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## Reported shipping violations worry ag exporters

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

A bipartisan group of U.S. senators has called on the Federal Maritime Commission to quickly resolve what they call “unreasonable practices” of ocean carriers that are hindering U.S. farm exports.

Reports began emerging last fall that carriers were delaying the export of hundreds of millions of dollars worth

of U.S. agricultural goods, and instead immediately returning empty containers to be filled with more profitable Chinese merchandise heading stateside.

Once incoming containers are emptied of their cargo, they usually go to rural areas, where they are loaded with agricultural products such as apples, hay, potatoes and lumber before they are sent back to ports for the trip to Asia.

Twenty-four senators — including Senate Agriculture Chair Debbie Staben-

now — signed a letter March 3 to Commission Chairman Michael Khouri, calling the actions by some carriers unfair and a potential violation of the Shipping Act of 1984.

“If the reports are true, such practices would be unreasonable, anticompetitive and hurt millions of producers across the nation,” the senators wrote.

Farmers and agricultural exporters echoed those concerns, saying the lack of access to containers and vessels has

delayed shipments and threatens to tarnish their reputation as reliable trading partners.

Shelly Boshart Davis, whose family business specializes in baling, hauling and selling grass straw from Willamette Valley farms to customers in Japan and South Korea, said the global pandemic caused a whiplash of sorts in the international trade community.



**Shelly Boshart Davis**

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# WHERE THE AUCTION IS

## LIVESTOCK SALE BARNs FACE CHALLENGES AMID CHANGING TIMES



EP Media group File

**Trent Stewart, owner of the Central Oregon Livestock Auction, calls out bids during a video sale in Pendleton, Ore. Stewart works as an auctioneer with Superior Livestock to help supplement his income.**



Buyers and sellers at the Chehalis Livestock Market.

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

**C**HEHALIS, Wash. — Auction day at the Chehalis Livestock Market begins with a flurry of activity behind the scenes, as hundreds of cattle from area ranches arrive at the sale barn adjacent to Interstate 5 in southwest Washington.

Once at the loading dock, the animals are ushered into a hydraulic squeeze chute, where veterinarian Jason Humphrey pierces their ears with electronic identification tags and gives vaccinations, if needed. The cattle are then sorted and placed in holding pens.

Alongside the auction ring, longtime customers sit on reclining chairs and sofas, trading gossip and renewing friendships. Next door, the restaurant is open, serving cheeseburgers, fries and coffee.

“We have a strong connection to the community,” said Brenda Balmelli, whose husband, Dave, bought the Che-

halis market in 1986 with business partner Joe Parypa. “Most of our customers are small farms, with five to 25 head they raise per year.”

That community connection, however, is becoming more difficult to sustain, Balmelli said. Fewer cattle, rising costs and the emergence of new technology are putting a strain on small sale barns.

When they first started, Balmelli said, it was common to sell 200-plus dairy cows, 100 feeder cattle and 300 slaughter animals at the weekly auction. Now, they typically sell 15 dairy cows, 150 feeder cattle and 150 slaughter animals.

At the same time, Balmelli said, they have kept their commissions the same to remain competitive, while costs such as labor, insurance and repairs have tripled over the last eight years. The internet has also made it easier for ranchers to sell their livestock direct to buyers online, foregoing the sale barn entirely.

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Photos by George Plaven/Capital Press  
**ABOVE: Brenda Balmelli, with the Chehalis Livestock Auction in southwest Washington.**

**TOP: Buyers and sellers gather at the Chehalis Livestock Market.**

## Environmental groups: Simpson plan speeds up salmon extinction, harms human health

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

It’s rare that farmers and environmental groups agree.

But both agricultural stakeholders and environmental organizations say Idaho Rep. Mike Simpson’s proposed \$33.5 billion salmon recovery deal is a no-go.

A group of 17 environmental organizations say Simpson’s plan would speed up salmon extinction and harm human health, calling it “untenable.”

The group, including the Center for Biological Diversity and Spokane Riverkeeper, sent a letter March 16 to Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Wash-

ington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, all Democrats, opposing Simpson’s plan.

A representative for the Center for Biological Diversity has not returned calls seeking further comment.

Agricultural stakeholders and power companies also oppose Simpson’s plan.

Simpson, a Republican, has not introduced legislation, but in February unveiled a plan for salmon recovery that includes removing the Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams on the lower Snake River in 2030 and 2031.

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