

Doerflers win Agriculturist of the Year award from Oregon Aglink

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

SILVERTON, Ore. — Dave and Rita Doerfler are not the types to go around seeking the spotlight. The couple, of Ioka Farms in Silverton, has spent decades serving Oregon agriculture on numerous state boards and embracing progressive farming practices to conserve soil and water. Yet they are greatly humble when it comes to receiving recognition. “It takes everybody working together to keep agriculture alive in Oregon,” Rita Doerfler said. “You don’t want to forget those people who have come through all these years with you, and have done a lot.” Oregon Aglink, a nonprofit organization dedicated to agricultural outreach and education, recently named the Doerflers as the 2019 Agriculturists of the Year. They will be honored Nov. 22 during the group’s annual Denim and Diamonds dinner and fundraiser in Salem.

“They just give back to the community,” said Mallory Phelan, executive director of Oregon Aglink. “They’re very forward-thinking people, thinking about where agriculture is going and how they want to help shape it.” Ioka Farms traces its roots back to 1877, when the land was bought by Dave Doerfler’s grandfather and great-grandfather. The family originally raised livestock and grew small grains in the densely green Silverton Hills, though the farm has since evolved to mostly grass seed and hazelnuts, with some Christmas trees and timberland. The name Ioka comes from an American Indian word meaning “a thing of loveliness, or a cherished piece of land noted for its beauty, health and natural fertility.” Neat rows of hazelnut trees greet visitors upon arriving at the farm, irrigated with drip lines to save water and spaced with grass to prevent soil erosion. “We’re in what we call highly erodible (land),” Dave Doerfler explained. “It’s not



George Plaver/Capital Press

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flat. Water runs downhill. So with it, if soil is available to be moved with water, it will do that. It’s hard to get it back up on top of the hill.” In addition to using cover crops, the Doerflers have long adopted no-till farming in ryegrass and fescue. They also grow small grains, such as wheat and oats, in rotation with grass seed to replenish soil nutrients and break up diseases.

“When you don’t know what you’re doing, why, you just try a lot of different things,” Dave Doerfler said with a laugh. Before transitioning to field crops, Dave Doerfler’s father, Alex, raised prize-winning Duroc hogs on the farm. The farm office contains several framed photos and cartoons of Alex Doerfler and his champion Durocs, including one with

the caption, “Fellows, we’ve got to get ‘em big.” From there, the farm began specializing in turkey hatching eggs. However, Dave Doerfler said Oregon’s turkey industry would soon decline as farmers in the South and Midwest began raising the birds year-round in temperature-controlled barns, leading to overproduction and depressed prices. At the time, the farm had just one working horse, a Persian named Fox. A 10-year-old Dave would encourage his father to buy their first combine and begin farming grass seed. Today, Ioka Farms is well into its sixth generation with up to a dozen family members still working for the company. “It’s been a family affair,” Rita Doerfler says. Dave, 79, and Rita, 78, married in 1961. Two years later, Dave graduated with a general degree in agriculture from Oregon State University. They have both served on numerous state and local boards — Dave spent two, four-year terms on the Oregon Board of Agriculture

from 1988 to 1996, and Rita was one of the founding members of Oregon Women for Agriculture in 1969. They have tackled a plethora of key issues over the years, such as field burning regulations, water management and right-to-farm legislation. “It’s a very special part of being in the community, I think,” Rita Doerfler said. “You’re going to lose a lot if (farmers) don’t speak up. ... You don’t have to be radical about the whole thing, but you can keep people informed about the process of agriculture, and why we’re doing some of the things we’re doing.” Phelan, with Oregon Aglink, said one of the most important voices to shape the agriculture industry belong to the growers themselves. “A lot of organizations exist to try and elevate the voices of the growers,” Phelan said. “We really appreciate when there are folks like Dave and Rita who are willing to be a voice for their industry, in the most authentic way they can.”

Washington tallies carbon; agriculture contributes 6.6%

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Belching livestock, decomposing manure and cultivated cropland emitted about 6.6% of Washington’s greenhouse gases in 2017, the Washington Department of Ecology reported Tuesday. The agriculture sector contributed 6.5 million metric tons to the state’s release of 97.5 million metric tons of gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. Washington’s total output was down slightly from 2016, but remained more than double the state’s aspiration to cut emissions to 45.25 million metric tons by mid-century. That will require cutting the equivalent of the greenhouse gases emitted by all vehicles, ships, planes and trains, as well as by agriculture. Still, Ecology said in a statement it was “troubling” that the goal might not be aggressive enough to fight climate change. The department said it will produce

before the end of the year a report with new recommendations on cutting greenhouse gases. “What we’re seeing is that our state’s carbon reduction strategies are beginning to pay off,” Ecology Director Maia Bellon said. “Even with the best economy in the nation, Washington was able to hold the line on emissions, but we need to do more and do it faster.” Ecology’s report offers a prelude to a more detailed inventory due out early next year on the sources of greenhouse gases. The inventories track progress toward slashing in half by 2050 the emissions released in 1990. Lawmakers enshrined the aspiration in state law in 2008, promising Washington “will do its part to reach global climate change stabilization levels.” Agriculture’s output of greenhouse gas emissions has remained fairly steady since 1990, at between 6.3 million and 7 million metric tons. Agricultural emissions in 2017 declined by about 6% from 2016, according to Ecology.

Early season snowfall, precipitation lagging across Oregon

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

SALEM — A dry start to the fall season is raising some concerns among state water managers about the possibility of drought returning to Oregon, especially in the Rogue and Umpqua river basins. Overall precipitation is measuring well below normal for the water year that began Sept. 30, according to the latest water conditions report from the Oregon Water Resources Department. The deficit ranges from nearly an inch below normal east of the Cascades, to more than 5 inches below normal in parts of southwest Oregon.

While no part of the state is currently in drought, the agency’s report states that could change in the coming weeks unless there is a marked change in weather patterns. Statewide, average precipitation at sites measured by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is just 45% of normal across the state. The highest totals as of Nov. 18 were in northeast Oregon, including 71% in the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins and 67% in the Grande Ronde, Powder, Burnt and Imnaha basins.

The lowest totals are in southwest and south-central Oregon, at 26% of normal in the Rogue and Umpqua basins; 24% in the Klamath Basin; and 21% in the Goose Lake and Lake County area. The Willamette Basin — home of the state’s leading agricultural counties by value of products — is trending right in the middle at 45% of normal. Stream flows are still averaging slightly above normal across Oregon, thanks to drought-busting record snowfall in February and heavy rains in April that bolstered supplies over the summer. However, the report cautions that more is needed to maintain that positive momentum.

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The largest source of emissions attributed to agriculture was the 2.6 million metric tons of methane belched by cattle, sheep and goats. Decomposing manure released 1.6 million metric tons of methane and nitrous oxide, and farming activities such as tilling and fertilizing emitted another 2.2 million metric tons of greenhouse gases, according to Ecology. Ecology uses information such as the number of livestock, the amount of fertilizer applied and acres cultivated to make its estimates. The numbers have varied only slightly since 1990. Emissions from farm equipment fall under the residential, commercial and industrial category.

Water reservoirs below average

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Coming off a summer of moderate drought with some crop losses, the five Cascade Mountain reservoirs serving irrigators in the Yakima Basin have less water than normal and the winter snowpack outlook is uncertain. “We are in an El Nino neutral which would mean normal conditions and we would be fairly optimistic. No one has been calling for a dry or mild winter so we have no cause to think it will be,” said Chris Lynch, hydrologist for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Yakima. However, he added, a warm water body off the Gulf of Alaska, reminiscent of one there prior to the drought of 2015, could result

in more moderate temperatures and less snow. The U.S. Climate Prediction Center says odds are better for temperatures slightly above normal than normal or below normal through winter while precipitation is at an equal chance of being above or below normal, Lynch said. Keechelus, Kachess, Cle Elum, Rimrock and Bumpington reservoirs, with a total capacity of 1,065,400 acre-feet of water, reached a low of 138,000 acre-feet on Oct. 15, which was 47% below normal for that time of year. It compared with 238,000 acre-feet a year earlier, a 30-year average of 261,000 acre-feet and a record low of 51,680 in 1973. “The 138,000 is a drought year type of low. Anything below 155,000 is kind of a drought year. In 2015, we

were at 107,000 and we were on a trajectory to end lower than that this year but rain in September and October bailed us out,” Lynch said. The reservoirs were at 207,000 acre-feet on Nov. 18, which was 40% below normal. The reservoirs provide irrigation water for 464,000 acres of mostly farmland along 175 miles of the 214-mile-long Yakima River in the Kittitas and Yakima valleys. The valleys hold some of the state’s richest farmland abundant in tree fruit, hay, wine grapes, hops and many other crops, cattle and dairies. It’s also the region most vulnerable to drought, the last being in 2015.

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