

Blumenauer offers alternative to farm bill

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer isn't on the House ag committee, but like many in the Portland district he represents, he's keenly interested in food and farming and has some ideas about how it should be supported in the next farm bill.

Blumenauer, familiar in Congress for his bow ties and bicycle lapel pins, has spent the past two years asking what the farm bill would look like if it were written for Oregon. That is, providing budget and policy support for small and organic farms, local food systems, conservation programs, sustainable ag practices and for growing fruits and vegetables instead of providing subsidies for "cotton grown in the desert," as he put it during an Aug. 1 appearance in Portland.

He believes the farm bill, up for reauthorization in 2018, gives "too much to the wrong people to grow the wrong food in the wrong places." He said USDA spending for the type of agriculture practiced in Oregon, with 220 commodities and emerging regional food hubs, amounts to a "rounding error" in the department's \$140 billion annual budget.

Blumenauer wants to change that. He's drafted the Food and Farm Act, essentially an alternative farm bill, and plans to introduce it this fall. He also released a report <https://blumenauer.house.gov/growing-opportunities> that summarizes his findings from two years of talking to farmers, ranchers, consumers and other stakeholders.

In a presentation at Zenger Farm in East Portland, Blumenauer said a farm bill revised to reflect



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Rep. Earl Blumenauer, a Portland Democrat who represents Oregon's 3rd Congressional District, is preparing legislation to make the next farm bill more supportive of diverse crops, food systems, small and organic farms, sustainable agriculture and conservation programs. He spoke Aug. 1 at a Portland gathering.

Oregon's style of agriculture would find favor in many other farming states, including California and Washington.

He said the broad range of USDA's activities mean a revised farm bill would address problems across the country.

"The farm bill is the most important health bill," he said. "It's the most important environmental bill. It's an opportunity to link rural and small town Oregon with population centers. It's economic development. Anyone here eat? Drink water?"

"The punchline is that nobody understands the farm bill," Blumenauer con-

tinued. "The complexity, I think, in some cases is purposeful."

Organics, conservation work, fruit and vegetable "specialty crops" and small farms have been funded piecemeal, thrown financial "crumbs" in previous farm bills, he said. "We want to have a comprehensive farm bill that we offer up to have a point of departure, to change the conversation."

Blumenauer's Portland audience included Alexis Taylor, the Oregon Department of Agriculture director, and representatives from groups such as Oregon Tilth, which certifies organic operations, the Oregon Food Bank, the Oregon

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Winegrowers Association and Grand Central Cafe and Burgerville, local chains that prominently feature regionally produced food on their menus.

While generally supportive of Blumenauer's ideas on the farm bill, some in the audience questioned how the reforms will fare in an embattled Trump administration.

Blumenauer acknowledged the administration has "not displayed a lot of legislative dexterity" and said changes will have to be carried through Congress by a broad coalition.

"It's hard with this administration to know where to start," he said. Supporters should concentrate on "What we are for and why we are for it," he said.

"We need to build a coalition, build the case, and not be distracted by the next Dumpster fire."

Washington kills 2nd Smackout wolf

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A second wolf in a pack attacking cattle in northeast Washington has been killed by state wildlife managers, the Department of Fish and Wildlife said Monday.

WDFW said the department will wait and see if depredations continue before deciding whether to kill more wolves in the Smackout pack in Stevens County. The cattle the wolves have been attacking are now in a fenced pasture and are being watched by range riders, according to WDFW. The rancher has added lights and ribbons to keep wolves away.

WDFW did not release more information, continuing a policy of withholding details about the culling of the pack. The department hopes issuing bare-bones updates will quiet negative public reaction to shooting wolves, which are not federally protected in the eastern one-third of Washington.

Wildlife managers verified the Smackout pack in Stevens County had attacked at least four cattle over a 10-month period, the threshold for the department to consider lethal removal.

WDFW initiated lethal removal July 20. The following day the department determined another calf had been injured by the pack.

In the spring, the pack had eight members and an unknown number of pups. Besides the two wolves killed by WDFW, another pack member was shot and killed by a ranch employee. The wolf was attacking cattle, and WDFW determined the shooting was lawful.

WDFW also resorted to shooting wolves in 2012, 2014 and 2016 to stop attacks on

livestock. Ranchers report heavy losses and having to alter operations as an increasing number of wolves concentrate in four northeast Washington counties.

WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello declined to provide more details about the culling of the pack. It's the fourth time WDFW has used lethal removal to stop attacks on livestock since wolves began recolonizing the state a decade ago.

Martorello said that releasing information in the past while operations were still underway has inflamed members of the public, leading to threats against wildlife managers and ranchers.

"Nothing is of higher priority than human safety," he said.

In previous years, WDFW has provided more details.

"An unfortunate consequence for that level of transparency is that it can be used for harassment and threats to public safety," Martorello said.

Martorello said WDFW eventually will reveal more details, but not until a report in the fall after the grazing season. The department will provide a weekly report on the number of wolves killed, he said.

Cattle Producers of Washington President Scott Nielsen said he's concerned that WDFW's policy will leave the public unaware of the damage wolves are inflicting on livestock producers. "I would like to see that put out," he said.

Nevertheless, the department has reason to be concerned about the reaction to culling a pack, Nielsen said.

"You have some absolute loons who think you should never kill a wolf," he said. "They (WDFW) need to protect whomever from some of that lunacy."

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