



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press  
Friend Hayley Huber, last year's Washington FFA state sentinel, gets a hug from incoming president Julia Spangler of Wenatchee, Wash., May 16 after Spangler was elected during the 85th annual state convention in Pullman, Wash. Huber and Spangler were both in the Wenatchee chapter together.

## FFA gives Washington officers a sense of place

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — The incoming and outgoing Washington state FFA presidents say the organization is all about giving its members a feeling of belonging.

During the 85th annual convention May 16 in Pullman, Wash., FFA members elected: Julia Spangler, of Wenatchee, president; Monica Haugen, of Pullman, vice president; Mitch Jamison, of Garfield-Palouse, secretary; Dallas Tyus, of Tonasket, treasurer; Jason Wigen, of LaCrosse, reporter; and Daniel Lyng, of Bellingham, sentinel.

Spangler was emotional after her name was called.

"I can't even believe my life right now — I am so honored and ecstatic about receiving this opportunity to serve such an amazing organization," she said.

Spangler said she doesn't come from an agricultural background. Her involvement with FFA was in service and sales, she said.

"I really want to target the kids who don't think they have a place," she said. "I want to give them a place and show them where they can be, where they'll grow and love everything about that place."

Departing president Apolinar Blanco, of Chelan, in his retiring address before the 3,185 members of guests at the convention, remembered his adviser telling him the only colors that mattered in FFA were blue and gold.

"We all have a different story, but we all travel the FFA highway," he said. "In FFA, we accept all kinds of kids.... In this



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press  
Departing Washington FFA state president Apolinar Blanco begins his retiring address May 16 during the state convention in Pullman, Wash.

organization, and in this life, we all matter."

Abbie DeMeerleer, Washington FFA executive director, said she was looking forward to sitting down with the new team and learning what their plan is for the year ahead.

"The things this team wants to see improve, evolve and to grow in Washington FFA — they're going to help set that vision and help us work towards accomplishing those goals," she said.

State adviser Rebecca Wallace expects membership to grow, noting the organization reached more than 8,000 members this year. Agriculture education enrollment in the state averages around 36,000 to 37,000 students each semester, she said.

"Our programs, our teachers, our students — we have to share our stories about what FFA has done and why it is such an important part of a student's experience in high school and beyond," she said



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press  
The new 2015-2016 Washington State FFA officers take a moment on the Beasley Coliseum stage following the 85th state convention May 16 in Pullman, Wash. From left to right are reporter Jason Wigen of LaCrosse, president Julia Spangler of Wenatchee, secretary Mitch Jamison of Garfield-Palouse FFA, vice president Monica Haugen of Pullman, sentinel Daniel Lyng of Meridian FFA in Bellingham and treasurer Dallas Tyus of Tonasket.

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# GMO ban fails in Oregon's Benton County

## Oregon State University concerned by proposal

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

A proposed ban on biotech crops in Oregon's Benton County has failed by a strong margin.

As of Wednesday morning, nearly 73 percent of voters rejected Measure 2-89, which would have prohibited cultivation of genetically modified organisms.

The proposal was met with alarm by scientists at Oregon State University, which lies in the county, who feared it would stop research projects that rely on genetic engineering.

Its defeat shows that once voters learn the facts, they will reject extreme measures, said Scott Dahlman, policy director of the Oregonians for Food and Shelter agribusiness group, which opposed the initiative.

"I think it's a resounding statement that folks in Benton County support all

types of agriculture," he said.

Dana Allen, a chief petitioner for the ballot initiative, said OSU's statements were likely the reason that people voted against Measure 2-89.

However, Allen said that the prohibition was focused solely on the county's food system and wouldn't be as far-reaching as the university claimed.

"It wouldn't shut down any research at OSU at all. All it would shut down is the open planting of GMOs that would contaminate our local food system," she said.

Even if it had been approved, the initiative was probably largely unenforceable.

Legislation passed by lawmakers in 2013, Senate Bill 863, precluded most Oregon counties from regulating GMOs.

That bill applied to seed, but OSU was concerned that research involving genetically modified bacteria or animals would not be covered by SB 863 and could be disallowed by the proposed ordinance, said Dahlman.

"There was a lot of risk there," he said.

Benton County's ballot initiative was intended to challenge the statewide pre-emption statute as undemocratic, said Allen. "We don't think the state should be telling communities what to do."

Similar measures are likely to continue being proposed at the county level as communities resist the statewide pre-emption, she said. "You're going to see this type of activity all over Oregon."

Aside from local measures, biotech critics also hope to get a ballot initiative on the 2016 statewide ballot that would allow local governments to enact such restrictions.

Voters in Jackson and Josephine counties passed GMO prohibitions last year.

Josephine County's ordinance is pre-empted by state law, but Jackson County was exempted from SB 863 because its initiative was already on the ballot.

Alfalfa farmers are now seeking an injunction prohibiting Jackson County's ban from going into effect for allegedly violating the state's "right to farm" law, which disallows local government restrictions of farm practices.

# Organic checkoff draws supporters, detractors

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

The Organic Trade Association has petitioned the USDA for a national checkoff program, which would raise an estimated \$30 million a year for research and promotion.

The proposal, three years in the making, is being led by OTA, which has 8,500 members, and a core committee of stakeholders. It is focused on research to support organic production, grow the industry and communicate the value of organic agriculture to consumers.

Widespread support exists for research, both in plant breeding and addressing pests and disease, but many organic producers mistrust government-run checkoff programs and some question the need for promotion.

Organic sales in the U.S. have grown from \$10 billion in 2003 to \$39.1 billion in 2014, and the number of certified operations — producers, handlers and processors — has grown from about 8,000 to nearly 19,500.

Organic demand is booming, production isn't keeping pace, research is lacking, and consumers are confused about the meaning of the USDA organic seal, said OTA CEO and Executive Director Laura Batcha.

"The organic industry in America is thriving and maturing, but it is at a critical juncture," she said.

An organic checkoff would give stakeholders the opportunity to collectively invest in addressing those challenges and advancing the entire industry, she said.



Fred Brossy looks over his organic wheat field near Shoshone, Idaho. Brossy, who with wife, Judy, has farmed organically for more than 40 years, said he isn't sure where he stands on the checkoff.

Carol Ryan Dumas  
Capital Press

Organic consultant Dave Carter of Westminster, Colo., served on the National Organics Standards Board and supports the checkoff, saying it is needed if the industry is going to increase production.

He said research is critically needed to bring more acres into production, increase profitability and ease the transition period for new growers. Education and promotion are also needed to communicate the health and environmental benefits of organic and clear up the confusion between organic, non-genetically modified foods and "natural."

Funding for research is particularly important because public funding for research often has to be matched. Educating the public on organic agriculture and organic production is going to take effort and investment because organic is such a rich, complex issue it's hard to get out the message in sound bites, he said.

Doug Crabtree, who with wife, Anna, farms 4,700 dryland

acres of small grains, pulses and oil seeds in Havre, Mont., serves on OTA's farmer advisory council.

"I just think it's common sense. We all benefit from organic markets, and we need a way to collect funds and give them back for research and promotion of our own industry," he said.

"I just think it's really important we reinvest some of our own funds to benefit our community, our industry. We can't wait for government to do it for us," he said.

Longtime organic grower Nate Jones of King Hill, Idaho, said he likes the idea of funding for research but doesn't think he's in favor of the checkoff.

"I have mixed emotions. I want to know who's going to administer it," he said. "My gut feeling is it would favor the larger conglomerates."

Paying to get more people to increase production is also a bit counterintuitive, he said.

"Those of us in it maybe want to keep the golden goose

as long as possible," he said.

Fred Brossy, who with wife, Judy, has farmed organically for more than 40 years, said he isn't sure where he stands.

OTA will be the driver of the checkoff, he said, and he's concerned the organization represents the "big end" of organic.

"I'm not sure big organic needs to be represented by all of us. They have deep pockets, let them do their own," Brossy said.

Carter said he gets nervous when so much of the debate gets tied up in size.

"Being organic is being true to organic standards," he said.

Small producers should be able to benefit by default from additional product sales, and research will give them better tools, he said.

Crabtree suggests organic producers read the proposal and become informed. The proposal was changed a number of times in response to grower concerns, he said.

"There's been tremendous responsiveness on the part of OTA," he said.

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