

People & Places

Farm lobbyist sees deeper blues, reds

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Mark Streuli, a farm lobbyist who grew up on a dairy and was once deputy director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, has a side hustle — auctioneer.

His on-stage exuberance has earned him a nickname, “Mark the Spark.” Motto: “Licensed, bonded and ready to go!”

Streuli, 57, brings the same outgoing style to lobbying for the Washington Cattlemen’s Association, the Washington State Potato Commission and the Washington Potato and Onion Association.

These days, however, are not the best for the extroverted lobbyist.

The Capitol is fenced off. Hearings are conducted by video. Streuli testifies from his house, a blank gray wall behind him. He talks into a computer screen showing the disembodied heads of legislators.

“You just don’t know what they’re looking at. At me? Another screen? Their phone? I assume they’re looking at me,” Streuli said. “I am more confident testifying in person.”

Streuli says he has rarely seen anyone in person during the pandemic. He misses being on the capitol campus and seeing who lobbyists on the other side of an issue are talking to. “I’m sure they like to see who I’m talking to, too,” he said.

“It’s challenging. I miss the people. To me, it’s really a people business, at the end of the day,” he said.

Started on a farm

There’s a straight line, more or less, from Streuli’s boyhood to what he does now.

Streuli’s father, Herb Streuli, was a dairy farmer in Enumclaw, about 40 miles southeast of Seattle, and state president of the Farm Bureau, testifying in front of government panels on farm issues.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Mark Streuli has worked in and around the Washington legislature for 29 years.

Herb Streuli sold the dairy in the 1980s when the USDA was buying out producers. At 90, he lives in Edmonds with his wife, Ryn.

Mark Streuli spent Saturdays at an auction barn, admiring the auctioneers. After graduating from high school in 1981, he went through Central Washington University, not briskly.

He worked, started a family and graduated in 1990 with a degree in political science. He broke into state politics that year managing the re-election campaign of Frank “Tub” Hansen, a retired Moses Lake farmer.

When Hansen died the following year, The Seattle Times called him “a spirited defender of farmers,” prone to folksy sayings like, “By damn, I’ll show ‘em where the bear run though the buckwheat.”

Hansen also was the last Democrat to represent the now thoroughly Republican 13th Legislative District in Central Washington. “Partisanship was not as extreme as today,” Streuli said.

Wide divide
In sizing up the 2021 Legislature, Streuli notes the widening partisan divide. The 2020 elections didn’t change the numbers — Democrats didn’t add or subtract from their majorities in the House or Senate. Both parties, however, added new members.

“The blue got bluer, and the red got a little redder,” Streuli said. “I think we’re seeing proposals that may not have moved before and now they’re moving this session and may make it to the governor’s desk.”

He listed a capital gains tax, a low-carbon fuel standard and a carbon tax as three policies with improved chances of passing.

Farm groups are on the defensive on all three issues. It’s not unusual for agriculture to be on the defensive in Olympia. But the usual channels for showing up and going on the offensive are not there.

Normally, the agriculture industry raises its profile with annual events, such

as dairy day, potato day and beef day — enjoyed by all. Last year, farmers drove tractors around the Capitol on the first day of the session, trying to set a tone.

Between last session and this one, the pandemic shut down farm tours, a favorite way for lobbyists to introduce lawmakers to agriculture.

“We missed all our tours. We didn’t have dairy day, potato day, beef day,” Streuli said. “Combined, all of that is important.”

The innovation this year has been to rally supporters to sign in remotely “pro” or “con” on bills that are being heard by committees. (You can also sign in “other,” for what it’s worth).

Most people don’t testify, but for those who do, there’s no need to leave home. The result has been more people saying something and less time to say it. “I think it’s good in some way and watered it down in some way,” Streuli said.



Western Innovator

MARK STREULI

Job: Lobbyist. Clients include Washington Cattlemen’s Association, Washington State Potato Commission and Washington Potato and Onion Association.

Education: Bachelor’s degree, Central Washington University.

Family: wife Janet; grown sons Nick and Jake and step-daughter Jennifer, and an adopted daughter Marlee, 6.

Inside the legislature

Streuli learned the inner workings of the Legislature by working as a policy analyst for Senate Democrats between 1991 to 2008.

He moved to the agriculture department while Dan Newhouse, now a U.S. House member, was the director. Streuli rose to become Newhouse’s deputy director.

After a stint lobbying for the Washington Farm Bureau, he went into business for himself — Streuli Public Affairs.

Roughly halfway through the session, the big issues remain unsettled. The biggest, Streuli said, is how a bill on overtime wages for farmworkers comes out.

Streuli said lawmakers have been good about responding to phone calls, texts and emails. The remote hearings bring in testimony from all parts of the state. But there’s no substitute for meeting in person with the people casting votes, he said.

“Transparency has decreased,” he said. “I don’t see how it couldn’t have some effect on the outcome.”



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to set the record straight.

California Wool Growers Association hosts annual ram sale

The California Wool Growers Association will host the 101st Annual California Ram Sale on April 10 at the International Agri-Center in Tulare, Calif.

More than 500 rams including Crossbred, Hampshire, Oxford, Suffolk and White-Faced rams will be offered from California, Colorado, Nevada, Idaho and Utah.

Ultrasound carcass measurements and a Range Ram Index will be provided on all sale rams, according to an association news release. The Range Ram Index utilizes ultrasound carcass data collected at the sale and will help to identify the potential genetic merit of those rams in passing superior genetic traits such as larger loin eye area or heavier carcass weights into producer flocks.

This year’s Ram Sale Trade Show will feature a variety of sheep health



Capital Press File

The 101st California Wool Growers Association Ram Sale will be April 10 in Tulare.

and equipment companies showcasing products developed to address sheep production, nutri-

tional and health needs. Ram sale information, including the sale catalog, schedule, lodging infor-

mation and directions are available on the CWGA website at www.californiawoolgrowers.org. To

SALE SCHEDULE

9 a.m. Buyer check-in and ram preview.

9:30 a.m. Trade show.

11:30 a.m. Complimentary buyer barbecue lamb luncheon.

1 p.m. Ram sale auction.

Location: International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Laspina St, Tulare, Calif. 93274

Contributions and the proceeds from the California Ram Sale support CWGA in its continued efforts to deliver lasting value to support and grow all segments of the California Sheep Industry.

For questions, contact the CWGA office at (916) 444-8122 or info@woolgrowers.org, Wes Patton at (530) 514-7250 or John Olagaray at (209) 663-7322.

request a Ram Sale Catalog, contact the CWGA office at 916-444-8122 or info@woolgrowers.org.

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

TUESDAY-THURSDAY, MARCH 23-25

Public Lands Council 2021 Legislative Conference (virtual): The conference will focus on legislative strategies to advocate for the livestock industry in the nation’s capital. Website: http://www.publiclandscouncil.org

TUESDAY, MARCH 30

Practical Sensory Programs for Factories and Quality Managers (online): 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

The Practical Sensory Program course is designed around a learn-and-apply model. Each participant will get a kit to have hands-on activities to reinforce the concepts learned. He or she will walk away with practical skills that can be applied immediately. The course fee is \$285/each individual. Contact: Catherine Cantley, 208-426-2181, catherinecantley@techhelp.org

SATURDAY APRIL 10

101st Annual California Ram Sale: 9 a.m. International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Laspina St., Tulare, Calif. The California Wool Growers Association will host the 101st Annual California Ram Sale on Saturday, April 10, at the International Agri-Cen-

ter in Tulare, Calif. Ram sale information, including the sale catalog, schedule, lodging information and directions are available on the CWGA website at www.californiawoolgrowers.org. To request a Ram Sale Catalog, contact the CWGA office at 916-444-8122 or info@woolgrowers.org.

FRIDAY, APRIL 16 AgForestry Leadership Class

41 Graduation: 5 p.m. Red Lion Hotel, Wenatchee, Wash. Celebrate the graduation of AgForestry Leadership Class 41. This celebration was rescheduled from its origination April 10 date. Table sponsorships are available. Cost: \$60/adults, \$20/

child. Website: http://agforestry.org/graduation-class-41/

FRIDAY-SUNDAY APRIL 23-25

Oregon Ag Fest (drive-thru): 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Clackamas County Event Center, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. Join us for the Drive Thru Ag Fest to experience the incredible world of Oregon agriculture, in a fun-filled, drive thru environment, and leave our event with an “Ag-venture” kit filled with activities, seedlings and more to continue the fun at home. The three-day event, aimed to help families better understand where their food, fiber and flora come from, is a unique learning experience, where drive-by exhibits

make learning about Oregon’s vast agricultural industry educational and entertaining. Tickets are \$22 per vehicle and are available online at https://oragfest.com/

FRIDAY-SUNDAY MAY 14-16

California FFA’s 93rd State Leadership Conference (online): This year California FFA members from all corners of the state will have access to the premier leadership event offered by our association as it will be delivered through a multi-faceted online platform. The conference will be three days jam packed with learning, growth and inspiration. Website: www.calaged.org