

## People &amp; Places

## Veterinarian has dairy roots

Amber Itle uses her background to help promote ID tags for Washington cattle

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Amber Itle got her start in animal health as a 5-year-old holding cow tails for her father, Joe, a veterinarian and dairyman.

She was destined to be a dairy farmer or large-animal vet. and chose veterinary school. She went from Pennsylvania farm girl to Ivy Leaguer to treating livestock in her adopted state of Washington.

After nine years in private practice in Whatcom County, she became a field vet for the state Department of Agriculture in 2013 and was recently promoted to assistant state veterinarian.

Itle, 41, has kept her field vet position in northwest Washington. She spent a recent Monday testing chickens for bird flu at a livestock market.

On other days that week she was in Olympia at the department's headquarters, where the only bovine is an oddity, a stuffed two-headed calf collected by Itle during her career and that she has hanging in an office.

Sitting in that office, she said she misses being in the field.

"Nobody thinks they're going to grow up to be a regulatory vet," she said. "My best work is done on tailgates, not the office."

### Tracing disease

She has taken on a job that will test her communication skills in both settings. As assistant state veterinarian, Itle leads the department's animal disease traceability program. She will spearhead the department's push to fit every cow in Washington with a radio-frequency



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State Department of Agriculture assistant state veterinarian Amber Itle stands outside the department's headquarters in Olympia. Her duties include containing animal diseases.

identification device, commonly referred to as RFID tags.

The state's cattlemen do not unanimously support tracking every cow electronically. Itle said she is ready to present the arguments for RFID tags, but that ultimately it will be up to producers to embrace it, or not.

"I'm not going to drag people kicking and screaming to the water trough," Itle said. "But I think they're missing an opportunity."

According to the Washington agriculture department, only 5 percent of the state's beef cows now have RFID tags. Some 80 percent of the dairy cows do, but they are at only 40 percent of the dairies.

Itle, along with her boss, state veterinarian Brian Joseph, will have to persuade farmers that electronic tags are in their economic interest, said Washington State Dairy Federation policy director Jay Gordon.

"She's got the right background as a vet and farm girl," he said. "She has a good way of talking to producers."

### Farm founded 1816

Itle grew up on the family's 200-cow dairy in Loretto, Pa.

The dairy processes and delivers its milk and milk from neighboring dairies. The dairy has gone by the name Vale Wood Farms since 1933, but Itles have been farming in Loretto far longer. Two brothers, Swiss immigrants John and Joseph Itle — then spelled "Itel" — came to America in 1816, according to the dairy's website. John obtained 5 acres in Loretto in 1841 and began the family farm. The farm has grown to about 500 acres and still includes the original five.

Itle said she considered a career on the farm. But other family members held down the jobs, and she was accepted into the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. She credits her father with inspiring her. "I was really motivated by the passion he has," she said.

She said that she and her husband, Jason Babcock, also a Pennsylvania native, were drawn to Washington's outdoor activities such as skiing and mountain biking.

Not an attraction, but notable and relevant to Itle's position: Washington was the first

state to have a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow."

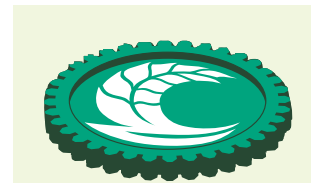
The 6 1/2-year-old Holstein was slaughtered on Dec. 9, 2003. A laboratory in England confirmed on Christmas Day that the animal, which had entered the food supply, was diseased. It took a week to trace the cow back to its birthplace, a farm in Alberta, Canada. Itle said the goal is to accomplish that task in a couple of hours.

The state records cattle movements through brand inspections and public auctions, but metal tags require writing down numbers on paper, mailing in the paperwork and typing the information into a database. The department says having that information electronically scanned would keep the database up to date and minimize the spread and economic damage of a disease outbreak.

### 'Insurance' in tags

"It's an insurance program for the producers," Itle said.

The Cattle Producers of Washington opposes mandatory RFID tags. The group



## Western Innovator

### Amber Itle

**Position:** Washington assistant state veterinarian

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in animal science from Penn State; doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine; master's degree in animal welfare from the University of British Columbia.

**Family:** Husband Jason Babcock, director of the Whatcom Community College Learning Center in the Mathematics Department. They have three children, ages 2, 5 and 7.

**Background:** Grew up on the family's dairy farm in Pennsylvania.

has several objections. The reservations include the costs of scanning equipment, the durability of electronic tags and the potential for revealing proprietary information.

The group also says that because the department has not presented a plan for tagging all cows, ranchers don't know what they're getting into if they support interim steps the department has proposed to replace some metal tags with RFIDs. The Washington Cattlemen's Association supports the interim steps, but has not taken a position on fitting all cows with RFIDs.

Itle said the transition to birth to slaughter individual electronic identification may take a decade.

"We can't do it without industry," she said. "The last thing I want to do is to force people to do something."

# Mid-Valley Winter Ag Fest returns



Mid-Valley Winter Ag Fest

A petting zoo is one of many activities offered for children at the Mid-Valley Winter Ag Fest in Rickreall, Ore.

The Third Annual Mid-Valley Winter Ag Fest returns to the Polk County Fairgrounds and Event Center in Rickreall, Ore., this weekend.

The slate of family friendly events begins at 9 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 24, when the fairgrounds and the Polk Heritage Museum open to the public, and continues through Sunday, Feb. 25, according to a press release from the organizers.

Weekend workshops include:

### Saturday, Feb. 24

2 p.m.: "Living with Your Well Water." Main Building Seminar Area. Free of charge with a \$5 adult admission to Ag Fest. Host: Polk Soil and

Water Conservation District. Bring a cup of well or domestic drinking water for confidential nitrate testing.

3-4 p.m.: "Streamside Restoration on Your Farm." Main Building Seminar Area. Free of charge w/\$5 adult admission to Ag Fest. Host: Polk and Yamhill SWCD. Tips for success and funding opportunities will be offered.

### Sunday, Feb. 25

11 a.m.-1 p.m.: "Farm Succession Planning Workshop." Main Building Seminar Area. Free of charge with a \$5 adult admission to Ag Fest. Hosts: Rogue Farm Corps (Nellie McAdams), Schwabe Williamson (Joe Hobson), Greenbelt Land

Trust (Claire Feigner) and two local farmers.

2 p.m.: "Living with Your Septic System." Main Building Seminar Area. Free of charge with a \$5 adult admission to Ag Fest. Host: Chrissy Lucas of Oregon State University Extension. Bring a cup of well or domestic drinking water for confidential nitrate testing.

3-4 p.m.: Streamside Restoration on Your Farm. Main Building Seminar Area. Host: Yamhill SWCD (Marc Bell and Josh Togstad).

Family attractions at Winter Ag Fest include an expanded 4-H petting zoo, a new balloon demonstration by Joy Entertainers, a

"G" gauge train display and a working sawmill, demonstrations all weekend long by the 4-H horse club, roping demonstrations by the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Dutch oven cookin and free face painting.

Local 4-H clubs will also offer fun contests in Building B during the weekend.

Early spring plants and advice will also be available from the OSU master gardeners.

For additional information go to [mvwagfest.com](http://mvwagfest.com).

Weekend hours are 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24, and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 25.

Adult admission is \$5. Children 18 and under are free.

## Calendar

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### Saturday, Feb. 24

Oregon Small Farms Conference 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Oregon State University LaSells Stewart Center and CH2M Hill Alumni Center, 200 LaSells Stewart Center, Corvallis, Ore. The Oregon Small Farms Conference is a daylong event geared toward farmers, agricultural professionals, food policy advocates, students and managers of farmers' markets. Twenty-seven educational sessions are offered on a variety of topics relevant to the Oregon small farmers and include a track in Spanish. Speakers include farmers, OSU Extension faculty and agribusiness representatives. Website: <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfc/registration>

### Saturday-Sunday Feb. 24-25

Mid-Valley Winter AgFest. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Polk County Fairgrounds, 520 S. Pacific Highway West, Rickreall, Ore. Join us for family-friendly events such as a farmers' market, face-painting, petting zoo and artisan vendors. Also included are an antique farm equipment display and a farm succession workshop, which begins at 11 a.m. Sunday. Cost: \$5 (cash only, please), under 18 free. Website: [mvwagfest.com](http://mvwagfest.com)

### Monday-Tuesday Feb. 26-27

Oregon Dairy Farmers Association Annual Convention. Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. SE, Salem, Ore. Website: <https://oregondairyfarmers.org>

### Tuesday, Feb. 27

Water Rights 101 Workshop. 7-8:15 p.m. Hermiston Community Center, 415 S Highway 395, Hermiston, Ore. This workshop will be led by staff from the Oregon Water Resources Department. It is designed to give participants a foundational

understanding of water rights in Oregon. Topics will include: priority date, point of diversion/appropriation, place of use, rate, duty, primary and supplemental rights, principles of beneficial use and basic irrigation district information. Cost: Free. Website: <https://oregonwatercoalition.org/events/>

### Thursday-Friday March 1-2

Idaho Hay and Forage Conference. 8:15 a.m.-5 p.m. Best Western Burley Inn, 800 N Overland Ave., Burley, Idaho. This is the annual meeting of the Idaho Hay and Forage Association and includes a trade show. Website: [idahohay.com](http://idahohay.com)

### Saturday, March 3

BEEvent Pollinator Conference. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Linn County Fair & Expo, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. The 2018 Beevent will focus on "Creating a Pollinator-Friendly Landscape." Learn how to make a more friendly habitat for pollinators. This conference is a full day of speakers, vendors and citizens who are concerned about the plight of our pollinators. Hosted by the Linn County Master Gardeners.

Visit <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/inn/beevent> for a more detailed schedule and speaker information. Hosted by Oregon Bee Project and Linn/Benton OSU Master Gardeners. Cost: \$30, with \$10 lunch option. Website: [www.linnmastergardeners.com/tickets.html](http://www.linnmastergardeners.com/tickets.html)

### Tuesday-Thursday March 6-8

FSPCA Preventive Controls for Animal Food. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Hilton Garden Inn, 1741 Harrison St. North, Twin Falls, Idaho. The new FSMA regulation requires every processing facility to have a trained resource person who has completed a specialized training course (such as this one) developed by the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance that is recognized by the FDA. Cost: \$720/Individual or \$648 per person for 2 or more. Website: <http://www.techhelp.org/events/400/fspca-animal-food-2-5-day-course-twin-falls/>

### Wednesday, March 7

Walnut Training and Breeding Update. 9:30-11:30 a.m. Nichols Ranch, 128 Nichols Road, Wheatland, Calif. Website: <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu/>

### Thursday, March 8

Part 2: Farm & Ranch Succession Planning Workshop. 6-8:30 p.m. Clackamas Small Business Development Center, 7726 SE Harmony Road, Milwaukie, Ore. This workshop can be accessed remotely from anywhere in the state. This program is offered and taught by the Clackamas Small Business Development Center, along with guest presenters such as attorneys and CPAs. In addition to informative topics and experienced ag professionals, courses include confidential, one-on-one business counseling. A complimentary light dinner will start each evening at 6 p.m. To register, call 503-594-0738. Cost: Free. Website: <http://bit.ly/2CX1jvl>

### Friday, March 9

Farm, Ranch, and Forest Succession Planning Workshop in Douglas County. 5-8 p.m. Lookingglass Grange, 7426 Lookingglass Road, Roseburg, Ore. To help growers take the next step in planning, Douglas County Farm Bureau, OSU Extension, and Rogue Farm Corps are coordinating a Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop. Cost: Free (dinner included). RSVP: to Nellie McAdams: [nellie@roguefarmcorps.org](mailto:nellie@roguefarmcorps.org), 971-409-6806

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