
A place out in the country  
That I call Home sweet home...  
Where chickens are laying  
And horses run free...

Where Grandma is baking a pie just for me.  
Where all the men gather  
By the barn talking cars...  
And women talk about babies and empty out canning jars.  
Where children feel safe  
Even when they are grown.  
And love is the reason  
It still feels like home...

Wranglers. And like Bushey, London wants to transfer those skills to someone else.

"Maybe if I can do this, I can help other guys who come here, pass along a little bit of wisdom I attain here," he says. "If I can do something to help them, I'd like to do that."

*Note: The Monarch butterflies at Washington State Penitentiary are tentatively scheduled to be released the week of July 9. Individuals who spot a tagged Monarch are asked to email the address or call the phone number listed on the tag and note the serial number of the butterfly.*



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## New in the neighborhood



Photo submitted

The Office Manager of Taggeres Company, Eric Henning, was looking out his office window and noticed a deer passing through the parking lot north of the shop. It was very windy and when the wind gusted, the deer ran East on McCreadie Rd. "I ran out to the road to see where it had gone and by then it had disappeared. I honestly wouldn't have believed what I saw myself, if I had not gotten out my phone and snapped two pictures before it vanished," said Henning. The farm's owners say they have never witnessed a deer at the farm. Both have resided here since the mid 1920's.

## Agriculture: A Cornerstone of Washington's Economy

Rich soils, diverse climates and large-scale irrigation make Washington one of the most productive growing regions in the world and enables farmers to produce some 300 crops each year. The state's deep-water ports and its proximity to important Asian markets also provide natural advantages for agricultural trade.

The state's \$40 billion food and agriculture industry employs approximately 160,000 people and contributes 12 percent to the state's economy.

Nearly \$13 billion in food and agricultural products were exported through Washington ports in 2010, the third largest total in the U.S.

### Top Crops

Washington's 39,500 farms power a diverse agricultural economy, led by the state's apple industry with 60 percent of U.S. production. In addition to the top 10 commodities listed below, the Evergreen State is a major producer of potatoes, stone fruits, farm forest products, fish, shellfish, onions and mint oils.

Apples - \$1.44 (billion)  
 Milk - \$950 (million)  
 Wheat - \$925  
 Potatoes - \$654  
 Cattle/Calves - \$568  
 Hay - \$509  
 Cherries - \$367  
 Nursery/Greenhouses - \$300  
 Grapes - \$214  
 Pears - \$189

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## Forecast identifies eastern Washington's future water needs

How to meet the water needs for Eastern Washington's communities, industry, crops and fisheries is the focus of a report recently finalized by the Washington Department of Ecology's Office of Columbia River. The forecast evaluates likely changes in surface water supply and demand in Eastern Washington over the next 20 years.

The Columbia River Basin Long-Term Water Supply and Demand Forecast will serve as a guide for developing new water supplies in Eastern Washington. Authored by Ecology with Washington State University (WSU) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the forecast is the most comprehensive look at surface water supply and demand to be produced in the state.

"It will take innovative water solutions to meet existing and future water demands in the basin," said Derek Sandison, Ecology's Office of Columbia River director. "The forecast helps to identify where additional water supply is currently needed and where it will be needed in the future. As we identify these needs, we can target where we make capital investments in infrastructure projects to meet those needs, both instream and out-of-stream."

Employing the latest computer modeling tools, the report incorporates factors such as climate change, population growth and regional and global economic conditions into forecast calculations. It also leverages and further builds on modeling tools and data sets developed by the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group.

According to the forecast, water managers will need to pay particular attention to changes in temperature and precipitation. Hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters in Eastern Washington will create new water supply challenges. Reduced snowpack, more rain in winter, and earlier snowmelt are predicted to lessen the amount of water available in late summer and early fall when demands are high. Stream conditions for the tributaries in eight river basins that are critical for fish spawning, rearing and survival are identified and evaluated in a "Columbia River Instream Atlas," a companion tool developed by WDFW.

"The Instream Atlas will serve as a great tool to help identify where fish needs are and opportunities to match water development projects with those needs," said Teresa Scott, WDFW's natural

resource policy coordinator. "Supporting fisheries is an important component of the state's mission to develop water for the benefit of all our water needs."

In 2006, the Legislature tasked Ecology with developing new water supplies for the Columbia River Basin for both instream and out-of-stream benefits. The program is directed to focus on projects that create opportunities to issue new water rights, acquire commensurate water in support of streamflows for fish, deliver water to Odessa Subarea irrigators relying on groundwater supplies that are diminishing and find water to offset the needs of junior water users whose rights may be interrupted during drought. In addition, legislators directed Ecology to prepare a supply and demand forecast.

Meeting current demands is already a challenge. During drought years, Columbia River instream flows fall as much as 13.4 million acre-feet below Washington Administrative Code (WAC) requirements for fish. In the tributaries, instream flows are 500,000 acre-feet below what is required. Additionally, during drought some 360 junior water rights may be curtailed or interrupted along the Columbia River, resulting in an unmet need of as much as a 310,000 acre-feet in severest drought years. Some 164,000 acre-feet of surface water is needed to irrigate 70,000 acres now relying on declining aquifers in the Odessa Subarea, and 450,000 acre-feet of new supply must be found to meet needs in the Yakima Basin.

At 6.3 million acre-feet per year, agriculture is the largest single diverter and consumer of water in Eastern Washington among the many water users along the Columbia River and its tributaries. Other users include domestic, municipal and industrial water consumers, as well as power generators and fisheries that rely on water that stays in the rivers.

By 2030, the combined influences of climate change, economic trends and population growth will result in a 1.9 percent (approximately 170,000-acre-feet per year) increase in the amount of water needed for agricultural irrigation.

In the next two decades, the forecast predicts the water demand for cities and communities in Eastern Washington will increase by approximately 24 percent or an additional 117,500 acre-feet per year, based on expected population growth

and associated industrial development. Hydropower use in Eastern Washington is expected to remain stable over the same time, with increases in energy demand being met through conservation projects and power from other energy sources.

Since 2006, OCR has developed approximately 150,000 acre-feet of new water supply by tapping into water stored behind Grand Coulee Dam, funding irrigation piping and infrastructure improvements, and water right acquisitions.

Another 200,000 acre-feet is in near-term development, with several projects coming on line. Permits will soon be issued from water stored at Sullivan Lake, and streamflows bolstered and new acreage watered through a pump and conservation project at Red Mountain.

The supply and demand forecast is updated every five years. The next report is due in 2016. The forecast is available online at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/forecast/forecast.html>.

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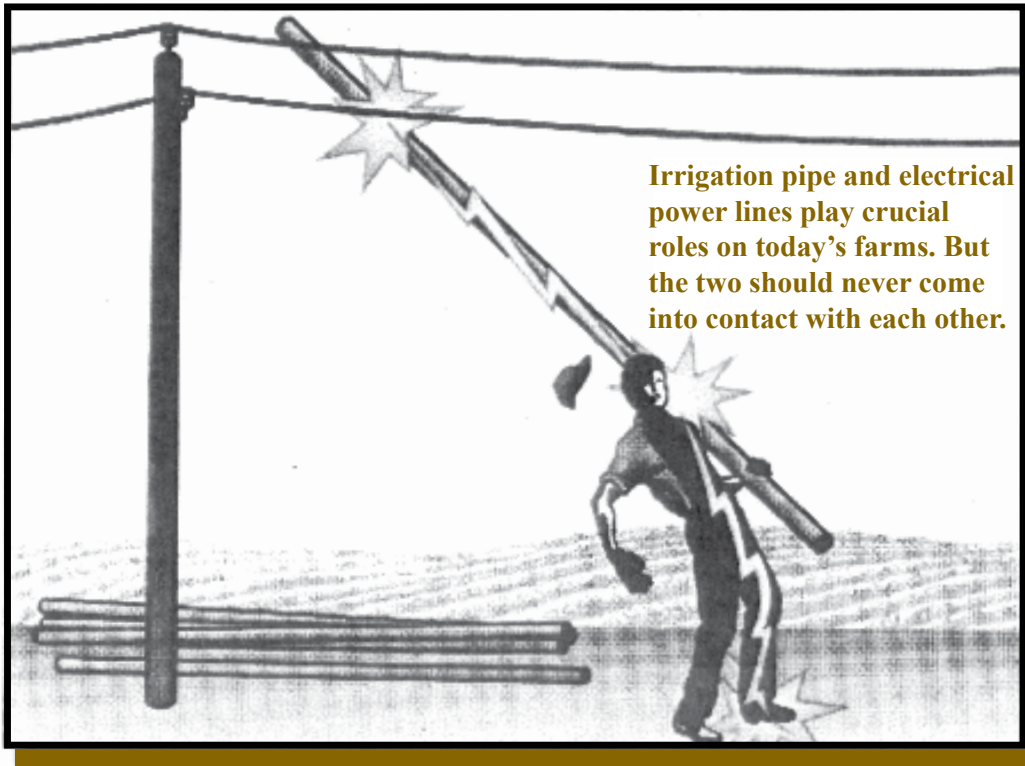


# Washington State farm statistics

most recent results available

Organic agriculture	2006	2007	2008
Certified operations (number)	558	631	697
Crops (acres)	56,137	67,668	82,755
Pasture & rangeland (acres)	10,651	13,831	13,411
Total (acres)	66,788	81,499	96,166

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## SOME PEOPLE ARE SHOCKED BY WHAT THEY FIND WHEN THEY DIG IN THEIR YARDS.

It's that time of year when people begin poking all kinds of holes in the ground. New trees, shrubs, fence posts, mail boxes; you name it. All require some digging ... a hole from a foot to several feet deep. The problem these days is that you don't really know what you are going to dig into, it could be a buried utility line, 220 volts of electricity or you may chop right into the cable TV line.



# Alpacas are “green” from field to fleece



Photo provided by Alpaca Owners and Breeders Association

Even youngsters enjoy raising the gentle, eco-friendly alpaca.

By Jennifer Ely

Alpacas are “green” machines. From their modest eating habits, protection of the pasture and their small grazing area, alpacas make perfect sense for today’s environmentally friendly farm. They make a true organic fertilizer that is easy to spread or compost. And then there’s the magnificent fleece. This warm, incredibly soft fiber comes in 22 natural colors and infinite blends, and is sought by enthusiasts everywhere. Most alpaca fleece is hypoallergenic, contains no lanolin requiring excessive processing, and is virtually ready for hand-spinners as it comes off the

alpaca. It is a fashion original.

The eco-friendly alpaca is an adaptive breed. They have been around for over 5,000 years and there are many reasons why. The stock is comfortable in all weather conditions and quickly adapts to its environment. They are easy to care for and only require a few acres of land to thrive.

Alpacas consume grass or hay but won’t eat you out of house or home. A single bale of hay will usually be enough for 20 alpacas for one day. They tread lightly on the ground with soft padded toes, so grass recovery is quicker, promoting pasture production.

Alpacas only nibble at the tops of grasses and do not rip plants from the soil as other livestock do. The result is less destruction of the land.

From families to retirees, the alpaca lifestyle offers numerous values seemingly lost in today’s fast paced culture. With heightened interest in sustainable farming, alpacas are fast becoming the livestock of choice.

If you would like to know more about owning alpacas for fun and profit, contact local breeders John and Jennifer Ely of Sage Bluff Alpacas, 786-4507, or [www.sagebluffalpacas.com](http://www.sagebluffalpacas.com).

## Benton REA selects new general manager

Following a national search, the Board of Trustees of the Benton Rural Electric Association, with headquarters in Prosser, has selected Mr. Clint Gerkenmeyer as the new General Manager.

Gerkenmeyer, who has served as the Engineering Manager for Benton REA for the last five years, will assume the responsibilities of General Manager upon the retirement of the current manager Charles (Chuck) Dawsey.

Dawsey has been General Manager of Benton REA for 24 years and retired on June 1.

Virgil Boyle, Benton REA’s board president, said that the board unanimously selected Gerkenmeyer following a nationwide search conducted over many months.

“His leadership skills, educational background and industry experience, along with his personal traits that reflect Benton’s culture, make him an outstanding choice for this position,” Boyle said.

“He is a trusted employee and respected leader, and we know that under his direction we will continue our mission of



Clint Gerkenmeyer

serving our members with reliable energy at the lowest possible cost.

“We have been fortunate to have had strong leadership under Chuck for the past 24 years and look forward to strong leadership with Clint as our new manager.”

## Fun Farm Facts

**How many apples eaten in the US are from Washington State?**

6 out of 10 - The most popular varieties are Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Golden Delicious and Gala.

**What state produces the most cranberries?**

Wisconsin - Each year, cranberry producers grow more than 300 million pounds of the tart berries.

**What nut is the peach related to?**

Almond - Almonds are stone fruits related to cherries, plums and peaches. California produces 80% of the world’s supply of almonds.

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# Attract birds and butterflies no matter what size your landscape

By gardening expert, TV/radio host and author Melinda Myers

Add a little extra color and motion to your summer garden with containers designed to attract birds and butterflies. Many garden centers continue to sell annuals throughout the summer and many of these mid-season annuals are a bit bigger, providing instant impact.

It's easier than you think to attract birds and butterflies and the good news is you don't need a lot of space to do it. Container gardens give you the ability to attract wildlife to your backyard, patio, deck or even balcony. Simply follow these four steps and your garden will be filled with color, motion and a season of wildlife.

1-Provide food for birds and butterflies. Include plants with flat daisy-like flowers like pentas, zinnias, and cosmos to attract butterflies. For hummingbirds, include some plants with tubular flowers including nicotiana, cuphea, salvia, and fuchsia. And don't forget about the hungry caterpillars that will soon turn into beautiful butterflies. Parsley, bronze fennel, and licorice vines are a few favorites that make great additions to container gardens. You can even create containers that will attract seed-eating birds. Purple Majesty millet, coneflower, coreopsis, and Rudbeckias will keep many of the birds returning to your landscape.

2-Include water for both the birds

and butterflies. It's a key ingredient and a decorative small shallow container filled with water can be included in a large container. Or include a free-standing birdbath within your container collection. I used a bronzed leaf birdbath in just this way. It created a great vertical accent, added interest to a blank wall and provided a water supply for the birds.

3-Give them a place to live and raise their young. Add a few evergreens, ornamental grasses, and perennials to your container garden. Use weather resistant containers that can tolerate the extreme heat and cold in your garden. Then fill with plants that are at least one zone hardier. Or add a few birdhouses. These can be included in the container or mounted on a fence, post, or nearby tree.

4-Skip the pesticides, please. Nature, including the birds you invite into your landscape, will devour many garden pests. Plus, the chemicals designed to kill the bad guys can also kill the good bugs and wildlife you are trying to attract. And, if pests get out of hand, use more eco-friendly products like soaps, Neem, and horticulture oil as a control mechanism. And, as always, read and follow label directions carefully.

And to conserve time and energy, try using one of the self-watering containers or hanging baskets that are on the market. This helps to make it



Photo courtesy of Melinda Myers, LLC

Containers like this make it easy and fun to attract birds and butterflies, no matter how little space you have to work with.



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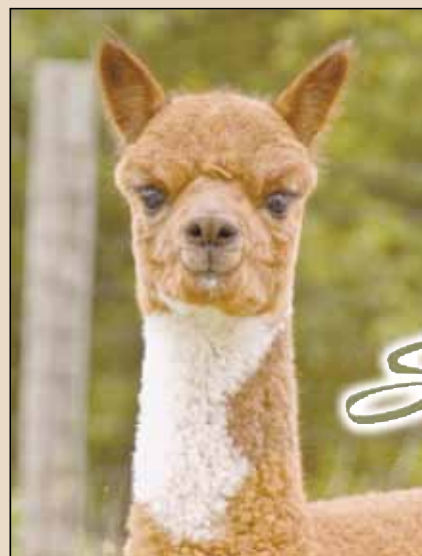
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# Short cattle supplies help keep market strong

Cattle prices remain strong throughout the U.S. due to short supplies, according to a second-quarter market report from Northwest Farm Credit Services.

After one of the driest years on record for much of the Southern Plains, recent pasture conditions have improved. However, conditions across the Plains and the Midwest have deteriorated significantly since last year. As a result, higher numbers of cattle have been sent to slaughter, further reducing cattle supplies. Forecasters are not predicting significant cattle inventory expansion until 2015 or 2016.

Profitability remains positive for cow/calf and stocker operations, the report said, while feedlots have been challenged with slimmer margins due to high feeder cattle prices.

Daily price volatility in all segments of the cattle industry has created challenges for producers when contracting cattle. Price volatility is expected to remain through 2012 and beyond.

## Price discussion

Cattle prices across all industry segments are up from last year and are significantly higher than the five-year average. Retail beef prices have increased in 2012, leading to firm bids for fed cattle from processors.

Cash fed steer prices were approximately \$120 per cwt in May, an increase of roughly 10 percent from year-ago levels. Producers throughout the Northwest have begun contracting the

2012 calf crop. The Superior Livestock Auction video sale held June 6 and 7 saw record prices. Prices this year averaged \$0.30 to \$0.50 per pound higher than 2011 prices. Calf and feeder prices increased 30 percent in 2012 compared to 2011 levels, a larger increase than that of fed cattle prices.

This has resulted in a widening spread between feeder cattle prices and fed cattle prices. This spread can only widen so far before feeder cattle prices decrease or feed cattle prices increase.

## Supply, demand and trade

Cattle and beef supplies remain tight. According to the USDA, 2012 beef production through June 9 is estimated at 11.02 billion pounds, down 2.8 percent compared to the same period in 2011. Year-to-date cattle slaughter numbers are down nearly 700,000 head compared to 2011, a drop of 4.6 percent year-over-year.

However, beef production hasn't declined at the same rate as slaughter numbers as average dressed weights in 2012 have increased by over 20 pounds per head.

Beef demand has gained momentum heading into the summer grilling season after suffering setbacks earlier this spring from negative press around Lean Finely Textured Beef and the discovery of BSE in a California dairy cow.

Despite these issues, wholesale beef prices have increased, indicating consumer demand for beef remains relatively strong.



Photo by Richard Burger

**Cattle graze on pasture** near Grandview. Short cattle supplies have helped keep the market strong, with prices significantly higher than the five-year average.

According to the USDA Market News, pork cutout prices are down 6 percent in the second week of June compared to 2011 levels. Broiler prices have increased approximately 5 percent year-over-year.

Boxed beef prices are up 12 percent compared to year-ago levels, indicating pork and chicken prices have become more competitive with beef prices in 2012.

This will impact consumer purchases, and could temper further growth of domestic beef demand.

Beef exports remain a key market component. According to the CME Group Daily Livestock Report, April beef exports increased 7 percent from March levels, while year-to-date beef exports are down 10.5 percent compared to the same

period in 2011.

However, the value of 2012 beef exports year-to-date is up almost 5 percent over the same period in 2011, indicating strong demand from foreign consumers in South Korea, Canada, Japan, Mexico, and Russia.

## Outlook

Several factors will influence the market going forward, including the short supply of domestic cattle, foreign trade activity, tight domestic supplies of competing proteins, global economic credit problems, continued high unemployment, and the health of the domestic economy.

Strong prices have improved many producers' bottom lines, and 2012 should be another profitable year for cow/calf producers.

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# Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

The Great Grandview Grape Stomp is coming. The event will be held on Saturday, September 8, at the Grandview Campus of Yakima Valley Community College. It starts at 1 p.m.

Anyone who has not before seen grape stomping in person is no doubt familiar with the concept as this practice pervades pop culture. Arguably the most famous example of wine stomping in media is a classic scene from I Love Lucy in which comedians Lucille Ball stomped on grapes and got into a fight with an Italian-speaking grape stomper. More recently, there is a widely-circulated viral video of FOX 5 news reporter Melissa Sander fell out of a grape tub and onto the ground. As a result of that accident, Sander spent weeks in the hospital.

One may have also come across one of the many grape-stomping events that take place across the country. Like the Grandview Stomp, these other events involve people competing to see who could create the greatest amount of juice by stepping on grapes with their bare feet. Meanwhile, team members in these competitions will catch the juice. The winning team is the one that can make the heaviest collection of juice. Competitors describe this stomping as an athletic activity, as it is extremely tiring.

Some spectators, however, will see such activity and feel something other than the humor attempted by Lucy, the pity inspired by the newscaster, or amazement at the stomp competitors. The sight of feet touching juice makes some people sick. How could a person stomach juice that had been pressed out by a pair of feet?

Such grape stomping is actually an ancient wine-making practice that faded away rather recently. We can be certain that it goes back to at least the time of the Ancient Romans, as they depicted it in their art. It was also, for centuries, a celebratory activity, as people of neighboring communities would get together to celebrate the harvest. The practice continued until it was replaced more and more by the wine press and other machinery.

Illegal as a practice to make commercial wine, grape stomping is largely an attraction of events like the Great Grandview Grape Stomp.

Last year's event featured around 100 contestants in 28 teams, all trying to see who could squeeze out the largest amount

of juice, determined by juice weight. They competed in different categories – corporate, adult, 10 – 17 years of age, and under 10. One team of adults won their category, and created more juice than any other team, by making nearly 16 pounds of juice.

In addition to the stomping contest, the Great Grandview Grape Stomp also includes costumes, entertainment, and more.

You may find out more information about the Great Grandview Grape Stomp by checking out [www.visitgrandview.org](http://www.visitgrandview.org).



Photo submitted

The Great Grandview Grape Stomp will be held on September 8 at YVCC, Grandview.

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## Fun Farm Facts

**How many honeybees does it take to produce a tablespoon of honey?**

12 - Twelve busy little bees must collect the nectar from 2,000 flowers to make a tablespoon of honey.





# Export market strength bolsters pear prospects

The Pacific Northwest pear industry is entering the final months of the 2011/12 marketing year. Overall the season has proved challenging, according to a second-quarter market report from Northwest Farm Credit

Service.

The record crop of 20.6 million boxes was delayed a week to ten days, forcing marketing desks to make up for lost ground throughout the year.

However, the season has not been

without success, with pear crop movement bolstered by strength in export markets, the report said.

Exports to Mexico have already set a new record, and export volume to Brazil is at near-record levels.

The 2011/12 crop is 15.5 percent larger than last year's 17.8 million box crop and 2.0 percent larger than the previous record of 20.1 million boxes set in 2009/10.

By volume, shipments are up 17.2 percent from last year, and are less than one percent ahead of the similarly large crop of 2009/10. To date, 96.7 percent of the 2011/12 pear crop has been moved compared to 95.3 percent last year and 98.4 percent two years ago.

Record pear movement to Mexico is supported by the suspension of a 20 percent retaliatory tariff on U.S. pears this past fall. So far this season, export volume to Mexico is up 33.1 percent from 2010/11 and up 22.2 percent from two years ago. Sales to Brazil are up 86.5 percent year-over-year, and only 3.8 percent behind the record export pace set in 2009/10.

Movement to 'Off Shore' export markets is up 24.8 percent from 2010/11 and 9.5 percent higher than two years ago. (The Off Shore category is mainly comprised of Russia, Colombia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Hong Kong, and India, the top U.S. pear export markets outside Mexico, Canada, and Brazil.)

Pear movement to Mexico, Canada and the domestic market was notably weak during the 2010/11 marketing year. As with Mexico, the domestic market experienced a rebound in sales.

Domestic shipments are up 13.5 percent year-over-year, but are behind 4.3 percent from 2009/10. On the other hand, movement to Canada remains sluggish; behind 6.1 percent from last year and 12.4 percent from two years ago.

Given the record crop size, pear prices largely weakened throughout the 2011/12 season to promote movement. The season-to-date average price for all Washington pear varieties was near \$18.75 at the end of June, compared to slightly above \$21.50 a year earlier.

Season average prices, though, remain above the \$17.45 season-to-date average for the similarly sized crop of 2009/10.

## Outlook

The Northwest pear industry will continue to focus on creating an orderly finish to the 2011/12 pear crop. Prices for most pear varieties have supported positive grower returns this year.

Growers with large size Bosc did well, but those with smaller fruit garnered lower returns. The tail-end of the Bosc crop may see additional downward price pressure.

Late season D' Anjou prices have experienced some recent strengthening, and may find additional support from export sales to Mexico. The Mexican pear market is generally strongest late in the year, with sales stretching into August.

At an estimated 19.3 million boxes, the 2012/13 crop should be more manageable than last year's crop. Pear Bureau Northwest projects a 9 percent decrease in the Green D' Anjou crop, and a 14 percent decrease in the Bosc crop.

Smaller crops for these varieties should help boost late season grower returns above levels experienced during the 2011/12 marketing year.

As the industry looks ahead, instances of fire blight and heavier than normal fruit drop may impact the size of the coming crop.

Additionally, the industry may be challenged to get the entire 2012/13 crop picked. The Northwest tree fruit industry is not expected to recover from the labor shortage that was evident last year, and the pear crop will compete for pickers with an expected record size apple crop.



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## Fun Farm Facts

**How many pounds of tomatoes does the average American eat each year?**

22 lbs. - More than half the nation's tomato consumption is in the form of ketchup and tomato sauce.

**What is the oldest known plant used for livestock feed?**

Alfalfa - Records of its use as livestock feed date to as early as 1,000 B.C. Alfalfa is one of the most nutritious crops to feed to animals.

**How much broccoli does the average American eat each year?**

4 lbs- We're eating 900 percent more broccoli than we did 20 years ago

**How many glasses of milk can one cow produce in a year?**

46,000 - The average cow produces 2,100 pounds of milk a month.



# Prospects positive for this year's apple crop

According to a second-quarter market report from Northwest Farm Credit Services, the outlook for the Northwest apple industry is mixed as marketing of the 2011/12 fresh apple crop nears completion and growers gear up for the 2012/13 crop.

The profit potential for the coming crop is high given price strength in the current market, the prospect of an empty pipeline as the crops transition, and the certainty of a smaller national apple crop for 2012/13.

The industry is also facing significant headwinds as growers deal with adverse weather and a labor shortage that could leave portions of the apple crop hanging in orchards this fall.

As of June 1, the 2011/12 fresh apple crop is estimated at 107.5 million boxes. That compares to the 109.2 million box record set last year and to 102.8 million boxes for the 2009/10 marketing year.

As marketing of the 2011/12 crop winds down, strong movement is keeping average apple prices high. Season-to-date average prices near \$22 per box compare to prices near \$19.25 per box last year and \$19 per box for 2009/10.

Given good prices and strong demand, the industry is able to pack and market lower grades of fruit than is customary.

## New crop prospects

Unofficial estimates have the 2012/13 fresh apple crop pegged at 125 million boxes; nearly 15 percent larger than the 2009/10 marketing year record.

The potential for a new fresh crop record, though, is threatened by adverse weather and the probability of a weak labor supply. Hail damage has been widespread and significant this year, with anecdotal reports suggesting the equivalent of more than 5.5 million boxes of damage so far.

Additionally, finding enough labor to pick a fresh crop much larger than last year's will be a challenge. The picker shortage in 2011 combined with a late harvest left apples hanging in orchards last year.

The scarcity of labor is expected to continue, and early signals suggest worker availability could be tighter this year.

An expected smaller national apple crop will provide opportunities for the Northwest this year.

## Outlook

The 2011/12 apple crop should have a strong finish, and growers can generally expect profitable returns. Current strength in the marketplace is positive and should help maintain traction around prices into the fall.

Other than the hail damage, the



Photo by Richard Burger

Apples in this Grandview-area orchard are already showing color. This year's crop is expected to be about 125 million boxes.

2012/13 crop is reportedly clean. Fruit should size nicely with a high survival rate of king blooms this year. This year's crop should pick sooner than last year. A more normal start of mid-August versus September is expected. The first official industry estimate for the Northwest fresh apple crop will be released August 1. Ultimately, weather will dictate crop size and timing.

Northwest apple prices could maintain a profitable price floor throughout the coming marketing year. Growers may also be able to use the processor market as a labor management tool this year.

Fruit destined for the processor market (other than slicers) can hang on the tree longer than fresh market apples.

There will be substantial incentive for growers to attract the necessary labor to get orchards fully harvested this year. Margins could be pinched as labor costs are bid up.

Growers that have implemented strategies such as building on farm housing, buying busses to ferry labor from the towns to the orchards, and leveraging labor friendly orchard designs will be best positioned to draw workers.



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# Large potato crop could mean lower prices

Grower optimism has faded heading into summer, according to a second-quarter potato market report from Northwest Farm Credit Services. Potato prices have weakened considerably, reflecting market expectations for a

large crop. Despite limited acreage expansion, excellent growing conditions could result in increased yields and production, prompting concerns among producers that prices could drop further, the report

said. Despite favorable contracts for many producers' 2011/12 potatoes, 2012 Idaho potato acreage increased just 20,000 acres.

### Northwest situation

In Washington, potato acreage is similar to 2011 levels. Most producers that increased acreage did so with additional acres offered by processors. Land scarcity and high rents, coupled with strong commodity prices for competing crops, contributed to limited potato acreage expansion.

However, growers anticipate above-average yields in Washington and Idaho, sustaining fears that potato supplies could be higher than expected, resulting in lower prices. Weather and growing conditions during the next 90 days will determine final yields.

The potential for a larger-than-expected crop has altered grower psychology, and led to a divergence between 2012/13 price expectations and 2011/12 pricing trends. In stark contrast to open contract prices ranging from \$10

and \$12 per cwt for 2011/12 potatoes earlier this year, some producers have contracted 2012/13 potatoes to limit risk.

Anecdotally, producers in American Falls have contracted the 2012/13 crop at a base of \$7.75 per cwt, with a potential quality incentive of \$0.80 per cwt. According to the USDA, the preliminary June 2012 all potato price for Idaho was \$7.95 per cwt, down 16.8 percent from \$9.55 per cwt in June 2011. During this same period, Washington and Oregon prices dropped 8.7 percent and 18.1 percent respectively.

Although there is anxiety about the size of the 2012/13 crop, old crop potato supplies are tight. Some processors have slowed production in order to minimize a potential gap between processing old crop and new crop potatoes. Processors may dig potatoes early to access more supplies. Other processors may wait to dig to increase the size of potatoes.

### 2012 Farm Bill

The Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012, otherwise known as the Farm Bill, passed in the U.S. Senate on June 21, 2012. The new bill replaces direct payments, counter-cyclical payments, and the Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) program with the new

Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) program. Under ARC, producers may choose between coverage at the individual farm level or at the county level for protection against price and yield losses.

Another key component of the bill is that farmers with adjusted gross incomes above \$750,000 would not be eligible for payments from Title I Farm Bill programs, which are currently capped at \$50,000 per entity.

The bill has been sent to the U.S. House of Representatives where it will likely face pressure for additional cuts, particularly to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which accounts for 80 percent of the Farm Bill's budget.

Although the current farm bill expires on September 30, 2012, there is no guarantee that a new bill will be passed prior to November elections.

### Outlook

Weather conditions will be critical for the U.S. potato crop. Optimal growing conditions could improve yields and increase production, resulting in dampened prices.

Producers may contract 2012/13 potatoes at lower prices to avoid excessive market risk, but producers will still be profitable in 2012.

The export market will continue to provide strength to the U.S. potato market in 2012.



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## Fun Farm Facts

**What is the most popular pizza topping in America?**

Pepperoni - Americans eat about 100 acres of pizza every day. In Japan, the most popular pizza topping is squid.



## Help native nesting birds by design

Is your swallow nest box being used by House sparrows?

Your purple martin house taken over by European starlings?

You may have design flaws in the housing you've provided that allows these aggressive, non-native birds to thrive and our native birds to decline.

Some ready-made bird houses may look cute but are not necessarily designed to keep the bullies of the bird world out.

Perches, for example, aren't needed by birds but attract house sparrows and starlings.

Design and construction of bird houses need to be species specific. The most important part is the entrance hole. If the hole is too small, the desired bird won't be able to enter. If it's too big (and this is more likely) undesirable wildlife - like non-native sparrows and starlings, and uninvited squirrels, can get in and harm, evict, or kill the desired bird.

As a rule, house sparrows can't enter a nest box if the entrance hole is less than 1-1/8 inches in diameter. Starlings can't enter if the hole is less than 1-1/2 inches in diameter.

Information in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) "Woodworking Projects for Backyard Wildlife," available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/projects/>, specifies entrance hole sizes to exclude these birds wherever possible. Even if you don't want to make your own nest boxes, it's a good resource for making better decisions when you purchase bird houses.

Bird houses often have to be maintained on a yearly basis to stick to these specs. You'll need to patch or restore the entrance holes after squirrels or woodpeckers have tried to enlarge them. There are many ways to do this, from attaching wooden extensions or "donuts" over the holes to fortifying them with metal washers.

If you still have problems with aggressive non-native species even when you follow the standards, there are also design alternatives.

A diamond-shaped entrance hole that is no more than 7/8-inch deep and up to 3-1/2 inches wide, will exclude house sparrows and starlings. To accommodate the slightly bigger violet-green swallow, file down the area inside of the entry hole by just a quarter inch. You can see these specs at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/projects/basic\\_songbird.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/projects/basic_songbird.html).

Anacortes bird enthusiast Gene Derig came up with that diamond design but recently told us about an even simpler way to accommodate and protect not only violet-green swallows, but also chickadees, nuthatches, and other native species.

"Try using a 3/4-inch high slot configuration," Gene said. "The slot is made by drilling three consecutive horizontal holes with a 3/4-inch drill bit, and then just shaving out what's left. It's especially good for urban areas where there are more house sparrows."

The purple martin is a species that could really use help with suitable nest sites within its range in western Washington, since its numbers seem to

be declining. In fact, it's a candidate for state protective listing, in part because of competition from sparrows and starlings.

WDFW biologist Chris Anderson notes that purple martins are colony nesters, but those attractive "multiple apartment complex" bird houses designed for them can be a problem in urban areas where starlings and house sparrows are numerous.

"A cluster of gourds drilled with holes seems to be much less preferred by starlings and house sparrows and the martins love them," Anderson said.

Another way to help is to be more strategic with placement of bird nest boxes.

Martins, like all swallows, feed on insects, mostly on the wing, often over water where insects concentrate. Hanging a gourd collection over water makes it that much more enticing to martins and less inviting to sparrows and starlings.

Sparrows and starlings usually won't nest within ten feet of the ground. Placing nest boxes four to five feet off the ground and in brushy areas will discourage these birds, and will readily be used by many native species, from bluebirds to wrens. Nest boxes at this height, however, are vulnerable to predators such as cats.

If you want to get rid of house sparrows or European starlings nesting in a bird house, it is legal to remove their nests and destroy the eggs. Unlike most birds, these non-native, introduced species are not protected by state or federal law. Nests may have to be removed five to six times before sparrows or starlings finally abandon the house.

Sometimes the best thing to do if your area is plagued by starlings or house sparrows, and you can't actively manage them, is to simply not use bird nest boxes

## Cherries ready for the picking



Photo by Deb Brumley

**Ummmm cherries are ready to pick.** Just about anywhere you go in the Valley right now there are cherries ready to pick and better yet.... ready to eat.

at all.


There are many other resources to help you address bird house issues in addition to WDFW's "Living With Wildlife" webpages. Some of the best information is available on the Sialis website, developed for people interested in helping bluebirds

(which are in the genus *Sialis*) and other native cavity-nesting birds. For starling problems, see <http://www.sialis.org/starlingbio.htm> and for House sparrow problems see <http://www.sialis.org/hosp.htm>. Another good site is <http://www.treeswallowprojects.com/index.html>.



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## USDA seeks county committee candidates

Agricultural producers in Yakima County who would like to guide federal farm programs at the local level have a chance to do so.

The USDA Farm Service Agency is seeking candidates for this year's County Committee election. Nominations are due to the FSA county office by Aug. 1.

"These federal farm programs represent millions of dollars to our rural economy. The local committee is the best way to ensure the programs fit our area's agricultural conditions as much as possible," said Lisa Ruff, FSA Acting County Executive Director for Yakima County.

Ruff said FSA encourages all interested agricultural producers, including women and growers of different ethnic backgrounds, to seek nomination.

The FSA County Office Committee is the most direct link between USDA farm programs and local growers. The County Committee system helps make nationwide programs workable at the local level.

Committee members make decisions related to commodity price support loans and payments, and establish allotments, yields and marketing quotas for some crops. FSA committees also make eligibility determinations for conservation programs and disaster assistance.

"The people elected to the committee will become part of a national network of farmers and ranchers that have a unique

opportunity to help the future of all local growers," Ruff said. "This is government at its best—locally rooted, and bringing the resources and expertise of the USDA together with our customers."

The FSA County Committee elections are being held in Local Administrative Area #1 this year. This area consists of farms located in the upper Yakima Valley (north of the Rattlesnake Ridge), minus the land situated south of Ahtanum Creek.

Producers in this area will be electing a County Committee person to serve a three-year term. Farm owners, operators, tenants and sharecroppers of legal voting age, in LAA #1 can run for a committee position and vote if they are eligible to take part in any FSA program.

Spouses are generally eligible to participate in committee elections. Any producers who may not have received an election ballot in the past should contact the Yakima FSA office to ensure that they are on the list of eligible voters.

Elected County Committee members receive an hourly wage for their attendance and representation at county committee meetings.

Persons interested in holding office as a county committee member are encouraged to check eligibility requirements with the local FSA office.

Additional information and nomination forms may be requested from the Farm Service Agency located in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Center at (509) 454-5746, Extension #2.

## Reach for the sky



Photo by Richard Burger

Hop vines spiral upward and over the trellis at the top of a hop field near Grandview. Hop flowers are already forming on the vines. The harvest typically begins around the fourth week in August, and lasts about four weeks.

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## Irrigation scheduling made easy with new app

By R. Troy Peters, P.E., Ph.D.

When do I turn the water on? How long do I leave it on?

Although these are straight forward questions, finding good answers to these questions can be quite complex.

Most mint growers realize, however, that getting it right has big payoffs. Good irrigation water management will increase yields, improve crop quality, decrease fertilizer requirements, save pumping energy costs, conserve water, and reduce non-point source pollution.

In short the grower is going to be more profitable, and environmental groups are going to be happy.

Troy Peters, the WSU extension irrigation specialists partnered with AgWeatherNet director Gerrit Hoogenboom, and AgWeatherNet web developer Sean Hill to develop Irrigation Scheduler Mobile (available at <http://weather.wsu.edu/is>).

Irrigation Scheduler Mobile is a free online irrigation scheduling tool for doing simplified check-book style irrigation scheduling. It is optimized for use on a smart phone and works on any platform including iPhone, Android, or MS Windows Phone, or Blackberry.

Because it operates as a web page, it also works perfectly well on any desktop web browser.

It is fully integrated with Washington's AgWeatherNet so that daily crop water use (ET) estimates and rainfall data are automatically filled in. To maintain privacy and to keep track of each user's data independently each user logs in using their free AgWeatherNet username and password.

Although currently not available, funding is currently being sought to expand it for use with stations outside of AgWeatherNet.

Every grower can set up an unlimited number of fields. Setting up a field

involves simply selecting the crop grown, the soil texture, and the nearest AgWeatherNet weather station for the crop water use and rainfall data.

From these selections the model is automatically populated with default values for the crop and the soil water-holding characteristics. These values can be fine tuned later by educated users to improve the model's accuracy.

After setup, all the grower needs to do is add the irrigation amounts on the dates that field is irrigated. The model keeps track of the soil water content over time, and displays the soil water deficit (how much more water the soil can hold before it is lost to deep percolation), and the current percent of the total soil available water.

The model can be corrected or updated on any date with soil moisture measurements or estimates.

The model uses a daily time step and takes into account the effects of a growing root zone as well as the decrease in plant water use due to water stress.

Although the most important screens for the user will probably be the Daily Budget Table and the Soil Water, the model also outputs graphs of: the daily crop water use, the cumulative water use, the crop coefficients and root zone depth over time, the estimated amount of water lost to deep percolation, and the degree of water stress and estimated yield loss to the crop due to water stress.

Online help for each screen is available within the irrigation scheduler mobile application.

A full help manual is also available online at <http://weather.wsu.edu/is/ISMManual.pdf>.

For additional help, or if you would like to submit any questions or comments, please contact Troy Peters at [troy\\_peters@wsu.edu](mailto:troy_peters@wsu.edu), or at 509-786-9247.

## Permaculture is alive and well in Sunnyside

Things are really growing at Heavenly Hills Harvest Permaculture Farm and Education Center.

Besides its normal summer offerings of community-supported agriculture and adult and family workshops concerning farming, Heavenly Hills Harvest Farm in Sunnyside has new activities going on this summer that include a Children's Summer Farm and Nature Day camp and, in its efforts to use the best practices for organic farming, the creation of a multi-story, 25-foot wide, "pollinator border," which may be a first in the area, and work to restore a section of the 100-acre farm, located on the Yakima River, to natural habitat.

The Farm and Nature Camp for children six to 12 years of age will be under the supervision of Merritt Mitchell-Wajeesh, farm owner.

Merritt has a masters degree in environmental science education, and experience with teaching children and adults. Two, one-week programs begin Monday July 23, and July 30, respectively.

Children will learn how to be farmers, spending time during the week planting and harvesting and learning how to prepare food.

They also will enjoy daily farm-style lunches, learn about other sustainable agriculture practices, such as composting and natural soil and pest management, and engage in nature explorations that include map making, bird watching, tracking, and gathering materials for art, keeping a nature journal, rock and mineral identification and other experiences

with geology, swimming, ball games, afternoon homemade ice cream parties, and on Friday, an extended day that will include parents and siblings for an evening cookout and fireside activities.

This is the fourth year for Merritt Mitchell-Wajeesh to supply organic vegetables and fruit, using the CSA concept.

Community supported agriculture is a growing trend nationally and means that people have the opportunity to get locally grown food, fresh picked, usually within a day of delivery, and also to visit the farm.

Each subscriber for the six-month summer harvest gets what is in season, beginning with salad and other greens, quickly followed by many varieties of tomatoes, onions, peppers, herbs, summer and winter squash, melons, potatoes, peas, beans, carrots, broccoli, egg plant, and more.

The baskets are delivered to central pick-up locations in Yakima and Prosser. On farm pickup is also available.

Merritt also presents workshops for adults and families on how to raise their own food, the permaculture way, sustainably, with raised beds, rich soil and no toxins.

Raised bed gardening at home can provide enough food to supply a family, and even others.

You can contact Merritt for information about the camp, workshops, and the 2012 CSA program.

Space is limited. Information can be found on the website, [www.heavenlyhillsharvest.com](http://www.heavenlyhillsharvest.com), or by calling Merritt at (509) 840-5600.

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# Irrigation specialist offers advice on soil moisture sensors

Efficient management of irrigation water for mint provides a host of benefits, such as increased yields, improved quality, conservation of water and energy, and decreased fertilizer requirements.

One of the best and simplest ways to get

the information to make improved water management decisions is through the use of soil moisture measurement technology.

However, the installation, calibration, and interpretation of the data can be overwhelming for most busy growers.

Troy Peters, Ph.D., irrigation specialist at WSU Prosser, in an edition of the Washington Mint Growers Association *Mint Drops* newsletter, offered some practical recommendations for using soil moisture measurement equipment.

There are two major types of soil moisture sensors, those that measure soil water content and those that measure soil water tension.

### Soil water content

Sensor types are neutron probe, time domain transmissivity, and capacitance.

The neutron probe is accurate, repeatable, and samples a relatively large area, using one sensor for all sites and depths.

It is also expensive, about \$4,500, cannot be left in the field, and involves government paperwork and regulations.

Time domain transmissivity is much less expensive, about \$110 per sensor, but samples a small area.

Capacitance sensors are easy to set up, but highly affected by soil conditions immediately next to the sensor, and can cost from \$300 to \$1,200 per system.

Peters said soil water content measurements are much more meaningful for irrigation scheduling when they are compared to the maximum amount of water that the soil can hold long term, known as field capacity.

The simplest way to determine field capacity is to use the sensor to take a measurement at a time when the soil is full of water, and free water has had time to drain through.

Good times to take measurements are as soon as soil thaws in the spring, assuming adequate moisture recharge over the winter, or 12 to 24 hours after a heavy irrigation.

The soil content measurement must be multiplied by the depth of soil in the root zone.

Peters said it also helps greatly to have an estimate of the soil water content at which plants begin to experience water stress.

### Soil water tension

Sensor types are tensiometers and granular matrix.

Tensiometers cost about \$80 per sensor, but can experience maintenance issues.

Granular matrix sensors cost only \$40 per sensor, but produce highly variable output, are less accurate, and are sensitive to temperature and soil salinity.

When using tension-based sensors, the soil's field capacity, wilting point, and maximum depletion point are mostly irrelevant, Peters said.

A soil that is full of water will have near zero measured soil water tension.

Fruit trees and vines should be irrigated before they reach 40 to 50 centibars. For regulated deficit irrigation, this could be increased to 80 centibars.

Since these measurements can be inaccurate and soil specific, growers should refine the limits using crop observations over time.

For example, note the measured soil water tension at the earliest indications of water stress, and be sure to irrigate before that point is reached in the future.



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# Dealers report on 2012 mint crop

## Washington

Scotch – Scotch acres are up about 5 percent this year from last year to about 4,500 acres. The crop looks good although a little slow due to the cool weather. Recent activities have been reported to be from \$18 up to \$19.

Native – Native acres saw an 11-percent increase this year to around 8,100 acres. The crop looks to have wintered well and is in good shape.

Oil on the spot market has gone for \$18-\$19. There has been some contracting taking place for the 2012 crop.

Peppermint (including NE Oregon, Yakima Valley and Columbia Basin) – Acres are down slightly this year to around 21,000 acres.

A large percentage of the crop is contracted, with a good portion of that contracted being on an index contract. There has been some contract activity at around \$22.

## Idaho - Eastern Oregon

### Spearmint

Scotch – Acres are up significantly from last year to around 1,500 acres. The crop looks to have wintered well, and seems to be in good shape.

There has been some spot activity recently at the \$18 level.

Native - Overall Native acres are up slightly to about 730 acres. The crop wintered well.

There has been some activity in the \$18-\$19 range, but with a limited

amount of oil available, the market has been relatively quiet.

Idaho Peppermint – Acres are going to remain about the same this year as last. The crop looks

OK, older stands are a little slow-starting due to the cool, wet spring.

There has been some spot activity at \$22. A good portion of the 2012 crop is contracted.



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