



FLYING FARMER

One man's journey to reach new heights on the farm and in the clouds

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — Bryan Harper climbed across the wing of his 1943 T-6 warbird and slipped into the cockpit.

The engine went *pttt pttt pttttt* and started. The plane rested on a grassy airstrip on Harper's farmland. Harper was preparing to do a surprise "fly-over" for a friend's wedding.

Harper is a fifth-generation farmer, vice chairman of the Oregon Board of Agriculture and former president of the Lane County Farm Bureau. He's also a pilot, former sprinter for the University of Oregon and one of only a few young Black farmers in the state.

"Sometimes people are surprised I'm a farmer," said Harper. "I guess I don't fit whatever mold they expect."

No regrets

Harper said people often assume with his sprawling array of airplanes, titles and awards, his life must have been comfortable.

But those close to Harper say it has been far from easy and his path to farming far from certain.

"At one time, I tried really hard not to be a farmer. But here I am, full circle, no regrets," he said.

'Little rural heart'

Harper was born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1988 to Rose, who is from a small village, and Warren, a fourth-generation farmer from Junction City, Ore.

Harper's parents met through mutual friends when Rose was visiting the U.S., maintained a long-distance relationship and married in 1987.

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Photos by Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Bryan Harper with his T-6 World War II-era plane on Strauch Field, at the western edge of his property

BRYAN HARPER

Age: 32

Occupation: Farmer, hazelnut grower

Education: B.S. in psychology, University of Oregon, 2012

Family: Warren Harper (dad), Rose Harper (mom), Elvis Harper (broth-

er), Billy Harper (brother), Jeff Craig (brother), Pelinda Latimer (sister), Molly Harper (sister), Tiffany Monroe (sister)

Hobbies: flying, collecting old airplanes and cars, backcountry camping, listening to music, running, spending time with friends and family

Website: Facebook page

Ranchers hit hard by wolves during spring grazing

Just one of six investigations confirmed by state wildlife officials

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

PENDLETON, Ore. — A ranching couple in northeast Oregon says they are frustrated and heartbroken after struggling to protect their cattle from wolves earlier this spring.

Cassie Miller and her husband, John Petersen, graze several hundred mother cows and their calves on roughly 10,000 acres of spring pasture owned by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in the Blue Mountains east of Pendleton.

Most of Oregon's 158 documented wolves live in the state's northeast corner, including the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Despite camping out with the herd at night, hiring a range rider during the day and maintaining a human presence around the clock, Miller said they are 19 calves short after moving the livestock over to their summer range July 1.

Miller, a fifth-generation rancher from Union, Ore., said they have only been able to find six dead calves on the large allotment — a mix of grassy meadows and timber stringers. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife investigated each case,

but could only confirm one of the calves was killed by wolves from the nearby Mount Emily pack on May 13.

Two others were ruled "probable" wolf attacks, and three were "possible/unknown," since most of the remains had already been eaten by scavengers.

While biologists did find evidence of wolves in the area — such as tracks, scat and coordinates for at least one wolf fitted with a GPS collar in February — they cannot know for sure what killed the livestock unless there is enough of the carcass left intact, leaving ranchers like Miller in a difficult position.



Courtesy of Cassie Miller

District biologists for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in Pendleton investigated whether this calf was killed by wolves May 13 on tribal land in the Blue Mountains. The incident was later confirmed.

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USDA revives mandatory radio tags for cattle

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The USDA has reopened the debate over electronically following cows, proposing to require adult cattle and bison moving between states to have radio tags by 2023.

The agency will take comments until Oct. 5 on mandatory radio-frequency identification, commonly known as RFID, according to a notice Monday in the Federal Register.

RFID tags and electronic records are an upgrade over visual tags and paper files, enabling state veterinarians to more quickly retrace a sick animal's movements, the USDA argues.

The agency withdrew the same proposal in 2019, partly because segments of the cattle industry complained the electronic tags are expensive, intrusive and unproven.

R-CALF CEO Bill Bullard, whose

ranchers' organization sued last year to stop the mandate, said Monday he wasn't surprised that USDA resurrected the proposal.

"We've never doubted their absolute quest to force this upon the industry, whether it's needed or not," he said.

The USDA currently allows cattle and bison with metal tags or radio tags to enter interstate commerce. The agency asserts that electronic tags are better in a crisis, however.

Metal tags can be wrongly transcribed by inspectors and paper records can take time to search, according to the agency.

"RFID tags and electronic record systems provide significant advantage over metal tags to rapidly and accurately read and retrieve traceability information," according to the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The USDA proposes to make RFID tags mandatory effective Jan. 1, 2023, for cattle and bison older than 18 months. The USDA would grandfather in metal tags put on cattle and bison before that date.

Cattlemen want to know who's going to pay for the electronic system, said Ethan Lane, vice president of government affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

"The main concern for the producer is whether it's my buck or somebody else's buck," he said.

Cattlemen are also concerned about whether the records collected from their operations will be kept confidential, Lane said.

"There are a lot of questions to be answered here," he said. "We're glad to see something in writing, so our producers can weigh in on that process and make their opinions known."

R-CALF supports ranchers who voluntarily embrace RFID tags, but adamantly opposes requiring them. Its suit last year responded to a USDA "fact sheet" outlining plans to mandate radio tags.

At the USDA's request, a federal judge in Wyoming in February dismissed the lawsuit. The judge agreed with the USDA that the suit was pointless because the "fact sheet" no longer represented the agency's policy.

R-CALF did not let the lawsuit go. It filed a new complaint in April, alleging the USDA continued to harbor plans to force ranchers to use radio tags.

"This agency is dead-set on controlling independent cattle ranchers, and this is their chief tool," Bullard said.

