

# Oregon Family Farmer

A publication of the  
Oregon Family Farm Association

Special Issue:

## Celebrating Oregon Women in Agriculture

Meet Helle Ruddenklau  
Oregon Women for Ag  
Leader and Pioneer of  
No-Till Farming

Celebrating Oregon's Agriculture  
Entrepreneurs: Shannon Sbarra  
at Volcano Veggies

Volume No. 7 | \$5.00



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# Oregon Women in Agriculture, Creating a Positive Future

Meet the remarkable women and organizations working to create a positive future for Oregon agriculture.

# 11



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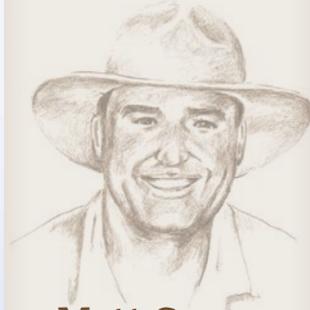


Oregon Family Farm Association



Oregon Family Farmer

From the  
**PRESIDENT**



**Matt Cyrus**

**OREGON FAMILY FARM  
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Every woman has her own opportunity in uncharted frontiers, and the women in this issue of *Oregon Family Farmer* are making the most of their opportunities. These stories unfold as highlights of the leaders, pioneers, entrepreneurs and commanding voices of women in what's often seen from the outside as a "man's world" – the world of farming and agriculture. We as a state are much the richer for the legacy of women leaders in Oregon agriculture.

I hope you especially enjoy this issue celebrating the women who are creating a positive future for Oregon. One special lady I love and celebrate is my daughter, Awbrey Cyrus. For nearly 180 years, the Cyrus family have been farming

in Oregon; first homesteading the Willamette valley in the 1840s, then crossing to the untamed valleys of Central Oregon in the 1880s.

We are a resilient bunch and Awbrey continues to amaze me with her resilience too. She has caught the Cyrus' passion for ag and animals and is quick to speak her mind when advocating for both.

A few years ago, Awbrey was working a dude string when she collided with a rearing horse, suffering a severe head injury and concussion. The injury left her housebound for a year, with months of memory loss and years of migraine headaches.

Her sheer willpower to overcome also

*Awbrey Cyrus with her dad, Matt Cyrus, and beloved Maremma Sheepdog, Brutus, on the same ranch Cyrus homesteaders have farmed since the 1880s.*





reared its feisty head as I watched her step into her boots, trek out to the barns, and work with her horses, bulls and ewes in spite of the pain.

Today, Awbrey works full time at VF Red Angus Ranch where she trains show animals, monitors calving and skillfully assists the embryo and breeding operations. She also raises her own livestock and applies her talent with breeding and genetics on her own stock of bucking bulls and award-winning sheep bloodlines. She's carefully selected and bred about 80 head of ewes for her own enterprise, Cyrus Club Lambs, dedicated to 4-H youth. You will often find her up, two to three times a night, doing most of the lambing by herself.

What's most exciting to her this lambing season?

"This year all my wether lambs sold out!" she told me.

"It's a good feeling to have a sold-out year."

She pours immense entrepreneurial drive into bettering her flock for FFA and 4-H clubs. Her ambitious and competitive nature takes great pains to improve the bloodlines and genetics year after year. When three of her lambs cleaned house at last year's Central Washington State Fair, it meant a couple of 4-H youth proudly took the three top spots in all categories.

*Cyrus Club Lambs swept the three top prizes at last year's Central Washington State Fair.*



Awbrey's inspiration, however, doesn't just come from the Cyrus clan, but from the youngsters she serves and the living examples of many remarkable women making a difference for their farms, communities, and the future of agriculture. I know you'll enjoy getting to know them in this issue.

Follow Awbrey on Facebook at [CyrusClubLambs](#)

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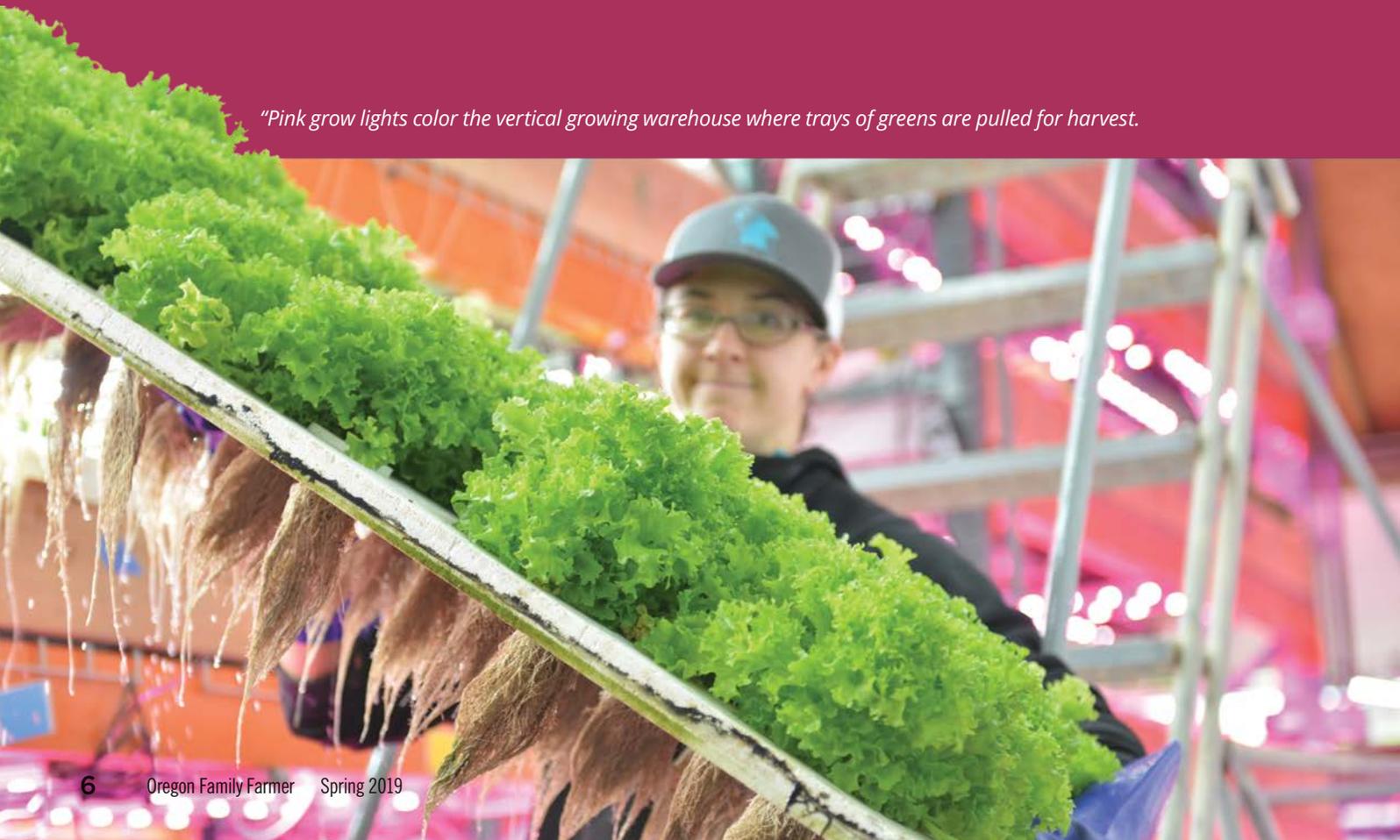
# VOLCANO VEGGIES

**SHANNON SBARRA, FARMING IN THE PINK**

WORDS: LAURA STEWART    PHOTOS: LYNNPHOTO.COM

Bend is known for the piles of fresh snow during the winter months and plentiful hours of sunlight in the summer. Most farms in Central Oregon find the balance between the extreme weather conditions to be challenging.

*"Pink grow lights color the vertical growing warehouse where trays of greens are pulled for harvest."*



For Volcano Veggies, a warehouse protects their plants from the frigid air and searing heat. Shannon Sbarra, with her husband Jimmy, co-owners of Volcano Veggies, took a uniquely innovative approach to farming called aquaponics, a system using the waste from farmed fish to provide nutrients for the plants. After plants are watered, the drained moisture is filtered to aerate the fish tanks.

"We're creating our own ecosystem," says Jimmy. "It's not a magical growing solution. Just like typical farming it's hard, difficult and challenging. You're trying to keep three things very happy that don't necessarily want to go together."

Volcano Veggies' process allows plants to be grown organically and pesticide free. Inside the warehouse, nutrient-rich water from large fish tanks feeds the roots of the plants. After the water seeps through the soil, this organic hydroponic solution is directed back to aerate the fish tanks. Grow lights allow for the consistent "daylight." Everything has a purpose in this closed environment.



"[I'm] solving the world's problems in my hometown," says Shannon. "You don't have to go across the world to make the world a better place. We found a way to follow our dreams, do something that was meaningful and have a significant impact, while creating a sustainable business model and supporting our community."

This husband-wife dynamo has worked together since they were first married. Their first business focused on programming and graphic design. Jimmy's skills as a programmer and Shannon's administration and accounting talents came together to create a thriving business. Although they found success in their first

*Newport Ave. Market produce manager Brian, snatches up daily deliveries of Shannon's fresh greens.*

business, they wanted to make a more tangible difference in the environment by providing quality, holistically produced food.

"At the end of the day, when we turned the computer screen off, our hard work was gone. We just wanted something more physical and real," says Jimmy. "In here, it's very real. We're making food for people."

The Sbarras applied their knowledge of computer software and artistic minds to monitor their growing process. Jimmy's unique skill as a programmer allowed him to create software to control the temperature of the warehouse, lighting and harvesting time to create the best produce possible.

Shannon works full-time for Volcano Veggies and helps raise two kids at home. She knows their business is making her family stronger and growing them closer.

"It's something we believe in, trying to make the world a better place and set a good example for our kids," says Shannon. "By working together, we've carved out a way to be on the same team and be involved in each other's lives and operate as a family unit."

*continued on next page...*





*"By working together, we've carved out a way to be on the same team and be involved in each other's lives and operate as a family unit," says Shannon Sbarra.*

*Shannon and Jimmy Sbarra, with kids Kaiella and Huxley, in tow, pose with their farming crew in their vertical growing warehouse.*

...continued from page 7

Shannon was on track after college to venture into climate change policies, but she wanted to concentrate on making a difference in her hometown. Her knowledge about climate change gives her an educated voice in Volcano Veggies' business practices.

"There is a lot of emphasis on environmental sustainability and not business sustainability," says Shannon.

Despite the challenges of being parents, paying fair wages to their employees, and growing organic vegetables indoors, the Sbarras find their work satisfying and essential. They know their produce is making a

difference in their family and in the lives of their customers.

"We have parents who say their kids won't eat any other lettuce but ours," says Jimmy. "That's just awesome! If we're getting kids to eat it, then we're doing something right."

They first began delivering their produce to the local Newport Avenue Market. Customers could taste the difference from traditionally grown produce and began asking for more. Since they began in 2013, Volcano Veggies has expanded sales into Whole Foods, Safeway, Market of Choice, and other local retailers. Their innovative growing technique took the stage at the Bend

Venture Conference in 2014 and won the Bend Broadband prize of \$10,000 and the \$1,500 Palo Alto LivePlan Software award. The next step for the Sbarras is to bring Volcano Veggies to other locations with cold climates.

"We hope to take aquaponics to skiing towns," says Jimmy. "We want to bring fresh vegetables to places that wouldn't get fresh produce for over half of the year. We're growing predictable food in unpredictable places." ■



# Meet Oregon's FFA Foundation Ambassadors

**Cailey Ellzey** (Sandy), **Hannah McAuliffe** (Lost River),  
**Madelyn Higgins-Porterfield** (Sutherlin), **Abigayle Darula** (Newberg)

*"FFA has prepared me for a career like nothing else has by giving me leadership skills and technical knowledge...It has brought me out of my comfort zone, helped me grow as a person, and given me the confidence to realize I can make a positive difference."*

*"It's given me a growth mindset and taught me to work hard for the things I care about."*

*"My FFA chapter challenged me to gain knowledge and skills in all different areas of agriculture through a variety of career-based skill events. They set me on my future career path."*

*"It taught me to work hard for what I love, whether in the show ring, a speaking event, schoolwork, or my career. FFA taught me to get back up after defeat and continue to strive for success in my future endeavors."*



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# CELEBRATING OREGON WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

In this issue of *Oregon Family Farmer*, we highlight the remarkable women and organizations who are creating a positive future for Oregon agriculture. In 2019, Oregon Women for Agriculture celebrates their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, while Oregon Dairy Women celebrates 60 years. In addition, Oregon Cattle Women turns 66.

According to the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB, [www.OregonFB.org](http://www.OregonFB.org)), the number of female principle operators in farming increased 21 percent nationwide. Here in Oregon, female farmers and ranchers are involved in raising each of Oregon's 220 agricultural commodities. OFB's board of

directors includes seven women, two of whom serve as county Farm Bureau presidents.

The USDA state-by-state numbers from a 2014 survey shows Oregon has more women involved in farming than the national average – nearly 40 percent of Oregon's farmers are women farming more than seven million acres of land. In 2019, a new Farm Bureau Women in Ag Survey is underway. Women can take the 2019 Women in Ag Survey at [FB.org/Women](http://FB.org/Women). New programs promoting agricultural women in leadership are growing. Find out more about the Farm Bureau's "Women in Leadership" Program at [FB.org/programs](http://FB.org/programs).

## OREGON'S NUMBERS, ACCORDING TO THE USDA

22,772

**WOMEN IN  
AGRICULTURE**

39%

**OF ALL FARMERS  
ARE WOMEN**

7.3

**MILLION ACRES  
FARMED**

\$263.4

**MILLION IN  
IMPACT**

Learn more when you search "Women in Agriculture" at [www.USDA.gov](http://www.USDA.gov)





Oregon Women  
for Agriculture

Est. 1969 **50** years

# HELLE RUDDENKLAU

## A VOICE FOR AGRICULTURE

— WORDS: MITCH LIES • PHOTOS: LYNNPHOTO.COM —

The idea was to finish school, be a wheat breeder and help feed the world. But the pull of the farm was too strong for Helle Ruddenklau.

"I preferred being on the farm, so I decided, I think I'll just stop

here, take what I've learned, take the scientific background and apply that more on a practical farm scale," Ruddenklau says.

Ruddenklau, who holds a master's degree in plant genetics

from Oregon State University, may not be improving wheat varieties these days, but she is doing her part to feed the world and she has become a strong voice for agriculture.

*Helle stands in a cover crop of spring snap peas, grown as part of their no-till approach to farming.*

Among other efforts, Ruddenklau and her husband, Bruce Ruddenklau, host a class of middle-schoolers on their farm each year as part of Oregon Ag-link's Adopt-a-Farmer program. Ruddenklau is involved in Oregon Ag in the Classroom's Literacy Project, which involves reading a featured book designed to educate primary school students about agriculture. She serves on the steering committee for the Oregon State University Extension Service's Citizens Advisory Network.

Ruddenklau is president of Oregon Women for Agriculture (OWA). She frequently testifies in support of agriculture at the Oregon Legislature. And she is active on social media, posting regularly on Facebook about activities on Ruddenklau Farms.

"I believe that the more we can let people in, let them know what we are doing, be really open and explain why we do what we do, show the love we have for the land and that we would never do anything to hurt the land or hurt the environment, the more we can do that, the better off we are with the general consumer," Ruddenklau says.

She adds, "It is so disheartening to hear when people are afraid to eat what we produce, so anything we can do to dispel that, I think is a good thing. And I think we need to have as many people as possible spreading that message."

Ruddenklau's participation in Oregon Women for Ag dates to when she was in college. "My mom paid for my membership and I

just kept on with it," she says. "I really love what we do. The women members are incredibly engaged and capable. If we need to get something done, we can do it. It is a cool group to be a part of."

The Ruddenklus' daughter, Lauren, 21, is following in the family tradition. She is treasurer of the Yamhill County Women for Ag.

The Ruddenklus, who also have two boys, ages twelve and seventeen, raise eight to ten crops a year on their farm near Amity, Oregon. The farm owns a plow, but rarely uses it, producing nearly all its crops under no-till, something it has done for the better part of two decades.

The farm's embrace of no-till arose out of problems with resistant weeds, Ruddenklau says. "We'd plow in the seeds, bury them, and the next time we plowed, it brought them all back up and they'd all sprout back up again. So, we just had this massive load of weed seeds that we were fighting every year, and it was pretty frustrating, because we weren't progressing."

A few years after purchasing the farm, the Ruddenklus borrowed a no-till drill one spring, planted peas directly into a field that was in perennial ryegrass, and got what Ruddenklau describes as "a great crop."

"We thought, 'Oh, this really worked,'" she says. "So, we starting going no-till and also started getting on top of the weeds."

The farm began looking at alternative crops that work well in no-till regimens and eventually

became an early adopter of the kind of diverse production which today is becoming increasingly common among Willamette Valley farmers.

"Most people were focused on grass seed at the time, because they were set up for it, and it worked well for them," Ruddenklau says of the early 1990s. "But it didn't work well for us and we were looking for alternative crops, and it actually put us way ahead."

After several years of no-tilling, the Ruddenklus noticed their ground was responding in ways they hadn't expected. "There was an abundance of earthworms, there wasn't as much runoff. We started to see some of the other benefits that come with it," she says.

The farm now regularly produces wheat, tall fescue seed, perennial ryegrass seed, sugar beet seed, meadowfoam, red clover, peas and radish for the Japanese sprout market, and the farm recently planted 50 acres of hazelnuts.

"It's fun," Ruddenklau says.

"When we got the no-till going, it became fun again. Things started to work. That really was a big turnaround and got everything on the right path." ■

### **Oregon Women for Agriculture:** owaonline.org

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# EMPOWERING WOMEN

## KARLA CHAMBERS' BRIGHT MINDS AT STAHLBUSH ISLAND FARMS

— WORDS: MITCH LIES • PHOTOS: BYLAURASTEWART.COM —

Four years ago, Karla Chambers, co-owner of Stahlbush Island Farms, noticed some of the young women she hired in management were not speaking up in meetings.

"They are just very bright minds," Chambers says, "but they would typically sit in the back of the room or wait to be called on before they would voice their opinion or offer influence in a meeting."

Chambers, who has long hired women in leadership roles and mentored young women on a one-on-one basis, decided to start a formal mentoring program for women at the Corvallis, Oregon, company. Today, eight

young women participate in the program, including an environmental engineer, a chemical engineer, a soil scientist, an agribusiness salesperson and other professionals.

"One of the reasons I run this mentoring program is I want to empower them early in their career to be able to stand up and participate," Chambers says. "I want them as equals at the table, not waiting to be called on."

"We hired them because we saw that potential," she says, "and I want to make sure they see that potential in themselves."

Stahlbush Island Farms deliberately seeks out diversity for its management team, Chambers says, and over half of the company's managers are women.

"I think bringing that diversity at the top of this organization has been key to our growth since day one," Chambers says. "Women have predominately been the decision makers on food purchases throughout my career, and we want to be sure that our management team, and our organization really reflects that so you look a lot like your customer and you think a lot like your customer."



*Karla Chambers (left) with women in her mentoring program.*

"I feel that way with diversity in general," Chambers says. "I think the more diverse we are, the more languages we speak, the more balanced we are, the richer we are in really meeting the needs of our customers."

Chambers, who, with her husband, Bill Chambers, have built one of the most successful farm and food processing companies in Oregon, says she and Bill grew up around successful women.

Bill's mother, Carolyn Chambers, was a successful business woman, says Chambers, who grew up on a wheat farm in Oregon's Sherman County that continues operating today. Chambers described her grandmother (Mildred von Borstel) as an astute business woman.

"There were all these German farmers that I grew up with that settled up there over 130 years ago, and today they are all in business, growing soft white wheat, which is a low-margin business, but they have survived because of good business skills and a lot of strong women that came with those equations," Chambers says.

Today, all four of the Chambers' children, including daughters Ellen Johnson and Katie Chambers, work in managerial positions for the company and are expected to take over the company when Bill and Karla retire.

Katie believes the siblings are well positioned to take over when that day arrives.

"Our education began very early on," Katie says. "Every dinner, we

would sit down at the table and the conversation wasn't about, 'What did your teacher say today?' We heard who was hired today, who was fired and why. We heard about the business every night at dinner, and we listened, and it was high level economics and business every night as our parents would talk about what new project they should take on, what new building they should build, what new piece of acreage they should invest in and why."

"I think that is where the mentoring started for us," Katie says.

Karla, who holds a master's degree in agricultural economics and finance and who served 16 years on the Federal Reserve Board, including two terms on the Federal Reserve Board of San Francisco under Board President and CEO Janet Yellen, believes educating the next generation and empowering them to make good decisions is what will keep Stahlbush Island Farms successful well into the future.

"When Bill and I were growing this business, we didn't have someone saying, 'You can't do this, and you can't do that,'" Chambers says. "And so, for the next thirty years, I don't want a leash on my children in terms of where this business needs to go."

"And I feel they have to learn the whole business, not just the operating part of the business, but the banking, the estate planning, everything," Chambers says. "And the earlier they learn that, the stronger they will be as leaders." ■



Ravi Kang (Process Engineer) and Katie Chambers (Mechanical Engineer) pose near the Pixall harvester used for corn. "Our team has to do a lot of on-the-fly engineering maintenance," says Chambers, "when time literally is money." "Karla has taught me to speak up with confidence," says Kang.



Karla, with Brecklin, points out her artwork on the cover of the Expo West Food Show catalog. "Having art on our own labels signifies quality," says Karla who began painting in 2007. "I'm proud of finding these bright minds and bringing them into agriculture."



Brecklin Milton, with a degree in Agri-Business, works in industrial sales and heads up tours for visiting FFA groups. "Karla helps us identify our goals both in and out of the business," says Milton.

"I offer tools to set them up for life," says Chambers, "not just for Stahlbush."

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# WOMEN ARE A DRIVING FORCE IN OREGON'S DAIRY FARMS

— PHOTOS: NAKALANMCKAY.COM —

Since 1959, the Oregon Dairy Women (ODW) has run as an all-volunteer, non-profit organization to promote the dairy industry through outreach and educational programs. The ODW's Dairy Princess Ambassador Program serves as the premier advocate for the Oregon Dairy Industry. The ODW awards scholarships

and provides financial support to 4-H and FFA programs, Agriculture in the Classroom, Ag Fest, Summer Ag Institute, Adopt-a-Farmer and judging teams.

According to the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, Oregon has more than 200 dairy farms. Many are managed by women who are vital to Oregon's

dairy farming community.

We invite you to meet Becky Heimerl of Misty Meadows Dairy in Tillamook, and Darleen Sichley from Abiqua Acres in Silverton. Becky and Darleen tell unique stories that capture the heart of what it means to be a woman who drives the growth of Oregon's dairy farming community. ■

**Oregon Dairy Women:** [oregondairywomen.com](http://oregondairywomen.com)

**Officers:** President, Becky Heimerl; 1st Vice President, Jessica Jansen; Secretary, Kristin Killgore; Treasurer, Ida Ruby; Past President, Amy Franck; State Director, Becky Droz-Albeke



# BECKY HEIMERL

## PLANTING THE SEED FOR OREGON'S AGRICULTURAL LEADERS OF TOMORROW

— WORDS: ROB GOODMAN • PHOTOS: NAKALANMCKAY.COM —

Born with farming in her blood, Becky Heimerl grew up taking care of animals and working in the fields. Her mother served as the past president for Oregon Dairy Women (ODW) and is now chairperson of the Oregon Princess Ambassador program. This year ODW is

celebrating its 60th anniversary. For Becky, the current president of ODW, the organization has a deeper meaning.

"I'm a lifelong supporter of ODW because we focus on educating people about how Oregon farmers care about the environment

and the animals we raise," says Heimerl. "When I moved back to Oregon, I became involved with ODW to help people understand what life is like as a farmer, how important our work is to the community, and that farmers are proud of the work we do."



*Misty Meadow Dairy near Tillamook is home to over 2,000 cows. It is one of five Farm Power Northwest dairy digester projects, capturing almost all methane from animal waste to reduce odor and produce power and fiber products.*

One activity Heimerl enjoys most is the Oregon Princess Ambassador program. While she enjoys the pageantry and crowning of the winner each year, Heimerl knows the broader benefits offered to young women involved in the growth of Oregon agriculture.

“The Oregon Princess Ambassador program works with young women between 17-23 years old,” says Heimerl. “We help women achieve personal growth by supporting them with their education, training them in public speaking, and even teaching them proper etiquette. While that might sound a little bit old fashioned, the point is that we want to help these young women become the future leaders in Oregon agriculture.”

Another piece of ODW’s focus is education. The slowly declining membership scales up the importance for educating people outside the industry about what farmers do and the impact of farming on local and state economies.

“There are fewer dairy farms in Oregon, but they still need to produce the same quantity of dairy products for our growing population,” says Heimerl. “There are many misconceptions about how farmers treat their animals and how we address environmental issues. One of the goals of ODW is to help educate the public on the importance of Oregon’s farming community.”

With her mother and sister

actively involved in ODW (her sister currently serves as the secretary), Heimerl sees the benefits of having a multi-generational connection to the Oregon farming community.

“We’re celebrating our 60th anniversary and I couldn’t be prouder of what we’ve accomplished,” says Heimerl. “Our members range in age from 20-90 years old and it’s incredibly rewarding to see what we have accomplished over the past 60 years. Personally, I have learned a lot from our members who have been involved for many decades and I look forward to an exciting future for ODW and for the growth of Oregon agriculture.” ■



# DARLEEN SICHLEY

**MULTI-GENERATIONAL FARMERS ARE DEFINING THE FUTURE**

— WORDS: ROB GOODMAN • PHOTOS: NAKALANMCKAY.COM —

When Darleen Sichley finished high school in Silverton, she decided it was time to leave her family's farm. Abiqua Acres was founded in 1938 by Darleen's grandparents and Sichley had spent her entire life helping run the farm. However, one year later she returned to the farm to raise a family. Beginning in 2008, Darleen, with husband, Ben,

and parents, Alan and Barbara Mann, officially became partners. They now have more than 100 Guernsey cows that produce milk for the Darigold co-op.

"Deciding to come back and be a dairy farmer is a lifestyle choice," says Sichley. "Dairy farming is a 24/7/365 life and I couldn't imagine raising a family anywhere else.

I'm very proud of the legacy that my family has created and I enjoy carrying on the tradition that my family started many years ago."

Sichley, who is a member of Oregon Women for Agriculture (OWA) and Oregon Dairy Women (ODW), watched her role models everyday while growing up on the farm.

"My mother helped my grandparents run the farm with no outside help for 20 years before I returned home," says Sichley. "I looked up to my grandmother and my mother because they taught me the importance of being independent and the value of hard work."

Fast forward to today and Sichley is raising three young boys and juggling their schedules. To help with the work-life balance, Sichley and her husband started using robotic milking machines to ease the burden of having to tend to over 100 Guernsey cows.

"We were intent on creating an environment where we could actually have a strong work-life balance," says Sichley. "Having two DeLaval VMS robotic milking machines allows us to have more flexibility in our daily lives."

*Her three sons Nolan (5),  
Quinten (9 mos), Mason (8).*



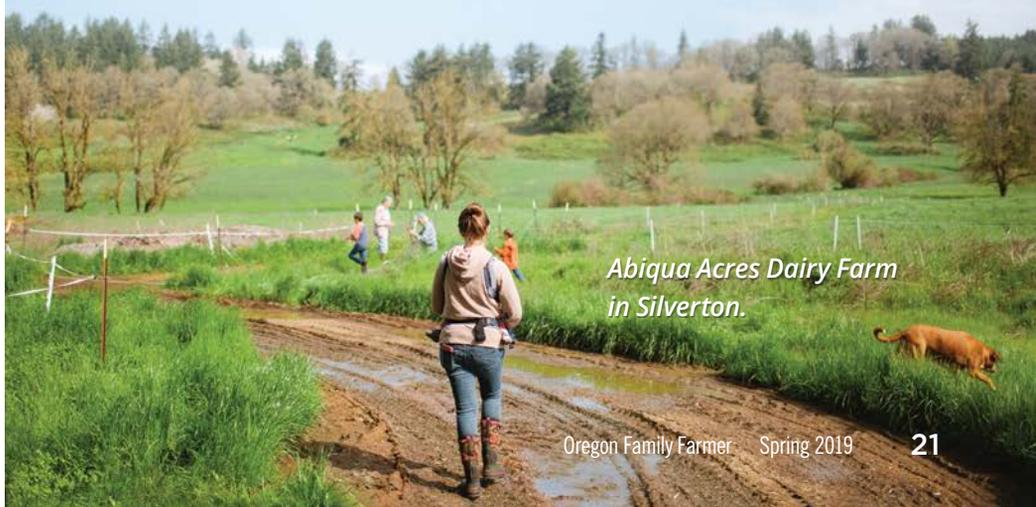
The cows are housed in a freestyle barn and they have access to the milking machines 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Each of the cows has an RFID tag on their ear which is read by a sensor when the cows enter the milking stall.

"Whenever a cow enters the milking stall we instantly get an update on how much milk they've produced and see which ones are late for milking," says Sichley. "We can see the information on our phone, laptop or on the robot which makes the milking process much more efficient. But the best part is that we can be at our son's baseball game and know exactly what the status is of each cow on the farm. Having that kind of flexibility is incredibly helpful."

While the technology is helping Sichley lead a more productive life, the fact that she is following in her grandmother's and mother's footsteps means a lot to her.

"I think it's great to see women being recognized for their contributions to Oregon agriculture. My grandmother and mother had different roles on the farm than I do, but the history of our farm is important to me. Women have always been the backbone of agriculture in Oregon and I'm proud to continue the legacy." ■

Follow Darleen's blog at [GuernseyDairyMama.com](http://GuernseyDairyMama.com)



*Abiqua Acres Dairy Farm  
in Silverton.*



Est. 1953 66 years

# OREGON CATTLEWOMEN

— WORDS: LAURA STEWART • PHOTOS: LYNNPHOTO.COM —

Beef is the main product from cattle, widely known and consumed, yet beef by-products span a wide variety of other goods including paint brushes, leather, lipstick, tires, and dish soap. Oregon Cattlewomen (OCW) was founded in 1953 as an organization working to

protect the beef industry. Their core work is to promote Oregon's cattle industry and cattle by-products, and maintain an active involvement in the Legislature.

Jenny Coelho is the OCW President. Raised on a ranch near Dairy, Oregon, her interest in cattle grew through involvement in

4-H. She devoted herself to preserving the cattle industry and pursued a degree in Agriculture Resources and Economics at Oregon State University.

"I was passionate about [agriculture] since I was four years old," says Jenny. "The farmers and ranchers in the U.S. are exceptional.





It's not always easy and not always glamorous work. Those jobs are important, but the general public doesn't know what it takes to get that product to the manufacturer. There are a lot of people who have to work really hard to make it happen."

Jenny uses her role as OCW President to educate the public and inspire the next generation of ranchers. "The cattlemen are the glue that holds a lot of stuff together in the industry," says Jenny. "Cattlemen help with promotion and education. As president I want to get the Oregon Cattlemen name out there so people know who we are and what we do."

Volunteers who fill the positions in Oregon Cattlemen promote beef products, educate the general non-farming public, and share helpful information about legislative bills. Some of

their work includes monitoring how the state handles water regulation, forest management and livestock transportation.

Recent programs in development include Team Beef, Junior Cattlemen and new scholarships. Team Beef supports athletes, representing the benefits of eating beef by sporting Team Beef t-shirts on race day. Junior Cattlemen, from 0-18 years old, volunteer at events and learn from experienced cattle men and women. For the first time this year, Oregon Cattlemen is offering scholarships to college-bound individuals focusing on agriculture or related fields.

"Agriculture is so important to a nation," says Jenny. "You have to have agriculture to feed your people. If you have a good agricultural base, your society will be productive. [Agriculture] is the backbone of the nation." ■

*Jenny Coelho hands out beef product samples at the popular Oregon AgFest in Salem.*

## Oregon Cattlemen oregoncattlemen.org

**Mission:** To participate in the advancement of the cattle industry through promotion and education. We actively work to promote positive legislation in support of our industry.

**Officers:** President, Jenny Coelho; President Elect, Diana Wirth; Area Vice President West, Katharine Jackson; Area Vice President North, Leslie Pierson; Area Vice President Southeast, Elisha Miller; Secretary, Cheryl Buchanan; Treasurer, Heidi Gordon; Budget Officer, Nancy Bailey



# TWO BUCKS RODEO

## LINDSY HOUSTON'S FAMILY OF BULLS

— WORDS: LAURA STEWART • PHOTOS: LYNNPHOTO.COM —

Driving the 126 highway through Powell Butte, a cattle ranch appears with a small wooden sign reading Two Bucks Rodeo. Set back from the road lies an open field dotted with barns and houses. A young woman stands in her blue jeans, long brown hair and thick brown jacket; her feet firmly planted on the muddy ground. Lindsay Houston is the main caretaker of her family: a family of bucking rodeo bulls.

Lindsay grew up with parents who always encouraged her to chase her passions. She

spent most of her childhood around rodeos and her family's Angus cows. Lindsay and her twin sister, Kiley, wanted to redefine the stereotypical male-owned rodeo bull industry. So, during high school, they bought two bulls and joined Oregon FFA. Lindsay won local competitions and placed third nationally with her bucking bull project. Meanwhile receiving Grand and Reserve Grand Champion ribbons, Lindsay excitedly expanded Two Bucks Rodeo, breeding competitive bucking bulls.



Rodeo men looked at Lindsay raising rodeo bulls as slightly comical and unrealistic, but Lindsay silenced their snickering when her bulls started to show up strong at bull-riding events across the Northwest. Lindsay brought her first few bulls to rodeos, and continued to grow her herd as she found success such as placing second in the yearling bull competition in Oregon and Colorado.

During one of Lindsay's long days working with the bulls, she opened a gate to let a bull into the nearby pen. As she turned around, she was hit squarely in the chest. "He tossed me up, up, up in the air," says Lindsay. "He kicked me in the head. He threw me over the tall gates and into the other pen. I literally looked like a rag doll."

Lindsay suffered a severe concussion but no broken bones. Although she is more cautious approaching bulls nowadays, she didn't allow this life-threatening moment to become an obstacle in her path towards success.

Over the years, her tenacious spirit kept on shining as she raised bulls and competed to win. "In the beginning, we were in a guy dominated world," says Lindsay. "The guys said we were just girls and came there to meet guys. Pretty much pushing us out."

Nowadays, Lindsay has earned respect in the rodeo world. "I'm just another 'guy' to them now," says Lindsay.

Although raising bulls takes hours of daily dedication, Lindsay feels complete when she's working with her bulls. Breeding bulls is more than a hobby or a lifestyle for Lindsay, her face just lights up when she talks about her work.

"When you love it, it's not really a job," says Lindsay.

The bulls are like family to Lindsay. One of Lindsay's first bulls, Redwater, lived to be thirty-two years old. Every year on his birthday, Lindsay would take photos with Red Water. The portraits now hang on her living room wall.

"Just like your kids, each one has their own personality," says Lindsay. "I get attached. There's always some little thing about each that I like."

Her parents, husband, Mike, and son, Emmet, share in her love for bulls, but her mother shares an extra spark of affection. Lindsay's mother drives a large tractor and works the ranch—peering from her tractor over the heads of bulls. "That's my mom," says Lindsay, pointing to a photo. "That's the woman behind it all. She is the rock here."

*continued on next page...*



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"A motto I've always lived by is to learn, lead, and succeed," says Lindsay. "You learn every day. You lead because people are looking at you. I think we've already succeeded. We've been a lot of places and done a lot of things, but there is always room for improving."

Lindsay went from winning ribbons for her FFA project in high school to receiving 50 awards from Professional Bull Riders (PBR), Professional Rough Stock, Northwest Pro Rodeo Association, and Challenge of Champions.

She is also a member of Oregon Cattlewomen.

Lindsay's eyes glisten when she talks about her dream of taking one of her "kids" to the PBR world finals. "What we're doing now, I love it, but to make it to the PBR world finals with a bull we've raised would be the ultimate heaven," says Lindsay.

Until then, she wakes up every morning to the quiet countryside, feels the chill of the morning dew, and looks out over the field where her family of bulls rest. Another day begins. ■



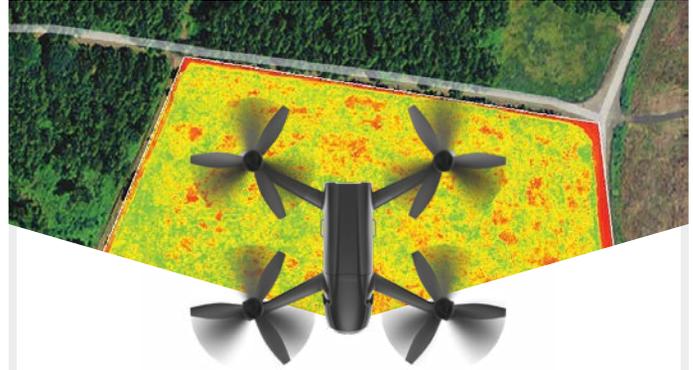


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# LEADING LADIES OF AG POLICY

## A LOOK AT THE WOMEN WHO HAVE FOUGHT FOR AGRICULTURE IN THE LEGISLATURE

— WORDS BY: HEATHER RAYHORN • PHOTOS: LYNNPHOTO.COM —

Oregon women have long influenced agriculture, not only by getting their hands dirty in the fields and navigating business and markets, but also from inside the state capitol. For decades now, women in the Oregon Legislature have cultivated the political landscape so Oregon farmers can thrive.

Some came from an agriculture background, like former Rep. Tootie Smith (R, Dist. 18), who grew up on the same farm she works today. Sen. Betsy Johnson (D, Dist. 16), grew up in a timber family; and former Rep. Liz VanLeeuwen (R, Dist. 37), grew seed in the Willamette Valley with her husband.

“Almost everything starts on the farm, from the leather in your shoes to the peppermint in your tea,” VanLeeuwen says. “Successful agriculture is one of the most intense, precise and time-demanding occupations. That is why it is important to have government representatives

who care about agriculture.” Johnson and State Rep. Sherrie Sprenger (R, Dist. 17) continue their work at the Capitol, both with more than a decade under their belt. Others have moved on from their positions in Oregon’s Legislature and their influence continues, not only for Oregon’s farming families, but in making a way for incoming politicians who continue the fight.

One of those freshmen politicians is Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis (R, Dist. 15), who grew up on a farm and now co-runs Boshart Trucking. Politically, Boshart-Davis’ priorities include giving a voice to rural farm and timber communities and protecting small business. Like many women legislators before her, she points to both regulation and taxation as key concerns for family farms.

“Liz VanLeeuwen is a legend where I come from in Linn County,” she says. “If ‘goals’ had a name, that name would be Senator Betsy Johnson. I could listen to her talk all day long. I’m lucky enough to serve in the House Republican Caucus with Representative Sherrie Sprenger, and I feel extremely fortunate as I recognize the incredible work of these women who have forged the way for me to be a woman in trucking, agriculture, business and now politics. Their success in paving the way has made it easier for me to serve in the legislature.”



*Ag champion, Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis is the leader for her generation in Salem.*

## On Representing Rural Oregon

Sprenger sees herself as a steward of Oregon's resources. She and her family love hunting, fishing and "just being in the far reaches of the state." She works to share the values of rural Oregonians at the Capitol. "Making policy, dependent on facts and research, is just one important consideration the Legislature should use to make laws," she says. "However, as important as the facts are, an understanding and appreciation of how our natural resources influence lifestyle, education and our livelihood are equally important. Without legislators who live or work in rural Oregon, policy that impacts agriculture and our natural resources will be largely driven by those least familiar with how to protect and care for this amazing state."



REPRESENTATIVE

**SHERRIE  
SPRENGER**

(R, D-17)

State Representative,  
2008-Present, District 17

East Linn County and  
part of Marion County.

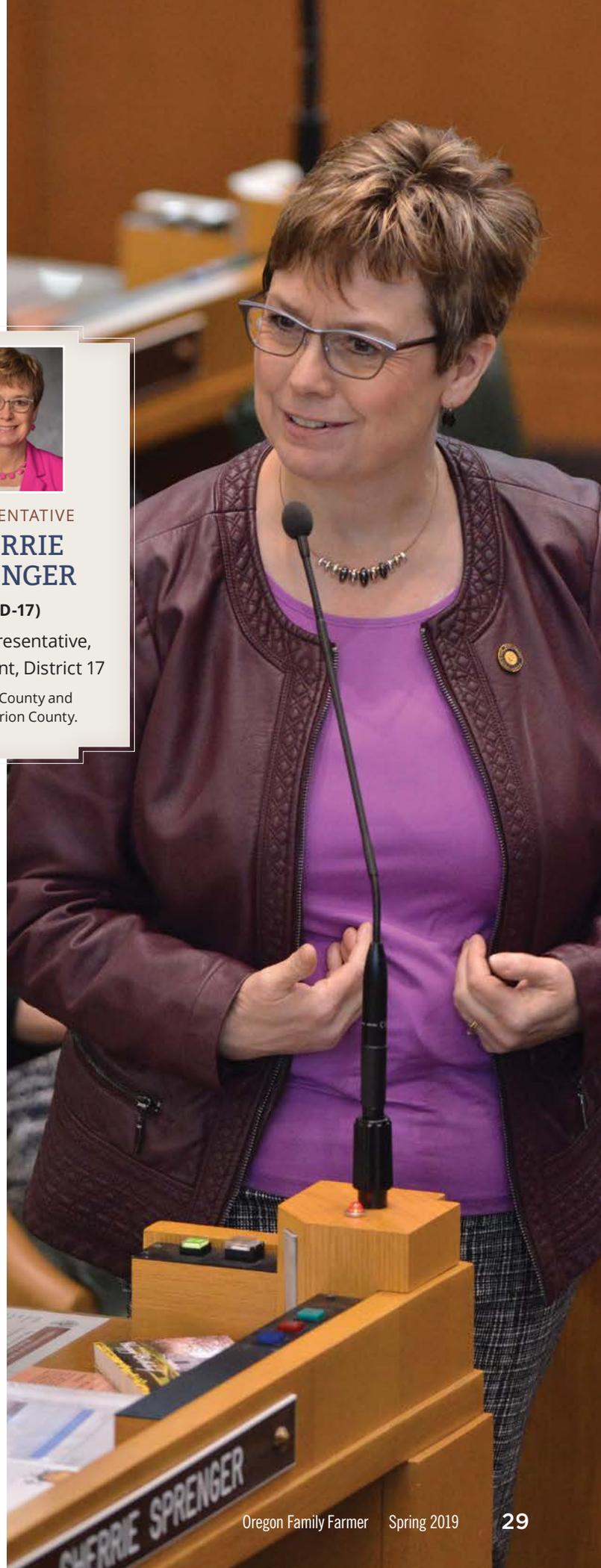
## Agriculture Highlights

In 2008, shortly after Sprenger joined the Oregon legislature, a 16-year-old neighbor girl, driving a hay stacker five miles from her home, was killed in an accident involving a log truck. Her family and community wanted to know what Sprenger was going to do about it. "I will never forget the feeling of overwhelming responsibility to serve my friends and neighbors," she says. She responded with Nathan's Law, which addresses the vulnerability of farm equipment on the road and carries increased penalties in certain circumstances. "Giving the family a copy of the new law, signed by the governor, has long been a highlight for me."

[oregonlegislature.gov/Sprenger](http://oregonlegislature.gov/Sprenger)

E: Rep.SherrieSprenger@oregonlegislature.gov

T: 503-986-1417



## Agriculture Background

Johnson grew up in Central Oregon, where she came to realize the importance of natural resources to Oregon's economy. Her father, Sam Johnson, owned timber mills in Central Oregon and Northern California. He also served in the Oregon House of Representatives from 1969 to 1979 and helped write the Forest Practices Act.

## Agriculture Highlights

Johnson is dedicated to raising awareness for and consistently protecting the livelihoods of those in the business of natural resources, from logging to cattle. As a big supporter of the dairy industry, including the Tillamook Creamery, the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association honored her with its Distinguished Service Award in 2017, naming her "a real friend" and protector of the dairy industry. Fighting for agriculture, she says, often puts her on the defensive end. "It's a constant process of educating urban legislators on the importance of agriculture to the vitality of Oregon," she says. "It's incumbent on legislators to think about all of Oregon."



SENATOR

**ELIZABETH  
"BETSY"  
JOHNSON**

**(D, SD-16)**

Oregon Senate,  
2005-Present, District 16

Cities west of Portland from  
Scappoose to Tillamook up  
to Astoria. Oregon House of  
Representatives, 2001-2005.

[oregonlegislature.gov/Johnson](https://oregonlegislature.gov/Johnson)

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**T:** 503-986-1716

VanLeeuwen says she never dreamed she'd be in office, but her involvement in agriculture got her drafted as a write-in in the 1974 primary. Though she did not win the November general election in 1974, VanLeeuwen was elected to her first term in the House of Representatives in 1980, on her third try.

## Agriculture Background

VanLeeuwen's father raised registered Ayrshire dairy breeding livestock until losing his Lake County farm and dairy cattle when the banks went broke in the late 1920s. In the 1950s, VanLeeuwen and her husband, George ("Geo"), became seed farmers in the Willamette Valley. "Geo did not have time to attend the Ag Extension or Ag Agency meetings, so I went. I also volunteered with Linn County and Oregon Farm Bureau on legislative issues. I remember taking a one and one-half pound loaf of bread and taking out two slices to demonstrate the share of the purchase price the wheat farmer received."

VanLeeuwen is a founding member of Oregon Women for Agriculture (OWA) and was the first secretary and newsletter editor. She also had a weekly "This is Liz VanLeeuwen with Mid-Valley Farm Report" radio program on KWIL in the 1970s until politics forced her to resign from both. In 1978, VanLeeuwen effectively organized and led a contingent of 53 OWA women and spouses to Washington, D.C., to lobby for Oregon agriculture.



REPRESENTATIVE  
**LIZ  
VANLEEUWEN**  
(R, D-1 (R, D-37) RETIRED 8)

Oregon House of  
Representatives,  
1981-1999, District 37

At the time, included all of  
Linn County except Albany.



## Agriculture Highlights

VanLeeuwen was a leader in the effort to keep the state from condemning farmland along the Willamette River, including her farm, when the state was planning to create a giant 510-mile park along both sides of the river from Portland to Eugene. VanLeeuwen also led the effort to keep Oregon universities and community colleges on the quarter system rather than semesters because semesters starting in August would be detrimental to the workforce in harvesting, food processing,

forestry, road construction and even tourism. She also recalls the Seed Lien Law she and her husband wrote together in the early 80s that requires paying farmers in a timely manner for seeds.

What is she up to today? At 93, VanLeeuwen is still an elected official with the Linn County Soil and Water Conservation District. She also serves on the board for Linn County Farm Bureau and at times helps out the Oregon Farm Bureau. She lives on her family farm, which her son James now manages, near Halsey.

## Agriculture Background

Snodgrass grew up picking crops on her grandparents' farm, which included hundreds of acres of berries, mint, corn and beans in the Jefferson area. "Those summers gave me a healthy appreciation of the hard work farmers do," she says. As an adult, she and her husband purchased one of his family's garden centers. They have run the Portland-area company called Drake's 7 Dees for the past 50 years, expanding it to include a landscape division. "It was so easy to talk about agriculture while in the Legislature because I lived and breathed it."

## Agriculture Highlights

Snodgrass' highlight was being a constant voice for agriculture and rural communities. "A nursery grower plants a crop one year which is not ready for 'harvest' for three to five years," she says. "That is a long wait for return on investment. Meanwhile, regulations can change, neighborhoods change, the price of fuel goes up, labor changes and the weather is a constant threat to the health of a nursery crop. It is important for all politicians to get their arms around the complexities and economic influence the ag and natural resource industries have on the general fund."

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HOUSE SPEAKER

**LYNN  
SNODGRASS**

**(R, D-10) RETIRED**

Republican,  
Oregon House of  
Representatives,  
1995-2001, District 10

Clackamas, Damascus, Happy  
Valley, Oregon City, Boring  
and Gresham. Republican  
House speaker, 1999-2001.  
Current: CEO, Gresham  
Chamber of Commerce.

## Agriculture Background

Smith has raised berries, wheat, clover, pigs, cows and Christmas trees and currently owns a hazelnut farm. She is a fourth-generation farmer who lived and learned about farm economics from an early age. "Not only did I learn a work ethic, I learned the economic management of trying to do business when most of the regulations are against farmers," she says.

## Agriculture Highlights

Smith says there are still laws on the books that she passed while in the Oregon House of Representatives which strengthened land-use rights of farmers, including a bill that changed the farm income test limit of \$80,000 per year to allow for other considerations such as real-life farm practices, as well as another that allowed for a mortgage to build a second home on a family farm if a family member wants to farm.

What is she up to today? In February 2018, Smith published a book, "Pay-to-Play: Sexual Harassment American Style," about sexual harassment in the workplace. She is a professional speaker and "political evangelist for women in leadership."

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REPRESENTATIVE

**TOOTIE  
SMITH**

**(R, D-18)**

Oregon House of  
Representatives,  
2001-2005, District 18

Clackamas County  
Commissioner, 2013-2016

The first woman elected to  
Oregon House District 18, which  
includes Silverton and Molalla.

First Republican woman  
elected to Clackamas County  
Board of Commissioners.

## Agriculture Background

Living in Woodburn for the past 35 years, Milne has long been a part of an agriculturally centered community. "My life has been touched in many ways by numerous friends and family who make their living in a variety of ways related to agriculture."

## Agriculture Highlights

Milne received the Gold Star, which she hangs on her Christmas tree every year, from Oregonians for Food and Shelter. "Every piece of legislation that freed or protected farmers from burdensome regulations and unnecessary costs and fees was an achievement," she says. As a Marion County commissioner, she led fellow commissioners in a formal resolution that declared "Agriculture is a high priority in economic development for Marion County."

"This resolution made clear our intentions to provide farmers and ag-related businesses certainty so they could make critical business decisions to grow their business, add jobs and increase production," she says, "thus bringing stability to agriculture, Marion County's number one industry. It also guided our decision making with regard to land-use applications, regulations and fees."

## Advice for Current Politicians

"Politicians need to understand and acknowledge that farming is a high-tech, complicated business driven not only by Mother Nature, but by unanticipated, intrusive government regulations that touch every aspect of farming operations," Milne says. "Every legislative session there are a whole host of bills that adversely affect pricing, products, employment, water rights, trade, land use and property rights, taxes and fees. It is an ongoing struggle to keep the family farm in business much less in the family. The current generation of young farmers, many of whom are young women who are taking over the family farm, are better educated, more technologically savvy and innovative in finding solutions. It will be important for politicians to learn from them if we are going to keep agriculture and natural resources the viable, successful sector we want and need it to be for Oregon's future."



REPRESENTATIVE

**PATRICIA "PATTI"  
R. MILNE**

**(R, D-38) RETIRED**

Oregon House of  
Representatives,  
1993-1998, District 38

Marion County  
Commissioner, 1999-2014

Portions of Marion and  
Yamhill counties.



## Agriculture Background

Gail Whitsett grew up on a large sheep ranch in Montana that her family later converted into a cattle ranch. She graduated from Oregon with a bachelor's and master's degree in geology and worked in the oil industry. "I saw what was happening in agriculture even though I was doing geology at the time," she says about her work for the oil industry in the Rocky Mountains. Later, she and her husband, a large-animal veterinarian, raised warmblood horses on an internationally recognized farm in Klamath County for 15 years. With her experience in geology and agriculture, once she joined the Oregon House of Representatives, she was quickly assigned to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

## Agriculture Highlights

Whitsett fought throughout her career in the House for water usage rights. She and her husband testified for and against a series of bills to keep water flowing for farmers and ranchers in the Klamath Basin. Her efforts resulted in amendments to bills to keep water available for agriculture in the upper and lower Klamath Basin. She also worked with her husband in the 2015 session on SB 864A, a law protecting ranchers and farmers who inherited land that crosses state borders from larger inheritance taxes. And she fought to make people aware of how wolves affected ranchers. "I felt like my job was to help inform the public and my colleagues that this is what farming and ranching really entails: water, predators. Basically, that we can use our property to farm and ranch. I felt like I had a big responsibility to make two-thirds of the state be heard regarding agriculture."

As for the future of agriculture in Oregon, she says, "It's critically important that Oregon maintain a place in the world for food production. It's up to the Legislature to not overly regulate the ability to produce food through farming and ranching." ■



REPRESENTATIVE

**GAIL  
WHITSETT**

**(R, D-56) Retired**

Oregon House of  
Representatives,  
2013-2017, District 56

Including Klamath Falls and  
surrounding sections of  
southern Klamath County and  
southern Lake County. Chief  
of Staff for her husband, Sen.  
Doug Whitsett, 2005 to 2017.



# SUN SETS ON 55-YEAR POTATO CO-OP

SERIES: PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CO-OP

— WORDS: MITCH LIES • PHOTOS: LYNNPHOTO.COM —

The mood was upbeat and confident at the Malin Potato Cooperative in February of 2015. The Merrill, Oregon, agricultural co-op was preparing to open a brand-new, \$7 million state-of-the-art potato packing plant. The co-op's members had been convinced the investment would provide a much-needed lift with the promise of high efficiency and new organic markets.

"It's exciting," says Dave Cacka (pronounced "choch-ka"), the co-op's general manager at the time, in a *Klamath Herald and News* story picked up by the national press, including the *Washington*

*Times*. "We're looking forward to getting this operational."

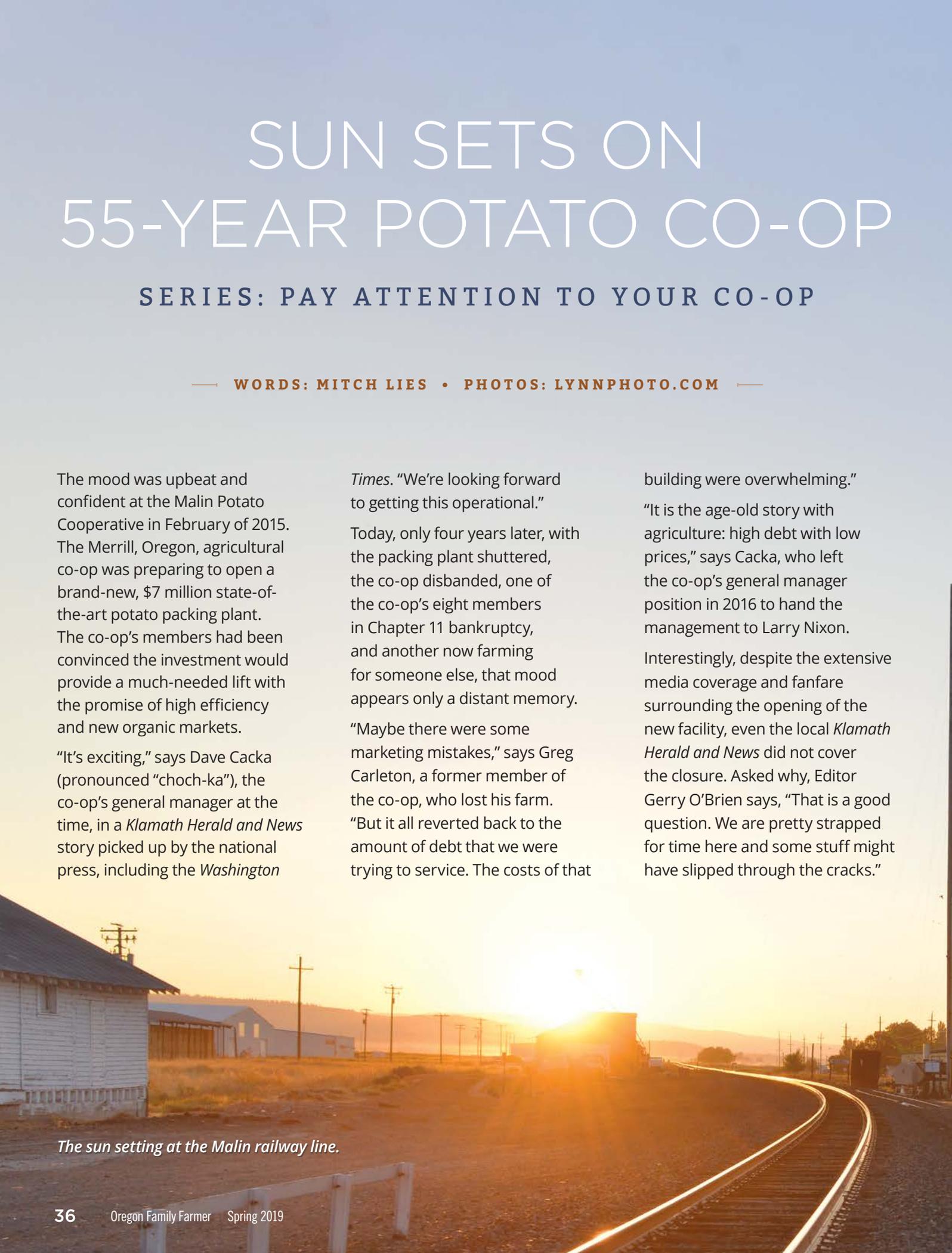
Today, only four years later, with the packing plant shuttered, the co-op disbanded, one of the co-op's eight members in Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and another now farming for someone else, that mood appears only a distant memory.

"Maybe there were some marketing mistakes," says Greg Carleton, a former member of the co-op, who lost his farm. "But it all reverted back to the amount of debt that we were trying to service. The costs of that

building were overwhelming."

"It is the age-old story with agriculture: high debt with low prices," says Cacka, who left the co-op's general manager position in 2016 to hand the management to Larry Nixon.

Interestingly, despite the extensive media coverage and fanfare surrounding the opening of the new facility, even the local *Klamath Herald and News* did not cover the closure. Asked why, Editor Gerry O'Brien says, "That is a good question. We are pretty strapped for time here and some stuff might have slipped through the cracks."



*The sun setting at the Malin railway line.*

Local and agricultural media rarely investigate these failures or report on co-op collapses. As a result, farmers never see the whole story or have a chance to evaluate and understand the risks and responsibilities of co-op ownership.

Coming just two years after the dissolution of the 87-year-old Pendleton Grain Growers (PGG) cooperative, the closure of the 55-year-old Malin co-op provides yet another cautionary tale for agricultural cooperatives. PGG's closure came after its grower-members invested in constructing a large grain storage facility at the Port of Umatilla. (Read "Whatever Happened to Pendleton Grain Growers" at [www.oregonfamilyfarm.com](http://www.oregonfamilyfarm.com).)

Going back further, Agripac, once a 200-plus-member farmer-owned cooperative based in Salem, declared bankruptcy and closed plants in the Willamette Valley in 1999, just three years

after purchasing 350,000 square feet of frozen vegetable processing plants in Walla Walla and Grandview, Washington. Added to the purchases, the 80-plus-year-old co-op in 1996 completed the construction of 21,000 square feet of office and warehouse flex space in Salem.

Effects of the plant closures reverberated through the local farming industries.

"The closing of Agripac had a huge impact on food crop production," retired Oregon State University Extension agent Mark Mellbye, who at the time was working field crops in the Willamette Valley, told the Eugene *Register Guard* ("A Growing Advantage," Jan. 19, 2008). "Farmers say it was the biggest impact on their lives since the Great Depression. It just devastated the economic viability of a lot of those farms."

Nationally, other examples follow suit, including that of Farmland Industries, once the nation's largest and most successful farmer-owned co-op, when management decided to open a new headquarters in Kansas City in 2001, with deluxe executive suites in a glass-wrapped building, only to file for bankruptcy in 2002.

In the case of the Malin Potato Cooperative, the decline of potato acreage in the Klamath Basin is named as a contributing factor.

*continued on next page...*



"Thirty-five, forty years ago, there were 38,000 to 42,000 acres of fresh market potatoes in the basin," Cacka says. "Now there's probably 7,000 or less."

Cacka adds, "The co-op was going to go out of business one way or the other. I think the board of directors thought they had a good shot at making this work. It was a move to try to keep the cooperative viable for the future and it just didn't pan out like they thought it was going to."

A major selling point of the new facility was its high-efficiency, automated sorting, which speeds processing, particularly for organic potatoes, which tend to have more culls than potatoes produced under traditional farming practices.

"The old facility was strictly designed to run conventional russets," Cacka says. "The new facility could run a lot of your round varieties that needed to be polished and needed a different kind of sorter and grader."

*Pallets of potatoes are left to spoil as the co-op was shuttered in mid-season Feb. 2018 and managers walked away.*

Nevertheless, Cacka says, in retrospect, given the vagaries and unrecognized complexities of the retail organic potato market, the co-op's big investment was questionable.

"Organic potatoes are a mixed bag," he says. "The retailer demands a product that is as good or better than the conventional side, and it is difficult to maintain the quality when you have a product that likes to sprout in storage."

"The premiums growers anticipated generating for organic potatoes, never materialized," Cacka says.

"I think the board of directors were under the impression that they would be able to sell the potatoes at a higher price, which would help pay for the cost of the new facility," Cacka says.

Attempts to reach former board of directors were unsuccessful. Attempts to reach the general manager at the time of the closure, Larry Nixon, also were unsuccessful.

Who originally sold the plan to the Malin board that a significant investment in a new plant, combined with special organic pricing, would be profitable for the potato co-op is still unclear.

"Many farmers do not understand

that there is down-side risk of being an owner of an agricultural cooperative," says one accountant that works with cooperatives and farmers. "Managers and boards can burn-up the owners' equity trying to compete with more nimble private companies, which is why many agricultural cooperatives collapse quickly in a big crash."

It is another lesson that farmers must keep a close eye on the financials of their cooperative, and not just trust the word of the internal "experts."

Effects of farm co-op closures tend to reverberate across rural communities, as unemployment rolls grow and farmers aren't as free with their spending. In the case of the Malin Potato Cooperative, thirty workers were suddenly unemployed in February of 2018.

Carleton and his partner, cousin Jim Carleton, meanwhile, lost their farm to foreclosure after unsuccessfully seeking Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2018, shortly after the February closure of the Malin co-op.

"We were highly leveraged," Carleton says. "We put too much stock in the organic portion of our farm. It was a major portion of our operation, and without any profit levels, it took us out."



Signs the co-op was faltering were evident prior to its closure, Carleton says, but the actual closure was sudden and unexpected.

“Washington Federal shut the doors on us in the middle of a packing season, and it knocked everybody for a loop,” Carleton says. “Nobody saw it coming. Half the crop was left in peoples’ storages when the bank shut it down.”

Carleton says to his knowledge he is the only former co-op member who has gone out of business. One other former member, however, has filed for bankruptcy protection, and one family, which held two memberships in the former co-op, has stopped raising potatoes entirely, according to Carleton and Cacka.

Other members of the former co-op continue to raise potatoes for other packing facilities in the basin, with several switching from primarily fresh market production to chip contracts, Cacka says.

This has led to a surprising change in land ownership around the cooperative, transferring ownership away from local farmers.

“Companies from out of the area have bought up property, and in many cases, are bringing nontraditional crops to the basin,” Carleton says, including strawberry

rootstock for transplanting in California, and leafy greens for fresh food markets.

Many growers also have reduced potato acres and are now growing more alfalfa, Cacka says.

“A lot of potato storages became hay barns,” Cacka says.

Carleton a fourth-generation Klamath Basin farmer, now is working for another farmer, says he misses working on his own family’s farm.

“I really enjoyed what we had,” he says.

Cacka, who left because “the board of directors felt they needed to go a different direction when they came with the organic potatoes,” says he was disappointed to see the co-op close. “Sure, it is disappointing. You want to see a business be successful. You don’t work hard to make something happen to want for it to fail. You want for it to be successful.

“Ag is a tough business,” the former co-op manager adds. “They tried to preserve their business. It just didn’t work out.” ■

**Editor’s Note:** In our recent Winter 2019 issue (cover, Alec Oliver), professor Eric Fruits, Ph.D., presented a thoughtful analysis on why we, as farmers, ought pay attention to our investment in agricultural cooperatives. Dr. Fruits’ perspective on the collapse of 87-year old Pendleton Grain Growers, among other examples, led readers to share stories of similar financial woes involving Oregon farmers.

When ag media fails to report on a co-op collapse, it effectively denies farmers the critical insight needed to address potential warning signs. *Oregon Family Farmer* continues a new series, “Pay Attention To Your Co-op,” in order to help farmers understand the risks and responsibilities of investing in cooperatives. The series also aims to give co-op board members tools to avoid being captured or misled by the paid management, and provide insights to protect farmers’ valuable assets in their local cooperative. Reader feedback has been key in this important series. Please continue to share your stories with our experts at [oregonfamilyfarm@gmail.com](mailto:oregonfamilyfarm@gmail.com).

*A year later, potato hauling trucks are still parked on the side of the building with some windows still rolled down.*





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