

# Farm groups endorse Hanson for next ODA chief

Others wait for national search for new director

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Multiple Oregon farm and agribusiness groups have requested that outgoing Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Katy Coba be replaced with Lisa Hanson, the agency's deputy director.

Some organizations, however, are withholding judgment until Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has a chance to vet multiple candidates for the position.

Coba is leaving the agency to take the reins at Oregon's Department of Administrative Services and serve as the state's chief operating officer in early October.

Hanson will serve as the ODA's interim director but several farm groups wrote



Lisa Hanson

Brown a letter urging her to make the appointment permanent.

Those organizations include Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Oregonians for Food & Shelter, Oregon Dairy Farmers Association, Oregon Association of Nurseries, Oregon Seed Council, Oregon Seed Association and Northwest

Food Processors Association.

It's important that the agency be led by someone who is solution-oriented in regulating agriculture, knowing when to use incentives and enforcement measures, said Barry Bushue, OFB's president.

"Lisa has proven herself as a leader in the department who can perform all those functions," Bushue said.

Hanson said she's honored by the endorsement and considers it a reflection of the entire agency's work with farmers and ranchers.

Armed with a degree in agriculture and resource economics from Oregon State University, Hanson began her career as a field representative for several food processing companies that sell products under the Green Giant brand.

In 1996, Hanson joined ODA as the agency's commodity commission program manager and was promoted to head its commodity inspec-

tion division two years later. She became assistant director in 2001 and then deputy director in 2005. In that position she is a legislative liaison and oversees natural resource programs.

Hanson said she believes the agricultural industry needs education about how to comply with regulations before enforcement tools are used.

"We need to help people understand how and what to do to be in compliance," she said.

Bushue said he's heartened that Brown chose someone of Coba's caliber to lead DAS, which shows she understands the value of collaboration.

A multitude of crops and livestock are grown in Oregon, so the ODA's director must value this diversity, he said. "Oregon's agriculture can't afford a narrow focus."

Friends of Family Farmers, which has criticized ODA for favoring large operations, isn't currently making any

endorsements for ODA's director, said Ivan Maluski, the group's policy director.

Maluski said he's not opposed to Hanson, but would like to see an "open and transparent process" for choosing Coba's replacement.

"We're not sure if anyone inside the agency, including Katy Coba's top deputies, would be able to make needed changes at the Department, which is partly why we think a broader search is necessary," he said in an email.

Oregon Tilth, which certifies organic farms, believes it's too early to come out in favor of any particular candidate, said Chris Schreiner, the group's executive director.

The ideal candidate should have a strong understanding of protecting natural resources, including water, soil and biodiversity, and be prepared to confront the clashes between different types of agriculture, Schreiner said.

"It seems premature to

support someone without a comprehensive search," he said.

A state notice advertising the position said the ODA's next director would earn roughly \$100,000-\$150,000 a year and is required to have a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and at least 10 years experience as the director, deputy director or assistant director of a state agency, among other qualifications.

Recruitment efforts to replace Coba have begun, with the Department of Administrative Services in charge of the initial vetting of candidates, said Bryan Hockaday, the governor's press secretary.

DAS will then present the list of qualified candidates to Brown, who will ultimately make the appointment, which must be confirmed by the Oregon Senate, he said.

"We do want a diverse pool of qualified candidates," said Hockaday.

# Oregon lawmakers discuss groundwater problems

Groundwater depletion likely to spark policy proposals

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

SALEM — Groundwater depletion problems discussed during a recent hearing in Salem could foreshadow policy proposals that will surface during the 2017 legislative session.

While participants in the "legislative days" informational session did not address the recent newspaper series

by name, the Oregonian's "Draining Oregon" package obviously loomed over the hearing.

Printed stacks of the series, which was printed last month, sat on a table near the entrance during the Sept. 21 hearing.

The newspaper's allegations that state regulators are allowing farmers to over-pump groundwater were also clearly on the minds of lawmakers on the House Interim Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water — as well as those of Oregon Water Resources Department staff called to testify.

Committee Chair Brian Clem, D-Salem, said the topic will likely be a source of

conversations during the next series of "legislative days" in November and during next year's legislative session.

To avoid "brutal neighbor-on-neighbor warfare," lawmakers should try to find a collaborative approach for water conservation, he said.

With the caveat that he didn't want to attack journalists who "buy ink by the barrel," Clem said he was concerned about loaded terms that imply farmers are greedy and wasteful.

"Farmers don't become farmers to become rich," he said. "There are much easier ways of getting rich."

The basic thesis of "Draining Oregon" was that OWRD

had insufficient information about groundwater levels across much of the state but nonetheless freely allowed well drilling, depleting aquifers.

Tom Byler, OWRD's director, conceded that over-pumping in past decades had led to several critical groundwater areas across the state, which led the agency to restrict uses.

"We haven't done as good a job as we should on that item," he said.

Byler said groundwater is tough to manage given the complex geology of underground aquifers and because farmers have become more reliant on this irrigation source when surface waters dwindle during the dry months.

Since 1955, when legislators passed a law requiring groundwater regulations, the number of wells across the state has increased from 4,660 to 256,800, said Justin Iverson, groundwater section manager for OWRD.

Agricultural wells — which require permitting — make up roughly 10 percent of the total number, but they represent about 90 percent of total groundwater usage in Oregon, Iverson said.

While domestic users must only report the location of new wells, drillers of agricultural wells must also provide information about water levels and irrigators must report their usage, he said.

OWRD also monitors groundwater with more than 1,200 observation wells, Iverson said.

Rep. Ken Helm questioned whether water regulators were "driving in the dark" in regard to well-drilling and the effects of climate change on water availability.

"Does that change the paradigm under which we should be operating?" Helm said.

He also asked if the OWRD is simply short of funding to robustly study groundwater, or if policy changes are also needed.

Byler replied that the agency already has many regulatory tools but is always open to looking at new ones.

# Washington watchdog asks What's Upstream for explanation

PDC wants response by next week

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Washington Public Disclosure Commission has asked What's Upstream organizers to respond to allegations from a farm group that the advocacy campaign violated state law by failing to file grass-roots lobbying reports.

In a complaint to the PDC, Save Family Farming alleged that What's Upstream tried to influence state legislation and should have registered with the commission.

The PDC reviewed the complaint and decided to look into it, PDC spokeswoman Lori Anderson said Monday.

The PDC opened a case naming Swinomish Indian tribe environmental policy director Larry Wasserman, the lead organizer of What's Upstream. Anderson said the PDC expects a response to the complaint in one



Courtesy of Save Family Farming

An advertising sign on a Whatcom County, Wash., transit bus was part of the What's Upstream campaign. The Washington Public Disclosure Commission has asked What's Upstream organizers to respond to allegations that it violated state law by failing to file grass-roots lobbying reports.

week. Efforts to reach Wasserman for comment were unsuccessful.

The Swinomish tribe, based along north Puget Sound, received \$655,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency over five years. The tribe hired Seattle lobbying firm Strategies 360 to create a media campaign, advocating stricter regulations on agriculture.

Save Family Farming,

which was formed to respond to What's Upstream, named in its complaint EPA Northwest Administrator Dennis McLerran and Strategies 360, along with Wasserman.

In an email Monday to the Capital Press, the EPA said neither it nor McLerran has been contacted by the PDC.

"The complaint confuses federal law with state law

and fundamentally mischaracterizes our conversations with the Swinomish tribe," according to the EPA.

EPA stopped funding What's Upstream last spring after federal lawmakers alleged the campaign violated prohibitions on using federal funds to lobby.

Wasserman's reports to the EPA indicated the goal of the campaign was to change state law.

The EPA's Northwest office has said it reviewed the What's Upstream website and concluded the campaign was not an illegal lobbying effort because it wasn't advocating for or against a specific piece of pending legislation.

The EPA's inspector general is auditing the use of the funds, which was passed through to the tribe from the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

Citing EPA records, Saving Family Farming noted Strategies 360 polled voters statewide to test messages that would increase support for mandatory 100-foot buf-

fers between farm fields and waterways.

What's Upstream also encouraged people to ask state lawmakers to consider imposing the buffers.

Individuals or groups who spend more than \$700

in one month or \$1,400 over three months to influence state legislation must file a grass-roots lobbying report, according to the PDC.

The PDC can levy a penalty of up to \$10,000 for a violation.

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