

Worker Shortage Puts Strain On Farms

BY LYNDA V. MAPES
The Seattle Times
(MCT)

ELTOPIA, Wash. — Dawn breaks over the field as cutters bend to their work: stoop, slice, stoop, slice.

As Washington's asparagus season draws to a close, growers have much to feel good about. Prices have been high all season, matching demand. The weather has cooperated, and the quality of the crop is superb. But as the last grass, as it's known, is cut from the fields, there is a distinct unease instead of a sense of celebration.

Just as the industry has made a comeback after a decade of getting clobbered by cheap imports, growers left about 10 percent of the crop in the fields for the first time anyone could remember. And not for lack of market, or a decent price.

"We just could not find the people to cut it," said Alan Schreiber, executive director of the Washington State Asparagus Commission in Eltopia. And it's just the beginning, growers fear, as the summer cherry harvest — predicted to be a record crop this year, and the most labor intensive of all — kicks into gear this week.

Growers had trouble mustering the small crews needed to cut asparagus over the adagio rhythm of a 10-week season on about 5,000 acres. How will cherry growers muster the 40,000 workers they need to strip off their crop, typically in a 10-day sprint in most orchards?

"I think we are all terrified," said B.J. Thurlby, president of the Washington State Fruit Commission and Northwest Cherry Growers.

Nobody produces more apples and sweet cherries for fresh eating than Washington, which has a lot on the line with record crops expected in both this harvest season.

"Will we be able to pick the crop? That is the billion-dollar question," Thurlby said. Actually more than that, with last year's apple crop worth an estimated record \$1.4 billion, and cherries worth \$367 million.

The labor problem in Washington's \$8 billion agricultural industry has been years in the making. Some 150,000 seasonal workers are needed to bring in the state's crops each year; only Florida, California and Texas employ more.

For decades, Washington growers have depended on a largely illegal workforce, mostly Latino, to do the skilled, hand labor needed to tie hop vines on trellises; prune, thin and pick cherries, apples, apricots and pears; and divide, plant and cut asparagus, said Mike



MARK HARRISON/SEATTLE TIMES/MCT
Adrian Hernandez picks asparagus with his wife, Cerecita Diaz, right, and mother, Hilda Hernandez, June 23, 2012, in Eltopia. Washington asparagus growers expanded their acreage and produced an exceptional crop this year, but 10 percent stayed in the ground for lack of enough workers to harvest it.

Gempler, executive director of the Washington Growers League.

The dependence on Mexican labor dates to the Bracero program initiated in 1942, in which hundreds of thousands of workers were brought through the 1960s by the U.S. government to pick crops.

After Congress passed immigration legislation in 1986, including amnesty for illegal workers now living in the country, many Mexican families made the U.S. their permanent home. But the children of those families have gone on to other work.

What is missing now is a workable government policy under which a legal, stable workforce willing to do the hardest tasks, such as cutting asparagus, is reliably and legally available, Schreiber said.

Just before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, progress was being made toward a new U.S. immigration policy. But that chance at stability was lost in the charged, post-9/11 political climate, which has only gotten more divisive, and Congress is at an impasse on immigration. In recent years, the United States has

tightened its borders and focused on enforcement, rather than a labor solution.

Immigration has roiled the presidential campaign, with President Barack Obama's recent decision to allow children of illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S., and his Republican rival Mitt Romney embracing a hard line.

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday struck down parts of an Arizona law designed to crack down on illegal immigrants — but left standing a provision that allows police to check the papers of people stopped for various reasons who might appear to be in the country illegally.

Meanwhile, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border illegally has rocketed in price, to as much as \$6,000 per trip — one-third more than it used to be, workers say. With border violence brought on by warring drug cartels, combined with the depressed U.S. economy, many are deciding the trip isn't worth the cost or risk.

The result is Mexican migration to the United States has slowed to a trickle, and growers are seeing the result.

“Will we be able to pick the crop? That is the billion-dollar question.”

B.J. THURLBY

For Sellers, Farmland Provides A Jackpot

BY JENNIFER BJORHUS
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)
(MCT)

MINNEAPOLIS — The record farmland prices that are shaking up rural America offer a potential bonanza for sellers.

Money from recent farmland sales is helping families pay off debt, buy second homes or make other investments, auctioneers say. Some finance education for their families.

"To call it just a seller's market is almost downplaying it," said Chuck Wingert of Wingert Realty & Land Services, an active farm auction company in Mankato, Minn. "We've never been here before. It's a windfall at the moment."

For Jack and Betty Thomas, the family farm they sold is financing a retirement dream in northern Minnesota: opening an animal shelter called Paws and Claws.

For years the Thomases have rented out the 80-acre farm that Betty grew up on near Worthington, Minn., but started eyeing the market in recent years for a good time to sell. In November, they made their move. Expecting about \$6,000 an acre, the



BRIAN PETERSON/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT
With skyrocketing farmland prices and crop insurance guarantees, black dirt is looking more like black gold for farmers in Minnesota. Looking to expand his farm near Lake Wilson, Gene Stael stands on the property he purchased last fall for \$6,800 per acre. "This has been a very good age for farming," Stael said.

Thomases sold the land at a public auction for \$8,150. The market "fit right into our plans just perfectly," Jack Thomas said.

The couple, who don't have children, said they're lifelong animal lovers and want to donate the money to build a state-of-the-art animal shelter for Cass County, which they said doesn't have one.

"Life's been pretty good to

us," said Jack, 75. "This was a way for us to give back."

Glen Fladeboe, whose Willmar, Minn.-based Fladeboe Auctions sold the farm for the Thomases, said he sees a lot of families enjoying the upside to the boom.

But not everyone who owns farmland is fully aware of the opportunity, he said, explaining that he routinely meets with peo-

ple a generation or two removed from the family farm who harvest paychecks in the Twin Cities now but still own the farm.

"They're unaware of the really huge growth in farmland values," Fladeboe said. "Nobody's sending them a monthly statement in the mail with what their farmland has gone up, like with their stock returns."

There was no surprise for Kelvin Bonnema. The 66-year-old retired Medtronic senior scientist in Brooklyn Park, Minn., said he'd been reading farm newsletters. Plus, farmers had been contacting him, asking about the land he and his brothers and sisters still owned near Willmar.

None of the children farms, and Bonnema said that after their parents passed away, they finally decided it was time to sell.

In November, Fladeboe Auctions sold the family's 154-acre farm in Kandiyohi County for \$8,112 per acre — still the county record.

"The people at the auction were happy for us. But at the same time ... it went for too much," Bonnema said. "I was shocked."

Training For CAFO Operators Set For July 11

BROOKINGS — An environmental training session for operators of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs, is set for July 11 in Huron.

Specialists from South Dakota State University, the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are offering the training. This training fulfills the environmental and manure-management training requirement to obtain a livestock permit for CAFOs from the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Producers and any other interested individuals who are not currently applying for a permit also can benefit from the information and are encouraged to attend. Current federal (EPA, USDA) and state water pollution control programs encourage livestock producers, even those who do not need permits, to voluntarily adopt livestock production and manure management practices that protect water quality. Certified Crop Advisor credits for are also available for attending this program.

During the morning session, Erin Cortus, SDSU Extension Air Quality and Waste Management Specialist will discuss water quality. John Lentz, Resource Conservationist with the NRCS, will talk about implementing conservation practices to improve sustainability. Jason Roggow, a natural resources engineer with the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources, will give an overview of the South Dakota DENR Livestock Permit program.

In the afternoon, Ron Gelderman, SDSU Extension Soil Specialist will discuss managing nitrogen and phosphorus in land applications of manure. Lentz and Gelderman will also go through nutrient management planning worksheets. Bob Thaler, SDSU Extension Swine Specialist will lead a session on livestock nutrition options for reducing nitrogen and phosphorus content of manure. Cortus will conclude the day's training with a session on air quality and odor.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. at the Crossroads Convention Center, 100 Fourth St. S.W. in Huron. The cost of \$50 includes lunch, breaks, and training materials. The program begins at 8:50 a.m. and concludes at approximately 4:45 p.m. To register for the training, call Candy Willms at (605) 688-5141.

Youth Sought For Beef Ambassador Contest

PIERRE — South Dakota youth interested in promoting the state's beef industry and improving their own presentation skills are encouraged to participate in the 2012 South Dakota Beef Ambassador Contest.

The contest, to be held July 26 at the Crossroads Hotel and Huron Event Center, will select a winner to move onto the national level and provide participating youth with the skills and information needed to educate consumers and fellow students about beef nutrition, food safety & stewardship practices of the beef industry.

Sponsored by the South Dakota Beef Industry Council (SDBIC), the S.D. Beef Ambassador Contest will be held the evening before the South Dakota Summer Spotlight Show in Huron, an event focused on showcasing youth livestock exhibitors.

This year's S.D. Beef Ambassador Contest will involve three age divisions: beginner (ages 8-11), junior (ages 12-16), and senior (ages 17-20). Senior contestants must be 17 but not over 20 years old by Sept. 1, 2013. Senior and junior contestants will be judged in four categories: media interview; consumer beef promotion; letter to the editor; and personal interview. Youth in the beginners' division will be judged solely on a 3-5 minute presentation. They will also be welcome to watch the junior and senior competitive events.

The winner of the senior division will receive \$500 and all-expense-paid trip to the National Beef Ambassador contest in the fall of 2013. The winning junior division contestant goes home with \$200 cash, while the top beginner contestant receives \$50. All participants in the contest receive cash prizes.

To find out more about the S.D. Beef Ambassador Contest, including a registration form, rules and regulations, go to sdbic.org. The registration deadline is July 13. To find more about the National Beef Ambassador program go to nationalbeefambassador.org. You can also contact SDBIC Director of Nutrition and Consumer Information Holly Swee at 605-957-5283, or hswee@sdbic.org, or 2011 SD Beef Ambassador Courtney Nolz, at 605-999-7036, or courtney_nolz22@hotmail.com.

The S.D. Beef Ambassador Contest is funded in part by South Dakota beef producers through the checkoff program.

Grandin To Speak At ILIA Conference

PIERRE — Dr. Temple Grandin will be speaking at the International Livestock Identification Association's (ILIA) annual conference at 8:30 a.m. (MDT) July 24 in Rapid City.

ILIA is making 50 tickets available to livestock producers for Grandin's speech and a book signing. Tickets can be purchased by contacting Susan Zilverberg at 773-5425.

Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University. She has built a worldwide reputation as a livestock-handling facilities designer and animal handling expert. In North America, almost half of all slaughter cattle are handled using the center track restrainer system she designed.

In 2010, TIME magazine named her one of the world's "100 Most Influential People" and HBO completed a documentary on her life called "Temple." She has authored more than 400 articles in scientific journals and livestock periodicals on animal handling, welfare, and facility design.

ILIA is an organization of member states, provinces, and Native American Tribal Nations where livestock brand recording, livestock identification and livestock inspection are recognized by legislation. ILIA encourages and supports enforcement of livestock ownership and identification legislation.

The organization is proud to have created the "Tom Spencer Endowment Fund," which is funded yearly through the ILIA conference and charity auction. The fund is used to provide post-secondary scholarships to young adults across the United States and western Canada who are direct family descendants of ILIA members.

The ILIA's annual conference is scheduled from July 22-25. Sponsorship opportunities are available.



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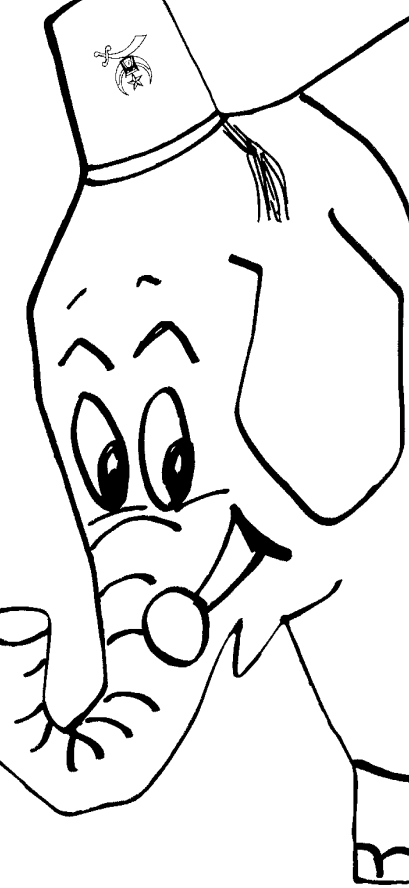


Pancake Breakfast

Pancakes, Eggs, Bacon, Sausage, or Biscuits & Gravy

\$6.00 All You Can Eat
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