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# Opinion

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## OUR VIEW

# State must resolve conflicting solar, farmland policies

Oregon has long held itself out as a “progressive” state, quick to seize on public policies meant to enhance the lives of Oregonians and improve their environment.

It passed the first bottle deposit law in the nation in 1971. As early as 1913 the Legislature laid claim to the entire Oregon coast and in 1967 enshrined public access in the Beach Bill. If it involves conserving, preserving or recycling, Oregon has been in the forefront.

What happens when two of those progressive priorities clash? That’s what’s happening across the state, but particularly in the Willamette Valley, and we’re watching with interest to see how it plays out.



Capital Press File

Solar panels installed in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Oregon has strict land use laws and policies meant to preserve farmland. In 2007 Oregon adopted a renewable energy standard that requires

25 percent of the state’s energy to be produced by renewable sources by 2025. As a result, the state offers tax credits and other incentives for the construction of

solar energy facilities.

It turns out that flat farmland is ideal for such installations. Several outfits, including a few Capital Press advertisers, have approached farmers in the Willamette Valley offering money for long-term leases to host solar arrays. They’ve found more than a few takers.

Yamhill and Marion county governments are considering barring such development on several higher-quality farmland soil classes. The restrictions would go beyond the current rules established by Oregon’s Land Conservation and Development Commission, which limit solar development on prime farmland to 12 acres.

Down in Jackson County the

county commission approved an 80-acre solar facility on high-value farmland by excepting it from Oregon’s land use goal of preserving agricultural land. That project was nixed by the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals.

We admit to being conflicted. We believe that private property owners should generally be allowed to use their land for the purpose that provides the highest return. For some, that’s leasing their land to solar energy developers.

At the same time, we know that once farmland is used for something other than farming the soil is often lost forever to agricultural production. Which suggests that all concerned move carefully and the state work out the conflicts in policy.

## OUR VIEW

# Call the fire department — there’s a cow pie on your farm

The phone rings at the fire station.

“Hello, fire department, how can I help you?”

“Yes, I’d like to report a cow pie.”

“A cow what?”

“A cow pie. You know — it’s what cows produce. Feed goes in one end, and cow pies come out the other.”

“Sir, why on earth would we at the fire department care what your cows do? Unless there’s a fire or an immediate threat to public safety, please don’t call. We have important things to do.”

“Didn’t you hear? We’re required to report dangerous emissions to the fire department. Cows poop — and they burp and pass gas — and we need to inform emergency responders like you and the police.”

While this fictitious exchange between a farmer and the fire department seems more than a little crazy, an environmental group argues that it’s important to “inform the public” about the emissions cows produce. They say that’s the law and, by golly, that’s what farmers should do — in spite the fact that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sees no reason for it.

The EPA maintains that the purpose of the law is to alert communities to dangerous chemicals that can cause an imminent threat to public safety. According to the EPA,

that would not include cow manure or flatulence.

We agree. No one in his, or her, right mind would require such a thing.

“It seems to be silliness run amok,”

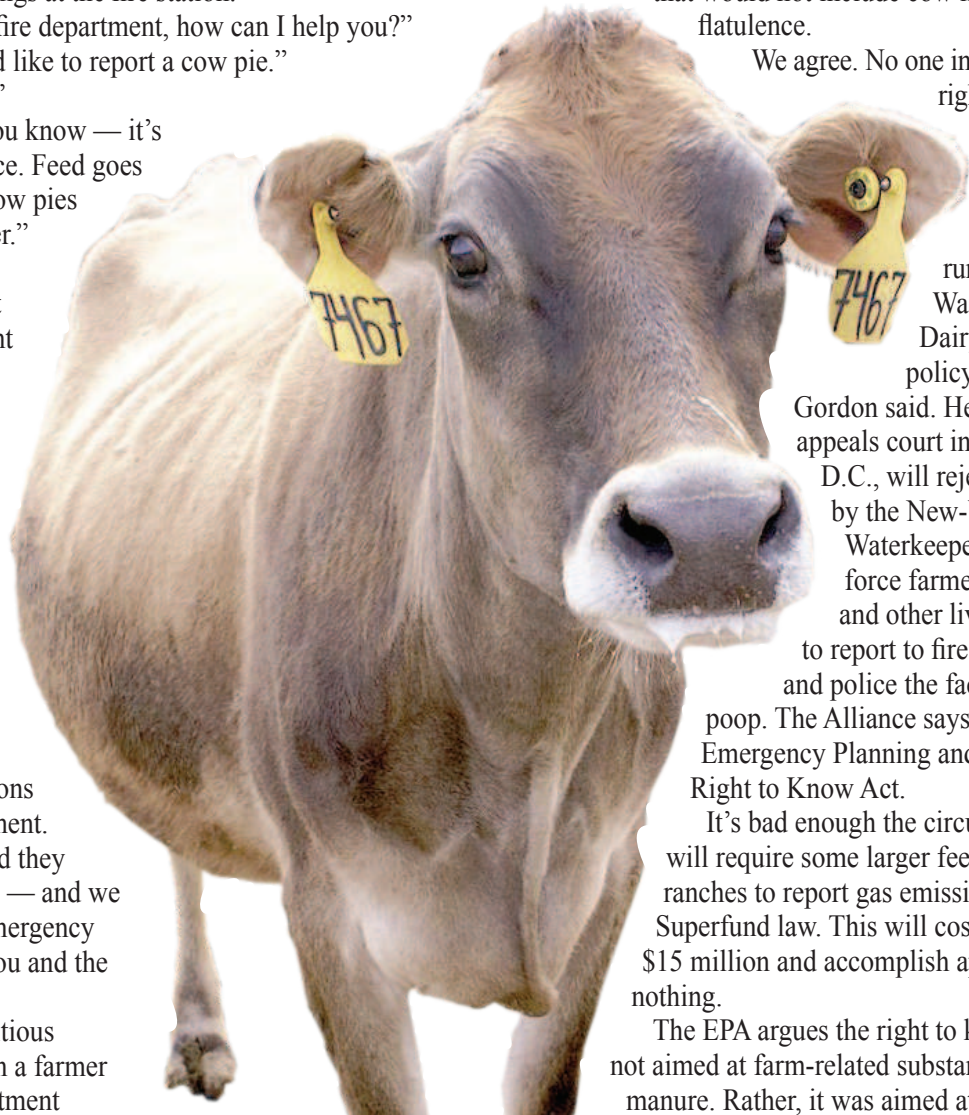
Washington State Dairy Federation policy director Jay Gordon said. He hopes an appeals court in Washington, D.C., will reject the effort by the New-York-based Waterkeeper Alliance to force farmers, ranchers and other livestock owners to report to fire departments and police the fact that cows poop. The Alliance says it’s part of the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act.

It’s bad enough the circuit court will require some larger feed lots and ranches to report gas emissions under the Superfund law. This will cost them nearly \$15 million and accomplish approximately nothing.

The EPA argues the right to know law is not aimed at farm-related substances such as manure. Rather, it was aimed at protecting communities against massive chemical leaks such as the one that occurred in 1984 in Bhopal, India, killing thousands of people.

“Any substance to the extent it is used in routine agricultural operations or is a fertilizer held for sale by a retailer to the ultimate customer” is exempt, according to the law. By our lights, that includes cow manure.

We assume the appeals court will come to understand that, too. After all, judges are used to dealing with that sort of substance, especially in this case.



# Open Campus opens doors to receiving high school diploma

By DIDGETTE MCCrackEN  
For the Capital Press

Guest  
comment  
Didgette  
McCracken



Oregon State University Open Campus in Grant County is starting a new venture in education, making a high school diploma more accessible to residents of rural Eastern Oregon and beyond.

Having taught in public schools for 20 years in rural Eastern Oregon I have seen students drop out, as well as met many parents who would like to finish up their high school diploma.

A high school diploma is the basis for other educational doors to open. My goal is to make sure if someone wants to attain that diploma it is accessible.

I had a colleague ask me

if an adult had the option of finishing a high school diploma rather than getting a General Equivalency Diploma, or GED. I honestly didn’t know the answer to that question, so I decided to find out and did some research.

After talking to folks in education and friends that were in K-12 administration I found out there was no reason this program couldn’t work. I found that community colleges focused on the GED, rather than finishing a diploma. Therefore, my focus is on those wanting to finish their high school diploma.

By partnering with a local school district I am now able to look at a student’s transcripts and determine the path to a diploma. Adults have the option to finish the requirements and graduate.

In the U.S., according to the Constitution under the Full Faith and Credit Clause, Article 4 Section 1, as a public document any high school diploma offered in the United States is recognized by the other states in the union.

This is an exciting opportunity for adults, as we can admit anyone anywhere. I know there are many out there that, for whatever reason, did not finish their diploma. Now they can. This is a program made to be accessible and flexible for anyone.

Now is a great time to start. If you know someone who is ready to finish, have them check with me. This could be a life changer for many people of all ages. This is a program that people can work on from home and at their own pace. It is accessible for people in any state.

The Open Campus program is under the extension division of Oregon State University. It is a program dedicated to degree completion, community development and college and career readiness. For more information please give a call at the Grant County Extension Office 541-575-1911.

Didgette McCracken is the Open Campus coordinator for Oregon State University in John Day, Ore.

## 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.

# Rescued by a rancher on public land

By STEWART TRUELSEN  
For the Capital Press

Guest  
comment  
Stewart Truelsen



In October a Utah rancher was driving a utility terrain vehicle to check on his cattle in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument when he came upon an elderly woman lying on a rocky, remote road. She was confused and dehydrated after being stranded for six days in one of the least explored areas of the continental United States.

Her husband was found a half mile away in an abandoned trailer near a corral. Gerald Byler, 76, and his wife, Helena, 78, of Texas were driving a rental car from Kanab, Utah, to Lake Powell on the border of Utah and Arizona. Somehow their GPS took them off course.

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is nearly 3,000 square miles of Utah backcountry with sandstone cliffs, slot canyons, hoodoos, arches, slickrock and washes. In nearby Zion or Bryce Canyon National Parks, the couple might have been found a lot sooner. But, the Grand Staircase is more remote, less-visited, and this was at the end of the tourist season.

The rental car they were driving did not have four-wheel drive, and when the road became impassable they set out on foot, spending the first night outside in cold rain. They had no water or provisions, and no idea where they were going. Mrs. Byler went on ahead for help leaving her husband behind when he could go no farther. He crafted an “SOS” out of rocks and flowers and awaited his fate.

Dell LeFevre, the rancher who found Mrs. Byler, is quoted as saying, “It was just lucky I went that way that morning.” In fact, it was lucky that any rancher was even on that public land. Environmental activists have been crusading against grazing allotments on the Grand Staircase ever since it was designated a monument in 1996.

At the time, President Bill Clinton said, “Nothing in this

proclamation shall be deemed to affect existing permits or leases for, or levels of, livestock grazing within federal lands within the monument.”

Twenty years before in 1976 the Federal Land Policy and Management Act required that federal rangelands be managed for multiple-use, including livestock grazing, other economic interests, recreation and scientific purposes, so long as there was not significant degradation of the natural resources.

Not long after that, environmental activists pledged to make the West cattle-free. They haven’t succeeded yet, but they have managed to put a lot of ranchers through the wringer with lawsuits against federal agencies and general harassment. They complain constantly to the Bureau of Land Management.

If you think cattle must be roaming all over southern Utah, you are wrong: they are not. You’d be lucky to notice more than a few cows and calves on a typical vacation within any of the red-rock parks of southern Utah. While European visitors especially love the West and the ranching way of life, Americans sometimes identify with the groups trying to shut down this business and lifestyle.

A study by Utah State University published in 2015 concluded that livestock grazing on the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument provides “significant economic benefits” to the region. The value was in the tens of millions of dollars.

The Bylers were grateful that a rancher found them before it was too late. If the cattle-free crowd had their way, he wouldn’t have come along at all.

Stewart Truelsen is a food and agriculture freelance writer and a regular contributor to the Focus on Agriculture series from the American Farm Bureau Federation.

## Readers’ views

### How much water does ag use now?

The editorial “Agriculture the most important use of water” explained the importance of Willamette Valley agriculture to our economy and the recent study done by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Water Resources Department. They state that 16 percent of the water stored by the 13 federal dams in the Willamette Valley would be used for agriculture.

The editorial does not

state the percent of water currently used. Without that figure, we cannot determine if the study is proposing a decrease, status quo, or increase in available water for irrigation. I agree that agriculture is the most important use of water, after all “no crops, no food,” but we need all the facts or we can’t make an intelligent comment to the Corps of Engineers.

Dianne Wood  
Salem, Ore.