



# On the Fence

## Farm Bill: A ‘good government’ could fix the Farm Bill

All we seem to hear about the U.S. Farm Bill is that Congress can’t renew it because of the part of it that pays for SNAP (food stamps), but not much is said about farms, farmers and food.

The first Farm Bill was a federal government response to one of the Great Depression’s spectacular market failures, when piles of harvested grain lay rotting in rural America at the same time that people in the cities were starving. Farmers couldn’t afford to lose any more money by trying to move the grain at free market prices.

Congress had no choice but to have big government manage the market. It still does today, and the Farm Bill has been renewed every five years since 1933. The last Farm Bill was renewed in 2014, when com-



**BILL RILEY**  
UNION COUNTY  
PROGRESSIVES/  
DEMOCRATS

modity prices were at an all-time high, and it is set to expire again Sept. 30. Historically it has passed with broad bipartisan support, except from the extreme fringes of both parties.

I think national security is the basic purpose of the Farm Bill. Whatever happens, we must never become dependent on another nation to feed ourselves.

Taxpayers cover some of the farmer’s financial risks through farm subsidies, including crop insurance, in order to minimize the number of farms lost to bankruptcy. This help should be going to families who depend on their farms for income and are struggling

to stay afloat, but that’s not what’s happening.

Last year, subsidies to farmers, not counting crop insurance payments, were more than \$12 billion. According to an article by U.S. News, the largest 15 percent of farms got almost 85 percent of the dollars, whether it was needed or not.

These are all complex partnerships and corporations run by people who never set foot on a farm. This occurs, in part, because subsidies are tied to specific crops: corn, wheat, soybeans, cotton, rice and peanuts. Growers of vegetables, tree nuts, fruits and most livestock receive nothing.

Crop insurance provides an incentive to grow as much as possible because the price is guaranteed. This sure-bet, backed by U.S. taxpayers, encour-

ages the biggest farms to get bigger and then claim insurance payouts when yields fall short. (Too-big-to-fail Big Ag?)

Today’s falling commodity prices are largely due to oversupply, at the same time as crop insurance puts no limits on the amount of these subsidies the largest farms can collect. Yet, beginning farmers, farms with diversified crops and enterprises, specialty crop operations, organic farmers and farmers using non-wholesale markets can’t get any of these.

Hope may be on the horizon for crop insurance reform, because H.R. 4865, the Crop Insurance Modernization Act, is tackling some of this. Not so with the Farm Bill renewal. Significant numbers of members in Congress are saying their unproductive rankling

may make an extension of the “same old” 1994 bill all they can accomplish.

So, maybe all we can do now is ask, “What are a few things a Farm Bill could do?” How about:

- Help young people who want to buy and start farms with finances and training to operate successful businesses so they replace the huge number of soon-to-retire farmers.
- Provide incentives to integrate conservation practices into farming operations.
- Help family farmers produce and sell food that builds rural economies by processing, manufacturing or otherwise adding value to what’s grown in the local area. Don’t crops that fly-out right after harvest seem to leave fly-over rural areas behind?

- Reduce risks and provide incentives for farmers to open sales opportunities in new and emerging markets.
- Develop new and strengthen existing infrastructure that connects producers to consumers. What if those city folk on the west side became our direct customers?

In spite of what we see and hear in media propaganda, whether a government program is small, medium or large isn’t what matters, only whether or not it is good government. This liberal big government program can, once again, be that good government.

**Editor’s note: The Union County Republicans could not find a writer to discuss the Farm Bill topic this week.**

## Your views

### Hargrove: Our value and identity come from our maker

To the Editor:

Our world is experiencing an identity crisis. I have been heartbroken as I hear more and more stories of people taking their own lives, hear that loneliness is prevalent and see that anxiety is so common. While there are many factors that may contribute to these struggles, identity is the biggest factor.

In a world that promotes celebrating “diversity,” we actually see a culture where becoming a follower is now the norm in order to be accepted. There is an epidemic where people are unhappy with who they are so they try to become someone they are not. People are changing themselves physically or behaviorally. This pressure to conform (especially among our young people) explains why so many are confused about their identity. They are letting society, culture and negative life experiences define them and determine their value.

Social media contributes to identity confusion by making it easier for people to compare themselves to others, bully others. Social media takes time away from building “real life” relationships, developing skills and enjoying hobbies.

While we could try to solely blame social media, society and culture for the identity crisis our world is experiencing, the core reason people

are struggling is because they have lost focus on where our true value and identity comes from. We are children of God who are created by him and loved by him. We are made in his image, and he has plans for us. He designed each of us with a unique set of talents, personalities and looks. When we try to become someone we are not and change who he created us to be, we will never be content.

We need to stop letting society define us and allow our maker to show us who he created us to be, and then we will experience confidence in who we are. Our value does not come from this world. It comes from God.

Jeremiah 29:11 says: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Carrie Hargrove  
Cove

### Hasse: Don’t let our forest become their forest

To the Editor:

I attended the Forest Access for All information meeting about the Blue Mountain Forest Plan at the Blue Mt. Conference Center July 30. I was very disappointed in the attendance. I guess after the 15-odd years, the Forest Service has finally won. People have gotten so busy that

they are just going to let the Forest Service close most access to the forest, and no one will object.

The new plan will take the forest from an open to a closed system. Currently, a road is open unless it is marked. In the new system, a road is closed unless it is marked open. This is a huge change. If you are caught on a “closed” road, you can be fined \$5,000 and/or a year in jail.

There are many other changes that will affect how we all use the forest. It will no longer be “our forest.” It will become “their forest” with most decisions on access and how we can use the forest up to the Forest Supervisor.

Folks, please get involved before we lose our forest. The comment period ends Aug. 28.

Joel Hasse  
La Grande

### Brainerd: Cycle Oregon event will be a win, win, win

To the Editor:

Starting Sept. 8, Cycle Oregon will roll in and through a good portion of Northeast Oregon, including three neighboring counties: Baker, Wallowa and Union.

The weeklong classic cycling event, which begins in Baker City, brings cyclists from all over the state, country and world, allowing riders to experience varied Oregon communities

and providing much needed financial support to local populations.

The chance that all three adjoining counties and their townships would simultaneously be able to prosper is rare — much like a trifecta.

The English dictionary outlines “trifecta” as a combination of the prefix tri- (meaning “three”) with the last element in perfecta (a word of American Spanish origin that refers to a horse-racing bet in which the finishers are chosen in the correct order). So, trifecta — a run of three wins or grand events — describes the opportunity Cycle Oregon brings to these three counties.

By working concurrently with all local communities, organizations and volunteers to positively make this year’s Cycle Oregon memorable, each community has the potential to reap the rewards, including approximate financial impacts of up to \$150,000. For small towns such as Elgin, these funds will assist greatly in funding elementary and high school programs and numerous civic organizations, many of which contribute greatly in planning along with providing hundreds of volunteers to assure the event is a success.

My bet is that this year’s Cycle Oregon event will be a win, win, win for all.

Kem Brainerd  
Elgin Hospitality Committee

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Phone:  
**541-963-3161**

Toll free (Oregon):

1-800-422-3110

Fax: 541-963-7804

Email:

news@lagrandeobserver.com

Website:

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Street address:

1406 Fifth St., La Grande

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