

AgriBusiness Council has long legacy

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Jay Allert, chairman of the AgriBusiness Council for Greater Spokane Incorporated, says the council and its predecessors have long been active in promoting agriculture in the region.

Even before there was a chamber of commerce in Spokane, organizations were working for the benefit of agriculture in the region.

The earliest roots of the Agricultural Bureau go back to May 1887, when a group of “future-oriented” citizens organized Spokane’s Board of Trade, which sponsored the first Fruit Fair, the forerunner of the current Interstate Fair.

The Agricultural Bureau’s name first appeared in reports in 1917 and changed its name to the AgriBusiness Council in 2010, according to a history compiled by Greater Spokane Incorporated.

The Agricultural Bureau was preceded by several agriculture committees during Exposition 1890, the first major event for agriculture in the area. Fruits, vegetables, timber and livestock from around the region were exhibited.

The chamber was incorporated May 21, 1892.

Other key moments in history:

1905: The chamber formed a horticulture committee to address the needs of the fruit industry and other types of agriculture.

1908: The National Apple Show was created and sponsored by the chamber’s agriculture committee and existed for eight years. At that time, the region had 10,000 acres of orchards in Spokane Valley; 7,000 acres in Deer Park; 2,000 acres in Waverly and 1,700 acres near Medical Lake and Green Bluff.

1917: The new Agricultural Bureau began a movement to improve prices for the wheat crop in the Pacific Northwest.

1920: The Agricultural Bureau coordinated the first Pacific Northwest Potato Show and Growers Conference.

1921: The Agricultural Bureau was instrumental in forming the Annual Fruit Growers Conference.

1922: The Spokane Cham-

ber of Commerce organized the Northwest Reclamation Congress to promote the federal Columbia Basin Project. The chamber provided guidance to the newly organized Columbia Basin Irrigation League.

1927: The Agricultural Bureau spearheaded the first dairy congress, bringing together a group of dairymen who formed a cow testing association, easing friction between producers and milk distributors.

1941-1945: During World War II the Agricultural Bureau pushed for all-out farm production. Labor shortages were a concern and packing houses were down 50 percent because of the lack of labor. The Agricultural Bureau War Employment Committee and the executive board of the chamber helped alleviate the problem. An arrangement was made with the commander of the Faragut Naval Training Station on Lake Pend Oreille in Bayview, Idaho, to grant leave to naval personnel to assist the packing industry.

1954: The Pacific Northwest Farm Forum began.

1974-1977: Planning got underway for the Spokane Ag Expo. A group of volunteers from the Agricultural Bureau



enlisted 16 corporate sponsors to underwrite any loss in the first three years of the show. The financial commitment was never needed.

1989: The Agricultural Bureau provided seed money for the Washington State International Ag Trade Center. The state Legislature provided funds for the facility and the City of Spokane provided the property and services. The new facility opened in 1989 with the Spokane Ag Expo as its first tenant.

1996: The Agricultural Bureau Marketing Committee formed to promote the importance and economic contributions of agriculture.

1997: The Agricultural Bureau contracted with Washington State University to measure the impact that agriculture had on Spokane’s economy.

2007-2010: The AgriBusiness Task Force determined a course of action needed to modernize the Agricultural Bureau with new activities and increase its membership.

Feb. 6-12, 2012: Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum show week is designated “Ag Week in Spokane” as the renamed AgriBusiness Council continued to highlight the importance of agriculture in Spokane and the region.

June 8, 2012: The AgriBusiness Council presented the Ag Economic Symposium through Greater Spokane Incorporated’s Good Morning Greater Spokane to showcase the industry to the urban business community.

Nov. 8, 2012: The AgriBusiness Council put together its first Washington State University Ag Tour for Spokane business leaders.

Feb. 4, 2014: The AgriBusiness Council, partnering with the Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum,

awarded the first “Excellence in Agriculture Awards” at the opening session of Farm Forum.

Feb. 2-4, 2016: Pacific Northwest Farm Forum will move from the DoubleTree Hotel to the newly expanded Convention Center, allowing the Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum to be under one roof for the first time.

“That’s a big history,” said Jay Allert, a Rosalia, Wash., rancher and chairman of the AgriBusiness Council. “It was so involved in the creation of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project, the Spokane Livestock Show, the international ag trade center when it was in Spokane — all of these things, the Ag Bureau played a very integral part. It’s so significant. It’s kind of an honor to be part of that group.”

Spokane used to house 15 feed stores or mills, which was natural, as agriculture was a dominating industry, Allert said.

“It hasn’t been easy, honestly, because there are fewer people involved and everybody has less time,” he said. “It really caused us to evaluate this mission we’ve always had, but we have to do it in a different way.”

Today, agriculture is going through a new transformation and “reinvigoration,” he said, pointing to new precision technology, which increases farmers’ profits and brings in new people.

“We went through a period there where young people couldn’t afford to come back to the farms,” Allert said. “Our future was kind of dwindling, and yet now that’s changing. We almost have to have (young people) now because you have to be a computer-savvy person to run a tractor, practically. It means a lot of change. It’s going to bring a lot of opportunity to the industry.”

'07 NH 88960A, BIG BALER, ROTOR CUTTER, ROLLER BALE CHUTES, STEERING TANDEM AXLE, 500/50-17.0-24..... \$59,900 (HU1028)

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'96 GLEANER R72, 2250 SEP HOURS, DUALS 24.5-32 AND 30.5X32, CHOPPER, NEW FEEDER CHAIN, ACCL ROLLS GOOD, CAGE AND VANES GOOD, INCLUDES GLEANER 700 HEADER, WITH HARD SURFACED AUGER, LOVE REEL AND ROCK GUARDS..... \$42,900 (BU1872)

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'01 JD 97505TS, 2209 SEP HRS, HILLCO HILLSIDE 27% LEVELER, 18.4R42 FRONT DUALS, 28L26 REARS, EVERYTHING CHROMED, NICE COMBINE..... \$104,900 (BU2009)

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WASHINGTON

904 S Hayford Road
Airway Heights, WA 99001
Phone: (509) 244-4902

102 N 1st
Fairfield, WA 99012
Phone: (509) 283-2111

3 Front St.
St. John, WA 99171
Phone: (509) 648-3373

IDAHO

202 West "A" Street
Moscow, ID 83843
Phone: (208) 882-7501

4th & Pine
Nezperce, ID 83543
Phone: (208) 937-2422

