



Mehrten Homer of Painted Hills Natural Beef feeds his breeding stock high on a hill in Fossil, Oregon. Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

RESISTING ANTIBIOTICS

Some ranchers avoid the controversy surrounding antibiotic use in livestock through husbandry practices

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

FOSSIL, Ore. — When fifth-generation cattle rancher Mehrten Homer first brought antibiotic-free beef to market at Price Chopper, an Oregon grocery chain now called Market of Choice, he recalls the man at the meat counter laughed. Bigger and cheaper beef sells, the man said. Surely no one would pay more for labels like “never given antibiotics.”

But Homer and his family didn't give up. And in time, their customers were hooked.

Today, Painted Hills Natural Beef in Wheeler County, Ore., a cooperative Homer and six other ranching families founded in 1996, is one of the Northwest's most recognized beef brands.



Mehrten Homer

Each week, they process 500 cattle — producing about 422,430 pounds of steak, roasts, hamburger and other products. Combined, the beef weighs more than an average railroad locomotive.

“I don't know anything else but cattle,” said Homer. He touched his cowboy hat with a sandpaper finger. “It was all I knew then. It's still all I know.”

Consumer demand for antibiotic-free meat has climbed as health messages have reached buyers. The shift reflects an effort to slow the spread of antibiotic-resistant “superbugs” — bacteria that have developed immunity to one or more antibiotics, claiming animals’

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Painted Hills Natural Beef

Founded: 1996

President: Mehrten Homer

Main office: Fossil, Oregon

Membership: Seven ranch families within Oregon

Weekly production: 500 cattle or approximately 422,000 pounds of meat/meat products.

Annual production: 22 million pounds, equivalent in weight to more than 52 blue whales, by comparison.

Overall industry production: 27.3 billion pounds in 2019



Capital Press graphic

Agriculture applauds new WOTUS rule

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Groups representing farmers and ranchers are hailing a final rule that provides a clear definition of Waters of the United States under the Clean Water Act.

The new Navigable Waters Protection Rule replaces the Obama administration's controversial 2015 WOTUS rule, which expanded federal jurisdiction to nearly all waterways and many areas that only temporarily hold water.

The new rule, announced Jan. 23, identifies four categories of waters that are federally regulated under the Clean Water Act:

- The territorial seas and traditional navigable waters.

- Perennial and intermittent tributaries.
- Certain lakes, ponds and impoundments.
- Wetlands adjacent to jurisdictional waters.

It also details waters not subject to federal control — including features that only contain water in direct response to rainfall; groundwater; many ditches including farm and roadside ditches; prior converted cropland; farm and stock watering ponds; and waste treatment systems.

The American Farm Bureau Federation said the new rule achieves important regulatory oversight while allowing farmers to farm.

“Farmers and ranchers care about clean water and preserving the land, which are essen-



EOMG File

The Trump administration has announced a new Waters of the United States rule.

tial to producing healthy food and fiber and ensuring future generations can do the same,” Zippy Duvall, AFBF president, said.

“That's why we support the new clean water rule. It

provides clarity and certainty, allowing farmers to understand water regulations without having to hire teams of consultants and lawyers,” he said.

National Farmers Union

expressed appreciation for the clarity in the new rule but also urged the administration to ensure the availability of clean water for future generations.

“Family farmers and ranchers have been confused by ambiguous water regulations for many years,” Roger Johnson, NFU president, said.

“Now that we have a more precise definition of WOTUS, we hope that farmers will better understand which kinds of water are subject to federal authority and which are not,” he said.

But farmers also need access to clean, safe water for their families, their farms and their communities, he said.

“When regulating natural resources, EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers must bal-

ance certainty for farmers, ranchers and property owners with protections for our water supply,” he said.

National Association of Wheat Growers said the rule provides more clarity in Clean Water Act applicability and definition of Waters of the U.S.

“Today's announcement is welcome news to America's wheat producers who've dealt with years of regulatory uncertainty,” Ben Scholz, NAWG president, said.

“Farmers are dependent on protecting our natural resources for safe and reliable water to grow crops and for the communities that farmers are a part of. To do so, we

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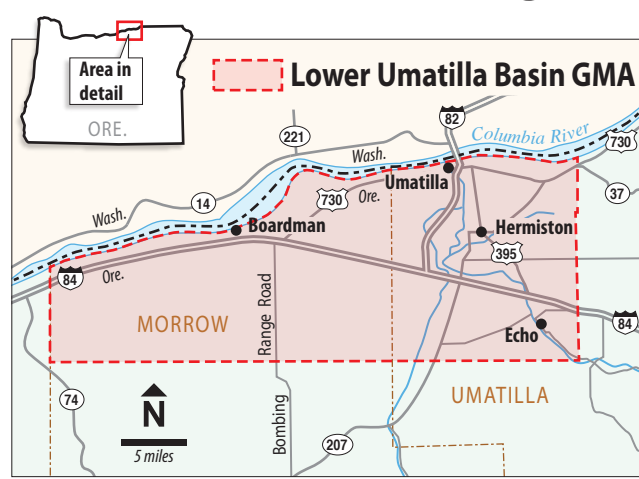
Bill would create task force to address groundwater nitrates in NE Oregon

Groups petitioning EPA for emergency action

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

SALEM — Oregon lawmakers will consider a bill during the upcoming legislative session aimed at curbing elevated levels of groundwater nitrates in the Lower Umatilla Basin.

State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, recently introduced Senate Bill 1562, which calls for the Oregon Department of Agriculture to form a new task force that would review existing data and recommend solutions to the area's decades-old



Source: Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

groundwater problem.

The Lower Umatilla Basin in northeast Oregon is home to some of the state's most productive farmland, with thousands of grazing cattle and vast fields of irrigated

crops. But rising levels of groundwater nitrates could pose a public health threat if left unchecked.

Regulators declared the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management

Area in 1990 to identify and mitigate sources of nitrogen contamination, including from agricultural operations.

Hansell, whose Senate district includes the 550-square-mile management area spanning parts of Umatilla and Morrow counties, said his bill builds on work that is already being done in the basin. It allocates \$250,000 to ODA for the inter-agency task force that would evaluate strategies for reducing groundwater nitrates.

“It will go directly to the Umatilla Basin,” Hansell said. “We're not asking for a multi-groundwater study throughout the state.”

The task force would include representatives of ODA and the state Department of Environmental Qual-

ity, as well as two members of the local management area committee and three members at large — one of whom must be a farmer or rancher with experience irrigating and fertilizing cropland.

Hansell said the funding was originally proposed in ODA's 2019-21 budget.

“There was no opposition to it, but it did not get funded,” Hansell said. “It was brought to my attention how important that would have been to the Umatilla Basin.”

Tests of groundwater wells show nitrates in parts of the management area exceed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's “maximum contaminant level” of 10 milligrams per liter. Exposure

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