

Squires: ‘A very effective advocate for the grain industry’

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Ag background

Glen Wittwer Squires grew up on a small farm outside Salt Lake City. His family raised fruit, hard red winter wheat, hay and triticale.

In high school, he helped start an FFA program, becoming the chapter’s vice president. One of the projects he worked on involved fundraising to build a greenhouse.

Squires married his wife, Charlotte, in 1983. They now have five children and seven grandchildren. Squires and his family like to go camping and canoeing, riding horses in the mountains and spending time together outdoors.

He received an associate degree in transportation management and went to work for a trucking company, eventually becoming operations manager.

After about a decade, he wanted to return to agriculture. He got a degree in agricultural business at Utah State University, then attended graduate school at Washington State University.

He studied under now-emeritus agricultural economics professor Ken Casavant, who focused on transportation.

“A real solid guy,” Casavant told the Capital Press. “He did the work I asked him and many times he would do more than what I asked him.”

Squires’ thesis was on Canadian competition in peas and lentils. He and Casavant testified before the U.S. International Trade Commission during an investigation into the competition.

A trade commission representative visited Squires at WSU. He sat in Squires’ office, looked around at the stacks of paper, and said, “You’ve got more information about this case right here than we do in Washington, D.C.”

The grain commission, then called the Washington Wheat Commission, later reached out to Casavant about studying Canadian feed wheat coming into the U.S.

Casavant had Squires work on the study.

Tom Mick, then CEO of the wheat commission, had wanted to bring an economist on board to work on behalf of the industry. Squires applied for the position and was hired in 1993. He became CEO in 2012, upon Mick’s retirement.

Squires never anticipated becoming CEO. He was just glad to have a job, he said, noting he had returned to school as a non-traditional student, married with children.



Photos by Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires talks with staff members Dec. 5 at the front desk of the commission office in downtown Spokane.



Yasuo Sasaki, executive director of the Japan Flour Millers Association, and Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission, sign a letter of intent to work together to develop club wheat varieties May 2 on the Washington State University campus in Pullman, Wash.

“It was a big leap of faith to quit my job and go back and spend five years in school, not knowing what was on the other end,” Squires said. “I feel just absolutely blessed and honored to have gotten a job in the wheat industry and work for farmers.”

Casavant believes Squires’ impact has been “substantial.” When decision-makers in Washington, D.C., have questions, they call Squires to ask how legislation might impact growers, he said.

“He’s a very effective advocate for the grain industry,” Casavant said. “He unabashedly identifies the needs of the farmer and makes them perfectly clear, and also knows how to present them in a fashion that can hopefully get responses.”

Transparency

Besides keeping wheat

farmers informed about all aspects of the industry, Squires most enjoys working with customers, and then seeing them buy more Pacific Northwest wheat as a result.

“That’s pretty fun, pretty cool,” he said with a grin.

It comes down to trust, he said, pointing to WSU winter wheat breeder Arron Carter’s popular presentation during the North Asia Marketing Conference in Malaysia in August. Buyers liked hearing directly from a wheat breeder, Squires said.

“Things like that bring credibility to what we’re doing and the kind of wheat we have,” he said. “We’re very open about it. Buyers appreciate the transparency. We don’t try to hide any information. If it’s too high a protein, we’re going to tell them so they can be prepared. If it’s too low, we tell them.”

Trust is important as the

commission funds research, educates the public about issues like transportation, communicates with legislators, and maintains good relationships with overseas buyers.

“People can count on us for what we say we’ll do — the information we provide is credible,” Squires said. “We’re not here one day, gone the next.”

Keeping everybody on the same page is a win-win scenario for all, he added.

“Ultimately, all of those things ripple all the way back down to benefit the producer,” he said.

Rising costs

Wheat farmers’ biggest need is a higher price to cover their increased costs, Squires said.

Transportation providers can just increase their rates, he said, citing an example in Kansas where railroad

companies use the same railcars and railroad to ship sorghum to the same points, but charge more for wheat.

“Because they can,” Squires said. “They can charge whatever they want.”

The same challenges exist in trucking and barges, Squires said.

“Everybody’s costs go up, but the farmer, he’s the price-taker,” Squires said.

Quality is the Pacific Northwest region’s biggest asset when it comes to wheat, Squires said. There are no complaints from overseas buyers, he noted.

“Invariably, what they say is, ‘Just keep doing what you’re doing. If you want to get it better, that’s great. But just don’t go down,’” he said.

Bang for the buck

The Washington Grain Commission works closely with buyers in overseas markets and U.S. Wheat Associates, the international marketing arm of the industry.

The commission supports national wheat interests, while protecting growers in the Pacific Northwest region and Washington.

One worry is the USDA’s Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development programs, on which the U.S. wheat industry relies to bolster overseas marketing efforts.

“I believe we need to set aside funding to be able to account for lost federal dollars, if that happens — which it could,” Squires said. “If we don’t have to use it, that’s great. But if we do, then we won’t have to miss a beat in terms of promoting.”

The grain commis-

sion also wants to make sure Washington’s farmers are on equal footing with wheat farmers from competing countries in overseas markets.

“We can’t isolate ourselves and say, ‘We’ll just go sell our wheat to Zimbabwe or something,’” Squires said. “We’ve got to have good relations with the people who are buying our wheat.”

Different elements

When he’s not working for Washington wheat farmers, Squires plays a leadership role on the Grizzly District committee of Boy Scouts of America.

Kids like adventure and like to be challenged — physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally, Squires said. That’s where the scouts come in.

“When they’re outdoors, they have to face different elements, they learn skills,” he said. “The whole merit badge program has all of these different opportunities for them to explore different aspects of life.”

An Eagle Scout, Squires has been involved in the organization since he was 12. This summer, he oversaw the week-long encampment of 2,800 people from all over the region for a jamboree, offering 30 to 40 merit badges and 40 different activities.

Squires sees parallels between his work with the scouts and his work advocating for farmers.

“You’ve got lots of different personalities in a scout troop, and you have to get along with everybody,” he said. “If you’re going on a 50-mile hike, everybody’s got to pull their weight and you never know what’s going to happen around the next corner. In the wheat industry, you have to keep going forward despite uncertainty, weather conditions, the things you run into.”

A good listener

“He’s a leader, but he’s not afraid to listen, which is actually a pretty rare combination,” said Dana Herron, a departing commission board member and co-founder of Tri-State Seed in Connell, Wash.

Herron credits Squires with the ability to see long-term, and charting the consistent direction of the commission.

“The Washington Grain Commission has positioned itself to be the leading commission representing wheat worldwide,” Herron said. “Everyone knows it; everybody that doesn’t admit it, still knows it. He’s done that good of a job.”

Auction: Lost Valley drew public controversy even before its 2017 opening

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2,000 cows, or roughly 20 percent of the total herd. The remaining 8,000 cows will be auctioned by February, Fuller said.

Lost Valley courted significant public controversy even before opening in early 2017. Environmental groups vehemently opposed the dairy, which was expected to generate 187 million gallons of wastewater and manure annually.

Despite concerns about air and water pollution, the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality jointly issued a CAFO permit for Lost Valley on March 31, 2017. The agencies promised the permit would require “the most extensive monitoring of any CAFO permitted facility to date.”

Almost immediately, Lost Valley began racking up violations related to waste management and stor-

age. Regulators are now in the process of revoking the dairy’s permit.

Wym Matthews, CAFO program manager for the Department of Agriculture, said the sale of Lost Valley does not influence the agency’s effort to revoke the dairy’s permit. A revocation hearing is set for Feb. 19 before an administrative law judge.

“We’re still moving forward with that process,” Matthews said, though he

added that the trustee and current manager are currently operating the facility in compliance with the permit requirements.

Fuller said Lost Valley is continuing negotiations to reach a settlement with the state. She said the dairy has hit or exceeded all benchmarks set by the state for cleanup, and “data from regular groundwater monitoring events and analysis by environmental experts has and continues to show that the

dairy has not caused harm to public drinking water supplies or the environment.”

A coalition of environmental groups — including the Center for Food Safety, Center for Biological Diversity, Food & Water Watch, Animal Legal Defense Fund and Humane Voters Oregon — also filed on Dec. 21 to intervene in support of the state’s effort to revoke the CAFO permit at Lost Valley.

“Petitioners ... seek to address the harms of indus-

trial animal feeding operations, including industrial mega-dairies, to Oregonians and Oregon’s environment, including through threats to air and water quality and human health from pollution, economic impacts to family farmers, and poor animal welfare,” the petition reads. “Petitioners have been engaged in the permitting of Lost Valley since it was first proposed, and commented along with thousands of their Oregon members.”

Canola: ‘Coexistence begins with equality. The problem is defining equality’

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There’s been a lot of legislative interest in canola in the past, though, so it’s possible lawmakers may nonetheless pass legislation next year that will point ODA in a different direction, she said. “They will do with that what they will.”

Farmers who want to grow canola and those who fear it will disrupt specialty

seed production have been grappling with the same questions for years without much progress, said Hanson.

“Nobody in the room is going to get everything they wanted,” Hanson said.

Rather than wrestle with broad philosophical concepts about co-existence between canola and related crops, the rule-making process will instead focus on narrow questions, such as

establishing an exclusion zone border and rules for isolation distances between crops, Taylor said.

The Willamette Valley Oilseed Producers Association, which favors expanded canola production, doesn’t plan to ask lawmakers to introduce any bills on its behalf next year, said Anna Scharf, the group’s president.

The organization would rather proceed with ODA’s

rule-making process than seek a resolution in the Capitol, which can yield unpredictable results, Scharf said. “Coexistence begins with equality. The problem is defining equality.”

The Willamette Valley Specialty Seed Association, which wants stronger controls over canola, would be “negligent” to vow not to seek recourse through the Legislature if the group

believes ODA’s rules will be too lax, said Charles Ortiz, the group’s president.

Ortiz said he personally favors farmers being allowed to grow canola but he doesn’t know if the Willamette Valley can sustain the level of production that canola proponents want.

Greg Loberg, WVSSA’s public relations chairman, said he has qualms about ODA’s regulations being

able to anticipate the various coexistence problems that may arise.

When complex conflicts arise among specialty seed producers in WVSSA, they will usually informally work out a “gentlemen’s agreement” specific to the issue at hand — an approach that’s tough to emulate with regulation, Loberg said. “We can’t write rules for every situation.”