

Lane County farmers, as well as farmers across the nation, are faced with a price crunch that may affect the eating habits Americans enjoy.

Comments from Eugene-Springfield farmers seem to reflect the concerns of farmers across the nation — the need for a solution to the high cost of production versus the low prices farmers receive for their products.

Farmers have traditionally operated independently but with the advent of higher production costs, more government regulations of pesticides and chemicals and increased foreign agricultural imports they have combined efforts to make government leaders and the general public aware of their problems.

According to Mike Owens, president of the Lane County Livestock Association, the current role of government in agricultural affairs is not benefiting the farmers now.

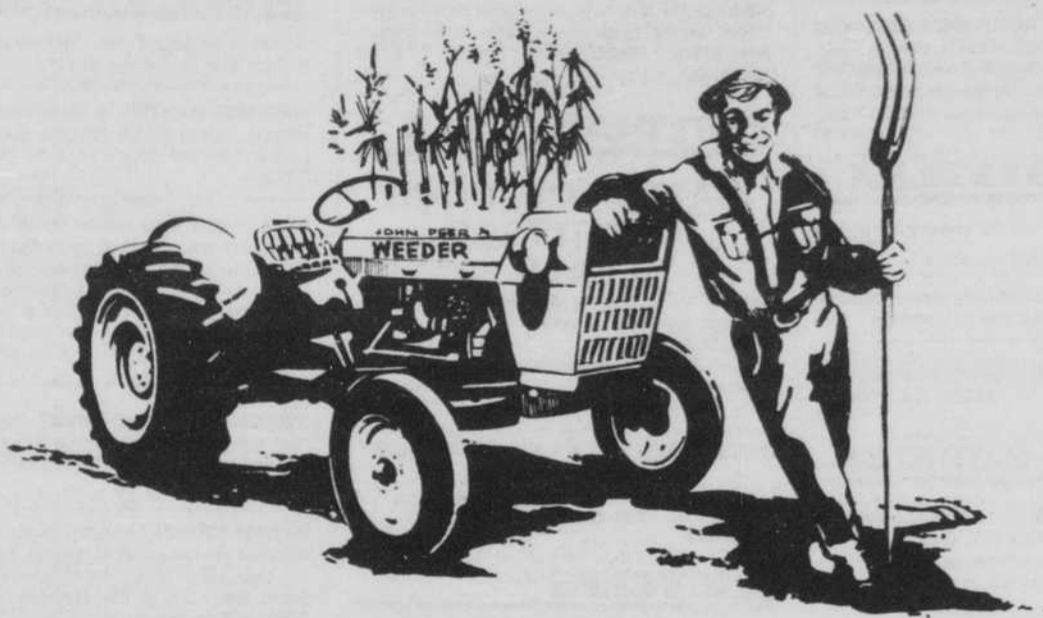
"My main concern is that we (farmers) need more cooperation from high government officials," he says. "Foreign beef imports should be stopped so the American farmer can get a reasonable price for his cattle. If the family farm operation can't make it, large corporations are going to take over farming."

Owen is not in favor of government subsidies.

"I don't want government intervention," he continues. "I just want to produce something and make some money on it."

County farmers hit by crunch, band together

By JOHN LUDWIG
Of the Emerald



Emerald Graphic

"If it comes down to it, we'll unionize, but I hate to see it come to that. Agricultural people try to be independent."

Ruby Rinsdorf, vice-president of the Oregon Women for Agriculture, believes that farmers are making their plight known.

"I've been pleased that farmers have been level-headed about letting people know they are in a cost-squeeze," she says. "The prices of many of our commodities are at cost or below cost."

Rinsdorf and her husband Marvin operate a grass seed farm in the Eugene-Springfield area.

"I'm now getting ready to go to Washington D.C. with 52 other women from the Oregon Women for Agriculture," says Rinsdorf.

The women will represent 10 Oregon counties, for a week beginning Saturday. They will meet with representatives of Congress, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency.

A number of issues will be brought up, including water pollution, the use of pesticides, field burning, and labor problems.

Exportation of agricultural goods is the solution to the problem according to another Eugene farmer, Bill Stevenson.

"We're a very productive people," Stevenson says. "I think a solution to the price squeeze caused by foreign imports is exportation of American agricultural products."

"We can produce exports cheaper than any other country," says Stevenson.

Director wants accessible government for citizens

By JUDY PETREE
Of the Emerald

Barb West, Lane County's new Community Relations director, has purposely made one of politics' oldest cliches her personal goal.

"I want to make government work for people — make it accessible," she says enthusiastically.

West, who began the county job this month says she is sincere in her statement because making government familiar and accessible to county residents is the primary function of her department.

She says a Citizen's Advocate Program will be implemented soon as a direct link between citizen and county agencies.

An office will be established where people can take their complaints and questions. She says each problem will be followed through until the citizen gets an answer.

Along with a graphic artist and a writer, West works with about 15 other county departments to help deal with the media and perform a variety of public relations functions for the county.

West, a University graduate, has been a member of the Eugene school board for six years. Until recently, she and her husband were co-owners of KZEL-FM radio station.

She believes her eight years as co-manager of the radio station have given her the media experience she will need in her new position. As an elected public official with involvement in community organizations and political campaigns, Jerry Rust, Lane County Board of Commissioners Chair, says she's a qualified administrator.

Commissioner Bob Wood joined Rust in support of West's appointment in a 2-1 vote. Commissioner Archie Weinstein, however, adamantly objected to the appointment, saying West's qualifications did not fit those listed in the official job posting.

Weinstein, who has been very public in his comments about West's qualifications, says he has nothing personal against her. He says she did not conform to the posting.

"I go on procedure," he explains.

West says this controversial beginning is unfortunate, but it hasn't effected her credibility with other county employees.

"My management style is different, but on the whole, I've been well received."

Another bone of contention between West and Weinstein was her recommendation that Don Hulbert, acting director of Community Relations, be retained temporarily.

The request was legitimate, according to West, since her department was short two employees when she took the job. She says the department's other administrative position was vacant when she took over, and Hulbert was needed to aid in the transition.

Wood and Rust approved Hulbert's retention on a three-month basis over Weinstein's negative vote. Weinstein says hiring a temporary aide is "a waste of taxpayers' money." Rust says keeping Hulbert was necessary because of the current understaffing in Community Relations.

Hulbert was retained at his previous salary of \$23,000 per year. West's salary is \$20,000.

During a reorganization last year that made Community Relations a separate department, Hulbert applied for the position as director. Shortly after that, he withdrew his application, but he stayed in the office as acting director until West's appointment.

Hulbert reportedly withdrew his application because of morale problems in the county offices. West says a survey of employee attitudes will be taken soon to determine if low morale is actually a problem.

Despite a somewhat stormy beginning, West says she is enthusiastic about what can be done in the county.

"The only thing that's frustrating is that I see so much that needs to be done and it's hard to narrow it down," she says.

"It's like having all the colors in the rainbow and I have to choose three."

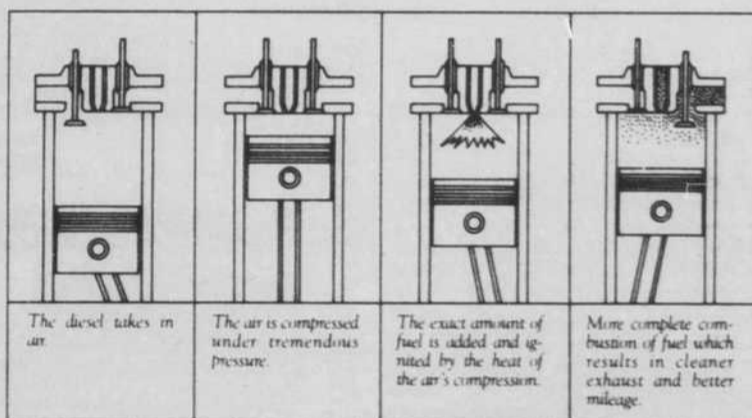
West says she doesn't foresee any problems in working with the commissioners — Weinstein in particular. She is optimistic that her appointment will become less of an issue as time goes on.

And Weinstein? He still objects, but he says they can work together.

"I can work with anyone for the good of the county," he says.

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