

Biden: Farmers tell President their hopes, fears in their own words

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Our priorities include:

- Enhancing trade opportunities around the world for U.S. dairy.
- Ensuring that borders remain open to foreign-born labor markets and that we enhance workers' abilities to remain employed in the U.S.
- Encouraging long-term prosperity at the farm and processing plant levels.
- Working with ag as a solution, not a primary cause, of climate change.
- Protecting dairy in the very dependable school lunch program as a key source of protein and nutrition.

Dairy farmers remain committed to feeding the world with safe and nutritious food, and we see ourselves as catalysts of change. So, while the path to solving these issues may be complex, dairy farmers stand ready to collaborate and co-create a future where U.S. agriculture remains strong and a key player in solutions for a healthier globe. We look forward to working with your cabinet choice, Secretary Tom Vilsack and your administration, to keep U.S. agriculture thriving.

— John Brubaker is a Buhl, Idaho, dairy farmer, vice chairman of Dairy West and a member of the farm leadership team serving the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

POTATOES

I'm a third-generation potato farmer who sees much potential in her community and state. But that potential remains at risk without thoughtful, proactive leadership at the national level to address a range of agricultural issues, including:

- Competitive trade agreements: Idaho agriculture depends in large part on exports. Market access will help support a sustainable ag economy in Idaho for the next generation.
- Reliable infrastructure: It's time to repair our transportation networks and build fast broadband to reach all our communities. Reliable networks, both physical and digital, will help the U.S. stay competitive in a global market.
- H-2A modernization: The current H-2A guestworker program doesn't meet the needs of Idaho agriculture. Even targeted changes, like a long-term solution to the Adverse Effect Wage Rates, would help our farmers significantly.
- Regulatory reform: Regulation is rarely a silver bullet and often a dangerous trap. Proceed with caution and take the time to involve the ag community in the review process.

None of these concerns are new, but their urgency is becoming greater as we see other nations growing more competitive. Do not miss this opportunity to ensure a healthy future for U.S. agriculture, which benefits the whole country.

— Britt Raybould is a Rexburg, Idaho, potato farmer and president of the National Potato Council.

TREE FRUIT

Farmers and ranchers, big and small, are on the production floor of the American economy and are filled with trepidation about the incoming Biden administration. On many issues we fear that favorable advancements made under (President Donald) Trump will be erased or go backwards under a Biden presidency. Increased regulation of agriculture will negatively impact our bottom line and competitiveness in a brutal global marketplace. The legacies of past Democratic administrations' regulatory regimes is the euthanasia of small and independent farms, which favors the ascension of corporate agriculture and foreign ownership of American farmland.

Labor is the single most expensive input for many specialty crops such as apples, cherries, hops and berries that Washington state leads the nation in. Dairy, wine grapes, pears and produce are also labor-intensive. Additional regulation and the wrong changes to the H2A pro-



Britt Raybould



Washington FFA

The Washington FFA state officer team. From left are Secretary Gunnar Aune, Treasurer Alissa Whitaker, President Cole Baerlocher, Vice President Lauren Stubbs, Reporter Haley Gilman and Sentinel Tysen White.

gram will increase costs and reduce the availability of the workers farmers need to produce these crops.

Dams and water projects make America great by producing clean, reliable hydro-power and making Western America one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. The wrong modifications to regulatory regimes such as the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Waters of the U.S. and a host of others can be devastating to all farmers and the ability of our irrigation districts to deliver water in an efficient and reliable manner.

In irrigated agriculture I have great confidence in our local and regional people at the Bureau of Reclamation. It is my hope that a new Biden administration will listen to them and us before they put forth costly and unworkable new regulations.

— Charles Lyall is a farmer in Mattawa, Wash.

ORGANIC BLUEBERRIES

Congratulations and welcome! My partner John Madsen and I own and operate a small U-pick blueberry farm in rural western Oregon. We've used organic practices for 22 years.

My biggest wishes for the USDA under your administration are that:

- At least a small fraction of the billions of dollars of subsidies for rice, corn, wheat, cotton and soybeans grown by huge corporate farms will be redirected to small farms that practice organic and regenerative agriculture.
- Black people, indigenous people, and people of color will be recruited for grant review panels and USDA advisory committees.

The USDA will re-establish the organic and sustainable agriculture policy adviser position, which was eliminated under the Trump administration.

I would also dearly love to see the Americorps/Vista program expanded, with farm labor as an option. If young folks from the city were encouraged to serve in rural areas, and if young folks from farms and rural areas could serve in the city and be listened to and validated, perhaps we could begin to heal the contentious divide between "red" and "blue."



Andrea Davis

Thank you for listening. — Andrea Davis owns and operates Kings Valley Gardens U-Pick Blueberries in Monmouth, Ore.

HAZELNUTS

Agriculture and natural resource industries have always been a major identity of the United States, providing food and fiber not just within our borders but globally. Our great nation is known for quality rather than quantity, and it's taken generations to get us here.

I do have some requests on behalf of an entire industry — fight for farmers, ranchers and foresters because we quite literally feed the world, and the world wants what we can grow. Consider how your policies may affect our natural resource industries. Farmers and the like have very little within their control every season. We can do everything right and still come up short. Mother Nature is the biggest culprit of that, but politics can be just as damaging.

Whether we like it or not, agriculture is a global enterprise and you must keep our industries competitive nationally and in the global market. We breathe the same air, drink the same water and the land is our livelihood, so let's get the dialogue going.

— Bryan Harper is owner and operator of Harper Farms Inc. in Junction City, Ore.



Bryan Harper

community needs to be looked at as a solution provider in this issue. We need to be partnered with to improve our carbon capturing ability rather than have the cost of our inputs increase and harm the production of the very products that will help resolve the issue. Oregon's trees, plants and crops sequester carbon. Please give us the opportunity to help solve the climate crisis.

These are only two of many important issues facing our industry and our great nation. We implore you to be a leader. Please act and move this great nation forward!

— Mark Bigej is co-owner and chief operations officer of Al's Garden Center and Greenhouses LLC in Oregon.

FFA

We understand the journey you are about to embark on is not easy, but as the next generation of America's leaders and agriculturists, we believe your term will be marked as successful if you consider the three cornerstones of our organization: Growing Leaders, Building Communities and Strengthening Agriculture.

We implore you to embody these ideals by encouraging the youth of our country to graciously serve others through fair and just leadership while pursuing their passions. In turn, their actions impact those around them, fortifying and building their communities. Now more than ever, we need to strengthen our communities to address the challenges our country is facing.

Finally, we urge you to promote the agricultural industry by advocating for factual information and delegating responsibilities. Agriculture has not ceased nor shied away in the face of adversity.

Hard-working American agriculturists house, clothe and feed billions, not just domestically, but globally. It is your duty to be well-versed on the positive impact American agriculture is making in the lives of all and provide support as our industry continues to meet both domestic and global needs. We are excited about the future of agriculture and youth development dedicated to growing leaders, building communities and strengthening agriculture.

— The 2020-2021 Washington FFA Association State Officer Team is Cole Baerlocher, president; Lauren Stubbs, vice president; Gunnar Aune, secretary; Alissa Whitaker, treasurer; Haley Gilman, reporter and Tysen White, sentinel.



Mark Bigej

NURSERY

Our country needs our elected officials to work on compromising on issues and moving on important topics, not sidestep them. The fabric of the nursery, greenhouse and retail industry is family-owned — not some "corporate" operation. Agriculture is a vital part of the community and we are proud of our stewardship and environmental ethic, but we face big issues.

One of the major issues that continues to not be addressed is immigration reform. There is a very real labor shortage in agriculture, and it is high time that we put politics aside and act. We need a comprehensive immigration solution that will lead to a sufficient legal workforce.

Another major issue facing the country is the reduction of our collective environmental impact. The agricultural com-

Owl: Roughly 80% of national forests are in reserves, logging is mostly prohibited

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to be managed for sustained timber yields, he said. These forested O&C Lands — Oregon & California Railroad Revested Lands — exist in a checkerboard pattern in Western Oregon.

"The BLM doesn't have any discretion," Fite said.

The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that opposes the critical habitat reduction, believes the significant increase in excluded acreage in the final rule will make it vulnerable in court.

"Whatever the agency does, the final rule has to be a

logical outgrowth of the proposed rule," said Ryan Adair Shannon, an attorney with the organization. "What it doesn't allow for is to come out with a completely different rule, literally an order of magnitude larger than the first."

The environmental group disagrees that O&C Lands must be managed for "industrial timber" and doesn't believe critical habitat is incongruous with "matrix" lands in national forests, said Noah Greenwald, its endangered species director.

Logging can still occur within critical habitat if an Endangered Species Act "consultation" occurs over a

project's impacts, he said. "It wouldn't preclude and hasn't precluded timber sales from moving forward on those matrix lands."

While the Center for Biological Diversity argues that reducing the owl's critical habitat amounts to a "nail in the coffin" for the species, the American Forest Resource Council counters that barred owls, a competing species, and wildfires pose a greater hazard to the iconic bird.

However, the organizations can agree on one thing: The new critical habitat designation will result in litigation.

"I have no doubt it will be challenged," said Shannon.

Inslee: Governor's plan calls for increasing minimum benefit to \$270 a week from \$201

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The rate would go up, but not as fast. The Inslee administration characterizes that as a tax "cut."

By 2025, however, the bill would come due. Under the governor's plan, the average tax rate would be 2.23%. Under current law, it's projected to be 1.8%.

The governor's plan also calls for increasing the minimum benefit to \$270 a week from \$201 a week. The state projects paying out \$3.3 billion instead of \$3.1 billion.

"Under the proposal, Washington will main-

tain the highest weekly minimum benefit amount in the nation," said Dan Zeitlin, policy director for the Employment Security Department.

The governor's proposal also allows older workers and those with health problems or who live with someone at risk to quit during a public health emergency and collect unemployment.

The Senate labor committee took testimony on the governor's plan, contained in Senate Bill 5061.

It was endorsed by the Washington State Labor Council and the Washington Hospitality Association,

whose members, restaurants and hotels, face crushing unemployment tax bills.

Some other business groups said that while the bill delays some of the pain, it still raises taxes during a recession. They said lawmakers should do just enough to get the unemployment fund through the pandemic, without taxing employers out of business.

"Although the system has been stressed, getting people back to work is a self-correcting mechanism and should be priority one," Washington Retail Association lobbyist Bruce Beckett said.