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# Opinion

## Editorial Board

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## OUR VIEW

# Organic weed battle could have been avoided

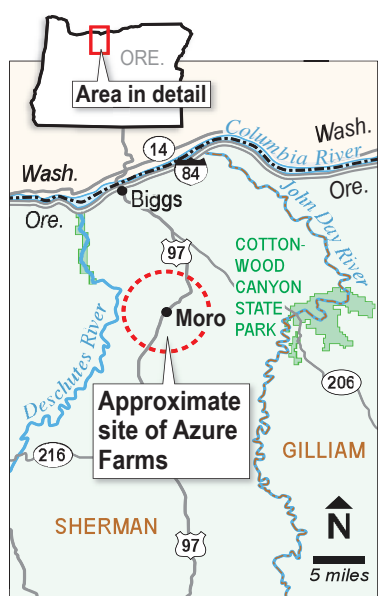
A dispute between an organic farm and an Oregon weed district seems to have been settled, more or less to everyone's satisfaction.

There are lingering hostilities, not only because of the farm owners' failure to control their weeds over the years but in the way they have comported themselves as the county has sought a resolution to the problem.

It didn't have to go this far.

Azure Farms is a 1,922-acre organic farm operated in Oregon's Sherman County by Azure Standard, a major distributor of organic products. Locals have been complaining for 10 years about serious weed problems at the farm.

Things came to a head this spring when local farmers renewed complaints that Azure's property



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

is filled with Rush Skeleton weed, Canada Thistle, Bindweed, White Top and Morning Glory.

County weed control Supervisor Rod Asher's efforts to resolve

the problem were rebuked. He informed the farm that unless a weed management plan was worked out, the county would exercise its authority under state law and ask the Oregon Department of Agriculture to quarantine the farm and have the weeds sprayed.

Azure Standard responded by unleashing a firestorm on social media, including videos of the farm's principals urging viewers to express their outrage at the county's stance — or at least an abridged version of the county's stance. That yielded nearly 57,000 emails from around the world — all critical of the county, some threatening. The county courthouse phone system shut down after being deluged with protests.

Azure Farms understandably wanted to thwart any actions

that could have compromised its organic certification. But its campaign mischaracterized the county's position and minimized its own responsibility for the dispute. The record shows that before the ultimatum Asher offered the owners a number of options that would have controlled the weeds without endangering its organic certification.

As the Sherman County commissioners were set to meet last week to address the issue, Azure Farms stepped back and submitted a weed control plan that will allow it to keep its certification and resolve the weed problem. The owners apologized for the social media campaign and pledged to patch their relationship with the community.

The county has warned it will ask the Oregon Department of

Agriculture to quarantine the farm if it doesn't control rampant noxious weeds. Asher said the county will spray herbicide and bill the farm for the work if the problem is not dealt with.

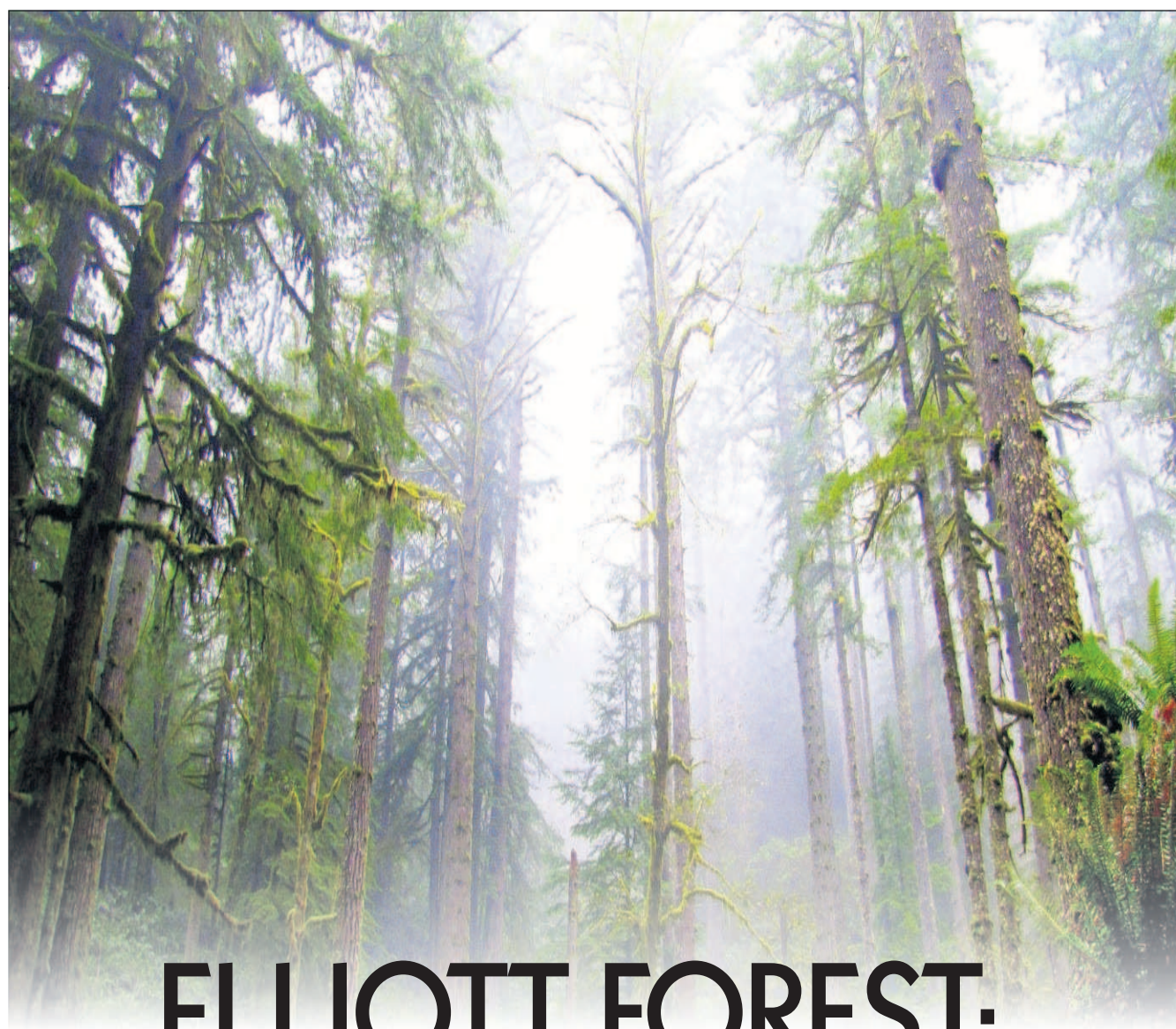
State and local weed ordinances were enacted for the good of producers of all stripes. They include enforcement actions when producers don't comply.

This is not an attack on organic farming practices. Properly and aggressively employed, organic weed control methods would have prevented this problem.

This is a question of stewardship, and the deference neighbors owe one another.

Azure Farms failed on both counts. Hopefully, its owners will keep their promise to remedy their weed problem, and mend fences with their neighbors.

## OUR VIEW



# ELLIOTT FOREST: One of those Oregon things

The saga of the Elliott State Forest continues. In Oregon, a state with 30 million acres of forestland — almost half of its total landmass — the state's three top officials have decided not to sell a forest whose sole purpose is to help fund the state's schools through the Common School Fund.

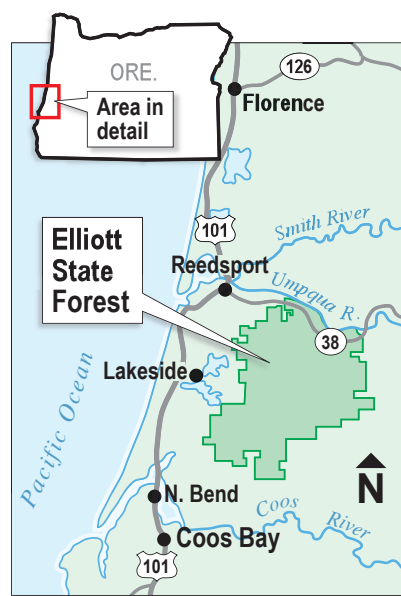
How this became so complicated is one of those Oregon things.

First the State Land Board — Gov. Kate Brown, Treasurer Tobias Read and Secretary of State Dennis Richardson — decided to sell the forest because it wasn't generating enough money.

Then, after winning bidders were identified and negotiating the purchase contract, the Land Board backed out of the \$220.8 million deal, because, well, that's where it gets complicated.

They backed out because they wanted the forest to stay in state hands, primarily to appease environmental interests, which apparently believed preserving an 82,500-acre forest — representing less than half of 1 percent of the forestland in the state — is more important than helping the state's 571,000 public school students.

It should be noted that the state Legislature is continually poor-mouthing public schools, so



Capital Press graphic

money from the Common School Fund and the Elliott State Forest is sorely needed.

The land board has come up with a unique plan for the state to sell \$100 million in tax-free bonds to buy the forest — from itself. Then the board would give the forest to Oregon State University, whose budget the Legislature is also threatening to cut. Somehow, OSU would be expected to find the remainder of the purchase price.

If you're not following this, you're not alone. This sort of thing happens too often in Oregon, where spending money with no

idea of where the project is headed is an art form. We remember the hundreds of millions of dollars spent to study a bridge across the Columbia River that wasn't built and for an Obamacare website that didn't work.

Considering the Elliott Forest debacle, it appears they are all part of an ongoing trend.

The state's job in managing the Elliott Forest is to find a way to fund state schools. Period. If that can't be done for environmental or other reasons, the board needs to find income-generating timber land to come up with that money, not selling bonds to assuage environmental sensitivities.

Secretary of State Richardson appears to be the only person on the board with the glimmer of a clue of how to do that. He suggested swapping the forest to the federal government for commercial timberland that can be logged to generate money for the schools and create jobs for loggers and mill workers.

But that suggestion apparently exhibits way too much common sense.

In the meantime, the land board seems destined to find yet another way to come up with a losing proposition — and leave the state's taxpayers with the bill.

## Readers' views

### Oregon legislature must address loss of farmlands, livelihoods

Eric Mortenson's article, "For sale: When Oregon farm and ranch land changes hands," asks two important questions: Who are our future agricultural landowners, and what will they do with the land?

It has never been more urgent to answer these questions, since land is already rapidly changing hands.

According to new research, Oregon's farmers and ranchers have never been older — 59.6 years on average — resulting in 64 percent of agricultural land changing hands during the next 20 years.

Beginning farmers and ranchers face increasing difficulty filling their predecessors' shoes. Land prices are escalating, due to increased competition from lifestyle owners who enjoy the view but not the work, investment entities and development speculators. And regulatory compliance costs further shrink our profit margins. Oregon's expensive estate tax also jeopardizes livelihoods by forcing some families to sell off parcels of land.

To address these issues, a group of diverse organizations spent a year researching and developing the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, House Bill 3249. This legislation offers voluntary, flexible tools to help farmers and ranchers pass their land to the next generation and prevent future regulation.

HB 3249 would authorize an impact study of Oregon's estate tax on agricultural businesses, support succession planning workshops and fund conservation management plans. These plans are a proactive way for landowners to prevent environmental emergencies and avoid subsequent regulatory fallout, like the listing of a species as endangered or threatened.

Funding for permanent working lands easements and temporary covenants would also increase. Landowners would still own and

farm their land but receive compensation for voluntarily agreeing to forgo certain development rights to protect the land from being subdivided. These tools aren't for everyone, but the funds and protection they provide are a lifesaver for some.

Providing \$190,000 for the first two years creates lasting benefits for the state's economy, rural communities, and natural resources.

We urge the Oregon legislature to support this bill. Oregon's farmers, ranchers and agricultural lands cannot wait another legislative session.

John O'Keeffe  
President Oregon  
Cattlemen's Association  
Adel, Ore.  
Douglas Krahmer  
President Berries  
Northwest LLC  
St. Paul, Ore.

### Comparing potatoes and milk

The newspaper reports about the economic impact of McCain Foods processing expansion.

True — processor management and employees will prosper, but what about the potato farmer?

Will the potato farmer receive a price for the potatoes greater than his cost to make them?

Hopefully, the potato farmer will heed the warning of Mark Klompier, CEO and president of United Potato Growers of America, that "oversupplying the market kills price." Mr. Klompier has stated, "The value of correctly supplying the market cannot be overstated."

Product supply determines the product price and farmer profit or loss.

Hopefully, potato farmers are smarter than dairy farmers who send a maximum milk supply to the market and receive an unprofitable price for their milk.

All farmers should send the correct product supply to the market — a supply matching profitable demand such that the resulting product price is consistently positive for the farmer.

Dairy farmers have failed to learn this economic lesson, hopefully potato farmers will do better.

Bob Krucker  
Idaho dairy farmer  
Jerome, Idaho

### Letters policy

**Write to us:** Capital Press welcomes letters to the editor on issues of interest to farmers, ranchers and the agribusiness community.

**Letters policy:** Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as guest commentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308; or by fax to 503-370-4383.