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Go for Success



Eugene, Oregon

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to operate farm machinery. Campbell said he dreams of having his kids take over the farm one day

But Campbell's operation isn't what most would consider a traditional family farm.

Like most Willamette Valley grass seed growers, Campbell owns less than half of the land he farms because he can't afford to buy it. He said it is more profitable to cultivate leased land

Campbell said he grows almost 1,400 acres in grass seed, up from the 400 to 500 acres he started with 10 years ago.

Small farmers are able to grow large acreages in grass seed because many varieties don't require intensive or annual cultivation, Bill Johnson, founder of an anti-field burning group said.

seed operations Grass throughout Oregon are becom-ing bigger and becoming increasingly concentrated in fewer hands. Johnson said the number of growers in the last four years has decreased by 40 percent, while cultivated acres



Family-operated grass seed farms such as Mike Campbell's could be put out of business if alternatives to the field burning ban aren't found.

have increased 20 percent.

Johnson argues that because of absentee ownership, and the relative ease of grass seed production, farmers tend to treat the land like a grass factory, looking for quick profits without regard to the land or their neighbor's rights.

They're not husbanding the soil," he said. "They don't want to take the time and money to take the long view.

From the other side, Campbell insists he cares about the environment. He said he should have the right to grow grass seed, and make a profit like any other businessman.

And even with field burning. he said he always has to struggle for profit. Although his seed brought in about \$100,000 last year, he said his business is burdened with debt.

Uncertain grass seed prices and a field-burning ban could destroy his operation, Campbell said.

This is the first year in many that grass seed prices were high enough for Campbell to make a decent profit.

"These are as good a time as anyone has seen in grass seed.' he said.

He lost \$100,000 in the early 1980's because of depressed prices, and he said it will take three more years to pay off the debt. He was forced to go to work in a mill for a year, and his wife has to work part-time at a department store to help the family make ends meet.

In spite of the uncertainties in the grass seed industry. Campbell said he wouldn't want to do anything else.

"You just fall in love with farming," he said.

He contends that field burning is the only way he can make a profit. As proof, he said he lost half his yield last year from acres he wasn't able to

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