

No water, no corn, no Amaizen Maze

Ripple effects to be felt throughout the Klamath community

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H&N photo by Lee Juillerat Tom and Jenise Bocchi won't be growing more corn for their popular Old Fort Amaizen Corn Maze because of the cutoff of irrigation water.

The ripple effects are beginning to show.

Decisions by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to trim allocations of irrigation water will affect more than the 1,000-plus farmers and ranchers that depend on water from the Klamath Irrigation Project.

Tom and Jenise Bocchi depend on irrigation provided through the Enterprise Irrigation District to provide small amounts of water to raise corn for their Old Fort Amaizen Corn Maze. Because Enterprise won't be receiving any water to allocate, the Bocchis won't be able to operate the corn maze.

Food bank affected

And because there won't be a corn maze, the Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank won't receive the two tons of food and \$1,000 the Bocchis donated last year.

The Bocchis also won't be buying corn seed, won't be buying fuel for tractors and vehicles, won't be buying advertising to promote the event, won't be buying snacks to be sold at the maze and, more importantly, they said, they won't be providing a recreational opportunity for families and youth.

"It's a trickle down through the entire community," Tom Bocchi said. "I'm just a little guy."

Started in 2007

The Bocchis started the Old Fort Amaizen Corn Maze on Old Fort Road near Klamath Falls in 2007.

Tom Bocchi said the maze attracted nearly 10,000 people last year from mid-September through Halloween. Interest has grown each year, with group tours, birthday parties and, last year, a Halloween Haunted Corn Maze.

"I do it for the young people. I don't do it for the money," Tom Bocchi said. "I do it for the young people because I grew up here and I know there's not a lot to do."

Still paying the bill

Even though Enterprise Irrigation District, which has a low water priority, won't receive any water because of the water shortage, Bocchi said, he's being charged his annual \$4,000 for operating and maintaining district canals.

He said the water used to grow the corn, which other years had been planted by now, isn't much.

In past years, the five-acre site was watered once a week for about 24 hours from June through August. The property has no other water source.

Bocchi believes the water shortage will impact Klamath Basin residents in ways they can't anticipate.

"The trickle effect is tens of thousands of dollars taken out of the community," Bocchi said. "What's the answer? The answer is it's affecting all of us."

Side Bar

About the Enterprise Irrigation District

Enterprise Irrigation District has about 2,000 acres and 1,634 mostly residential users, according to district general manager Shane McDonald and board member Mike Beeson.

The district generally is north of the A Canal. It extends from Vale Road near the Shield Crest Golf Course to the intersection of Crater Lake Parkway and Shasta Way and goes up Old Fort Road.

While the majority use water to irrigate lawns and gardens, the district also includes some farms and ranches and the Steen Sports Park.

McDonald said most people in the district also have access to city water, but the cost is five or six times more expensive than irrigation water. He said several people who normally grow large gardens have either scaled back or decided not to plant gardens because of the extra cost.

"These shortages will definitely impact our farmers and people who get water to their livestock," McDonald said.

Beeson, who has been a district board member for 11 years, said discussions with previous board members indicated that when the district joined the Klamath Water Users Association more than 30 years ago, it was agreed the various groups would serve as a united front during water shortage years.

Although the district has a lower water priority, he said the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation decision to cancel water delivery to the Enterprise district bothered him.

"It's not what we were led to believe. The agreement was we were all going to fight together.

"It's affected our entire district," he added. "A lot of people are not happy."

Beeson said the district installed 35 miles of pipe in the past 11 years, "which is a big, big water savings" because the pipe replaces open canals subject to evaporation.

The district also is looking at drilling a well in the future, but doing so would take a significant investment, possibly upward of \$500,000.

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