

# Washington lawmakers torn over beef industry rift

‘An awful lot of pros and cons’

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Beef cooks April 19, 2015, on the Capitol Campus in Olympia during Beef Day hosted by the Washington Cattlemen's Association. A debate over whether to raise the beef checkoff to \$2.50 from \$1.50 continues to sizzle.

checkoff.

The Washington Cattlemen's Association and the Washington Cattle Feeders Association supported raising the fee, doubling the state commission's yearly budget to about \$2 million.

The Cattle Producers of Washington, however, rallied enough opposition from

ranchers to stop the proposal.

Dent volunteered to examine the intra-industry rift and report to fellow lawmakers in time for the 2017 session.

"It's been an interesting ride for the last seven months," he said. "These meetings could sometimes be contentious, but they were passionate, and I love that. It's

what makes America great."

Sen. Judy Warnick, also a Moses Lake Republican, has joined Dent in meeting with beef industry representatives.

Warnick said she too is unsure what to do. "There are an awful lot of pros and cons," said Warnick, chairwoman of the Senate agriculture committee. "Maybe we'll have to throw out a compromise position."

A compromise could include scaling back the fee increase, or fine-tuning commission plans.

The commission's executive director, Patti Brumbach, said much of the new revenue would be used to expand the commission's "image and trust campaign."

"We need to get the information out to a broader audience," she said.

Cattle Feeders Executive Director Ed Field said the organization remains firmly behind raising the fee.

"Some don't see the value, but we do," he said. "We understand the value the Beef

Commission brings in beef promotion and safety."

Likewise, the Cattlemen's Association has reaffirmed its support.

"I'm certainly crossing my fingers and hope we can get there. I think it's definitely needed and merited," Executive Vice President Jack Field said. "I think it's to the point where the ball is with Rep. Dent and Sen. Warnick."

Cattle Producers Vice President Nate Hair said he believes that most ranchers would vote against the fee hike if given the chance.

"I think it'd be an overwhelming 'no' on the increase," he said Tuesday.

Cattle producers pay the tax, but don't reap the benefits, he said.

Increased beef consumption doesn't help producers if meat packers import cattle to meet the demand, he said.

"There's obviously a big struggle over this," Hair said. "We can't get on board on this because there's no upside to this."

## Capital Press publisher announces retirement

Mike O'Brien ends 46-year newspaper career

SALEM — Capital Press Publisher Mike O'Brien is retiring Jan. 3 after a 46-year newspaper career.

O'Brien joined Capital Press as general manager in 1997, and was promoted to publisher in 2007.



Mike O'Brien

"It has been the high point of my career to serve as publisher of the Capital Press.

It has been truly inspiring to work with such a talented and dedicated staff. My thanks to them and the ag community that supports Capital Press," O'Brien said. "I leave knowing the paper is in good hands with owners who are more concerned with how well we can do it rather than how cheap we can do it."

O'Brien began his newspaper career in 1970 as a district manager at the San Francisco Chronicle. He was appointed circulation manager at the Daily Tidings in Ashland, Ore., and moved to Albany, Ore., to be circulation manager at the Democrat-Herald in 1979. In 1985 he returned to Ashland as publisher of the Daily Tidings.

He has assumed leadership roles within the newspaper industry and the Northwest ag community. He serves on the board of directors of Oregon AgLink. In 1996, while at the Daily Tidings, he served as president of the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association. During his tenure, O'Brien supervised many large projects, including a major renovation of the Capital Press building in 2000. He also presided over big changes in the way Capital Press reaches and serves its readers.

"Under Mike's leadership, the Capital Press has expanded its digital presence and elevated the level of reporting, becoming the premier ag publication in the Northwest," John Perry, chief operating officer of EO Media Group, the parent company of the Capital Press, said. "He has accomplished this in good economic times and others that tested our mettle. We wish Mike all the best in retirement. He's earned it."

Perry will assume the publisher's duties on an interim basis.

# Survey shows hard cider industry maturing in supply, price

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Suzie Hoffman samples a glass of hard cider during the Hard-Pressed Cider Fest in Hood River, Ore., in April. A survey of Northwest cider makers show they now sell in 20 states and in Canada and some Asian markets. About half of Northwest cider makers grow their own apples.

posed dessert apples, which are much cheaper, ranging from \$1.48 to \$2.65 per gallon, according to the survey. Purists prefer gnarled old English and French varieties, which often aren't the best for fresh eating.

Producers continue planting the old varieties at a rapid pace, Ritchie said.

"We're still seeing that happening," she said. "Many of our cider makers are planting more acreage as they get capital."

Cider has a solid following on the West Coast. A retired

Cornell University cider expert, Ian Merwin, once estimated that people in Oregon, Washington and California drink 80 percent of the hard cider consumed in the U.S.

During the U.S. Cider Association's annual convention last February in Portland, speakers said cider makes up 1.7 percent of alcohol sales nationally, but about 4 percent in the Portland and Seattle areas.

Among the survey highlights:

- Cider makers who re-

sponded to the poll sell in 20 states, plus Canada and Asia.

- Of the cider made by respondents, 57 percent contains only apple juice, 7 percent is "perry," or made from pears, and 36 percent is made from other fruit or berries.

- It takes 12 to 13 pounds of apples to make one gallon of cider. A little more than half of respondents said they grow their own fruit.

- About 82 percent of the cider produced has an alcohol content of less than 7 percent, which means it was

taxed at a lower rate than cider with a higher alcohol content. Changes in the way cider is taxed will raise the percentage in the coming year, Ritchie said, making stronger cider more available. The tax change will allow more carbonated cider as well, she said.

- Outside of a couple producers who have more than 1,000 acres of apple trees, the average cider acreage under cultivation is 17.5 acres, up from 14.7 in the 2015 survey.

# Oregon Senate confirms Taylor as head of ODA

New director faces tough budget, more decision-making authority

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Agriculture's new director, Alexis Taylor, got some sound advice at a recent legislative hearing.

"We very rarely hear complaints about the Department of Agriculture, so please don't screw it up," said Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas.

That sentiment has been a running theme in meetings with state government officials during a recent stop in Salem, said Taylor, who was confirmed unanimously as ODA's director by the Oregon Senate on Dec. 14.

At the end of her tenure at USDA, Taylor oversaw the Farm Service Agency, the Risk Management Agency and the Foreign Agricultural

Service, working on policy, budget and management issues. Overall, the three agencies have 14,000 employees worldwide.

"I really enjoy finding talent, helping to groom talent," Taylor told Capital Press.

In the immediate future, though, Taylor doesn't expect to make staffing changes at ODA.

She will need to rely on the experience of top staffers as the agency navigates the 2017 legislative session.

"Consistency is really important," Taylor said.

ODA is at a tough juncture, as the agency is facing a cut to its general fund budget, which pays for programs such as predator control and weed biocontrol, among others.

Taylor is taking an optimistic view of the situation, noting that dealing with a constrained budget can prompt agencies to identify process efficiencies that save money.

"We can look at how we do things, why we do them a certain way," she said.

The overall state budget turmoil is also likely to give Taylor greater decision-making power.

Gov. Kate Brown has a lot on her plate and probably won't be inclined to micro-manage natural resource issues, said Katy Coba, the ODA's former director and current chief of the state's Department of Administrative Services.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press Alexis Taylor, the Oregon Department of Agriculture's next director, speaks during a recent legislative hearing in Salem. She was confirmed by the Oregon Senate on Dec. 14.

"I expect the governor is not going to be giving a lot of detailed direction to Alexis," Coba said.

The governor has also shifted her natural resources advisers into new positions,

shrinking the natural resources team and likely leaving more power in the hands of ODA, she said.

"Agencies will have to step up a little more," Coba said.

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