



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

The 8,000-acre Murtha Ranch along the John Day River near Condon, Ore., was purchased by the Western Rivers Conservancy for \$7.9 million. The group sold it for the same price to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, which developed it into Cottonwood Canyon State Park. As a nod to traditional uses, hunting and fishing are allowed, and state officials are developing a grazing plan that may be put into effect next spring.

When Oregon farm and ranch land changes hands, the question becomes, 'Now what?'

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Diane Daggett remembers the conversation with the woman who had just purchased the Daggett family's 440-acre cattle ranch in Northeast Oregon's Wallowa County, land that had been in the family for four generations.

The buyer said she had called her husband, who was aboard their yacht in the Cayman Islands, to share the news. "Honey," the woman said she'd told him, "I just bought the most amazing birthday gift for you."

And the land, sold by Daggett's stepmother for what Daggett figures was three times what it could generate as a cattle ranch, slipped from the family's grasp. Now it lies behind a locked gate.

Variations of that story are playing out across Oregon

and other states as farm and ranch land changes hands, sometimes by thousands of acres at a time. Some buyers are fellow farmers who are expanding their operations under the mantra of "get big or get out." But other buyers include investment firms, wind energy developers, conservation organizations, companies that fit the description of "Big Ag" and wealthy individuals looking to establish private hunting reserves or vacation retreats.

Primary worry

The impact is unclear at this point, but the primary worry is about ag land being taken out of production. Jim Johnson, the Oregon Department of Agriculture's land use and water planning coordinator, said ag land conversion

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Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Ag groups: Feinstein farmworker bill should be part of larger solution

By TIM HEARDEN
and DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Farm groups are giving generally high marks to a bill co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein that would shield many undocumented farmworkers from deportation.

The United Farm Workers-supported Agricultural Worker Program Act would provide "blue cards" to those who have worked in agricul-

ture for at least 100 days in each of the last two years. The cards would enable them to legally stay in the U.S.

If they maintained blue card status for the next three to five years, depending on total hours they worked, they would earn a green card and permanent legal residency.

Feinstein, D-Calif., said the bill aims to address a worsening labor shortage in agriculture.

"Workers are scared," she told

reporters in a conference call. "They're afraid they're going to get picked up and deported. Some have disappeared. ... Some (growers) have talked about developing on leased land in Mexico, and that's not the answer."

Feinstein and her co-sponsors — Democratic Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, Michael Bennet of Colorado, Mazie Hirono of Hawaii and

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Courtesy of California Strawberry Commission

Pickers harvest strawberries near Santa Maria, Calif. Farm groups are giving generally high marks to a bill co-sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., that would enable farmworkers to gain legal status.

Washington CAFO law attacked from all sides

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The dairy industry and environmental groups have come up with 19 legal challenges to the Washington Department of Ecology's new manure-control law.

The Pollution Control Hearings Board, the forum for appealing Ecology actions, has scheduled a week-long hearing for Dec. 4-8 in Tumwater on

the state's Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation permits. The appeals did not keep the rules from taking effect in March.

"Ecology developed these permits with the best available science and broad stakeholder input," department spokeswoman Jessica Payne wrote Monday in an email. "We believe they are protective of water quality and represent best practices for the facilities the permits will cover.

Ecology stands by these permits."

CAFO permit terms are a major battleground for farm groups and environmental organizations in Washington. Provisions will dictate for at least the next five years how dairies keep manure from polluting groundwater and surface water.

Previously, the state Department of Agriculture oversaw how dairies store and spread manure, and few dairies had CAFO permits issued by Ecology.

The expanded permit will require more soil testing, put more limits on fertilizing with manure and place more scrutiny on manure lagoons, even ones built to Natural Resources Conservation Service standards.

The Washington State Dairy Federation and Washington Farm Bureau dispute the science and economics behind the rules.

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