

# Capital Press

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## Vilsack: Dems need to jump urban-rural divide

Secretary thanks farmers 'for what they do every single day'

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

The urban-rural divide, although glaringly visible during the presidential election, is "not so difficult to jump over," outgoing U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said.

In an exit interview with the Capital Press, Vilsack said the desires of people living in urban

centers are precisely what rural residents want. They want a country they're proud of, he said, and they want to make a living, give back and take part in their communities.

Vilsack, wrapping up eight years as USDA secretary under President Obama, has been banging that message since Hillary Clinton was beaten in the elec-

toral vote by Donald Trump. The Democratic party took its worst shellacking in rural areas, where 80 percent Trump votes weren't uncommon, and Vilsack maintains the party had it coming. The Democrats ignored rural issues and it cost them, he said.

"We as a party have not spent enough time in rural areas," he said. If the Democrats are per-

ceived as the party of government, he said, they need to do a better job of explaining or marketing what various agencies do and how they can work with people to solve problems.

The tactic might not win rural areas for Democrats, he said, but they wouldn't lose so badly.

At the time of the Dec. 12 Capital Press interview, the Trump administration had not yet chosen a



Courtesy USDA

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said urban and rural dwellers share many of the same desires for the country and their families.

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## Final analysis recommends deregulation of modified bentgrass

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — The Center for Food Safety has blasted a final environmental impact statement that recommends deregulation of a genetically engineered creeping bentgrass that escaped field trials in 2003 and has taken root in Malheur and Jefferson counties in Oregon.

It was being developed by Scotts Miracle-Gro Co. and Monsanto Corp. for use mainly on golf courses. Since the escapes, Scotts has been responsible for controlling and eradicating it where possible.

Scotts and Monsanto petitioned USDA to deregulate the bentgrass, which was genetically engineered to withstand applications of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's popular Roundup weed killer.

A final EIS released by USDA Dec. 7 recommends deregulation of the genetically engineered creeping bentgrass because it "is unlikely to pose a plant pest risk..."

Some farmers and water managers in the affected counties worry that because the bentgrass is resistant to glyphosate and difficult to kill, it

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Sean Ellis/Capital Press

A genetically engineered creeping bentgrass plant is shown Oct. 10 during an outreach meeting in Ontario, Ore. Scotts Miracle-Gro Co. experts showed farmers and others how to identify the plant.



A container ship departs Seattle earlier this year.

# Trade matters

## U.S. farmers rely on overseas customers to buy their crops, boost domestic prices

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
For the Capital Press

Mike Miller knows how important foreign trade is to agriculture. For Miller and Washington state's 1,900 other wheat farmers, exports are the economic lifeblood. They ship more than 90 percent of their crop to overseas customers such as bakers in Japan and noodle manufacturers in the Philippines and South Korea.

The customers were hard-won. "We realize that we have a good product. We've spent money for decades building a relationship and reputation. I think we're pretty well-respected," Miller said.

Those customers are vital to the industry, said Miller, who in addition to growing wheat near Ritzville, Wash., is chairman of the Washington Grain Commission and vice chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates, which promotes U.S. wheat overseas.

Washington farmers are not alone. Overall, about half of the U.S. wheat crop is exported, making international markets key to wheat growers across the country, Miller said.

Trade is also critical to other U.S. farmers and ranchers. U.S. agricultural exports totaled \$133 billion last year, representing 23 percent of all U.S. ag production and 31 percent of the gross farm income for the nation's 2.1 million farms, according to an analysis by the American Farm Bureau Federation.

That's why any discussion of trade by politicians gets farmers' full attention. President-elect Donald Trump has said he would scuttle the new Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, which includes Japan, Mexico and Canada, three of the largest buyers of U.S. agricultural products.

For some states and crops, exports are the main source of farm revenue. In Washington, for example, 90 to 95 percent of the wheat price farmers receive is attributable



Capital Press file

Mike Miller stands in one of his wheat fields last spring. He is chairman of the Washington Grain Commission and vice chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates.

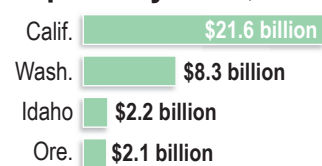
"We realize that we have a good product. We've spent money for decades building a relationship and reputation. I think we're pretty well-respected."

Mike Miller, chairman of the Wash. Grain Commission and vice chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates

## Northwest, California ag exports, 2014

Regionally, California led the way with more than \$21 billion worth of agricultural commodities exported in 2014. U.S. exports totaled \$150 billion that year.

### Total value of ag exports by state, 2014



### Top 10 ag exports by state, 2014 (\$ millions of dollars)

Rank	California		Washington		Idaho		Oregon	
	Item	Value	Item	Value	Item	Value	Item	Value
1.	Almonds	\$4,532	Fresh fruit	\$759	Dairy	\$460	Seeds/hort.†	\$955
2.	Dairy	2,425	Plant products	700	Wheat	392	Fruits/nuts	366
3.	Walnuts	1,448	P. fruit*	681	P. vegetables*	263	Wheat	209
4.	Wine	1,392	Wheat	489	Beef	179	Vegetables	141
5.	Pistachios	1,125	P. vegetables*	301	Feed	143	Dairy	94
6.	Table grapes	890	Dairy	233	Vegetables	138	Beef/veal	86
7.	P. tomatoes*	776	Vegetables	158	Hides/skins	75	Feed/fodders	68
8.	Rice	714	Animal products	125	Corn	56	Animal products	40
9.	Oranges	575	Feed/fodder	100	Poultry	17	Grain products	35
10.	Raisins	410	Beef/veal	83	Pork	8	Hides/skins	27

Sources: USDA; state departments of agriculture; University of California \*Processed †Horticulture/related products

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Carol Ryan Dumas and Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

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