

# Q&A: What does ideal agriculture in Washington look like for you?

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## What would you say needs to be improved?

**Inslee:** Well, I can't point to any specific thing ... except I would like to have a sit-down conversation over tea, or even a cold one at some point, with hundreds of thousands of people. That could improve it, but time doesn't permit that, unfortunately.

I think there's some things that I would like to engage the agricultural industry more in some of our mutual challenges, I do think there's been some improvement there.

I'd like to see them more active in helping to figure out what we do about the extreme weather events that are damaging the ag industry right now.

I was talking to the grape growers in Walla Walla that had to deal with smoke damaging their grapes; talked to wheat growers, production was down 20-30% last year because of heat. I've talked to all kinds of growers really concerned about water supply.

The one thing I hope to engage the industry more in is trying to find their insights on how to reduce carbon pollution that's really going to damage, over time, the ag industry in Washington state.

We're in very dire straits in the next several decades because of basic heat, because of drought, because of extremes both hot and cold, because of flooding. We could use more leadership in the ag industry helping the state figure out what the right approach to reduce carbon pollution is to save the ag industry.

## Any response to critics who say your policies and regulations are making farming more difficult for them?

**Inslee:** Well, I'd have to know what people are referring to.

## I'm thinking of the mandatory riparian buffer bill, as one example.

**Inslee:** I have to believe that people want to preserve the iconic salmon species of our state. This is a rational way to do it, because the salmon are going to go extinct if the water is too hot, and the water is going to be too hot if we don't have shade in the rivers. So this is a reasonable approach to work with landowners to try to maintain some of (that) shade for the rivers.

I've got to believe that people want salmon, and you just have to face reality: You're not going to have salmon if the water boils them — now, that overstates it — if it's too hot for them to survive. This is a two-fer — the salmon are getting hit both by the lack of shade, which helps heat the water, but also by the global climate change issue, which is heating up the climate in general. This is a dire problem, and so I think this is a rational approach.

I just have to believe people don't want to see salmon go extinct. If you don't care, then yeah, I can understand why you wouldn't like it. But I have to believe people care.

## When you think of the future, what does ideal agriculture in Washington look like for you?

**Inslee:** The word "innovative" comes to mind. "Innovative" and "value-added." I think our strengths in agriculture are the fact that we're constantly innovating and



Office of Gov. Jay Inslee  
**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown confers with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee at the United Nations COP26 climate meeting in Glasgow, Scotland, last fall.**

being ahead of the curve technologically. ...

Our strength is having high-value products. So we've got the best wine, the best apples and the best cheese. And we've done that because our ag industry leaders have been always looking to innovate. I think that's a strength that we ought to help them by giving them educationally oriented people that can help provide those technological innovations, and be willing to help any way we can to promote them.

I've seen that time after time, from the whole change in how we grow apples. It's just been remarkable to see the changes to make them easier to harvest and less water-intensive. That's because we have a lot of innovators. The people out there with a bunch of apples are as innovative as folks in the aerospace industry. I think any way we can help to continue that dynamic is really, really useful.

## What is the ultimate goal for the dams on the lower Snake River? Do you have an expected outcome for the federal/state assessment? Will that provide the final answer on the dams?

**Inslee:** I don't know the final answer. ... As you know, Sen. (Patty) Murray and I have initiated the process to ask the question, not to give the answer at the moment: What would be necessary to replace the services if the dams were breached? What would be within the achievable to replace the transportation services of the available river? What would be necessary to replace the irrigation benefits? What would be necessary to replace the power method?

So we are starting the process to ask that question. And I think one of the things to end this endless cycle of litigation, it just makes sense to get those answers before decisions are made one way or another.

We know there's a significant salmon concern and extinction concerns, but we haven't effectively yet asked the question (of) how we would replace those services. I think that's really important.

We are asking people to come into this discussion with an open mind and a willingness to try to get answers to those questions. We need people's help to do that, we've started that process. We hope by late summer we can have a report to help guide that question.

So I don't have an answer,

it's an open question at the moment.

## Do you think the assessment is going to provide that answer, though? You talked about the endless cycle. Will this be the end of that cycle, where we can all point to it and say, "This is what we need"?

**Inslee:** Well, no, there's still going to be a lot of controversy, no matter what the decision. ... I expect that. But I think this will give fair-minded people, who really have the willingness to ask these questions, some guidance about this.

Some folks who have advocated breaching have not yet answered the question: How do we replace these services? Those who oppose breaching, some have been unwilling to look for alternate solutions. I think all of us need to have an open mind to ask these questions and try to get the best answer that we can.

I come at it from having strong connections to both sides of the values. I'm very committed that ... our grandkids are not going to have a diminished Washington state, and a Washington state without salmon is a very diminished Washington state. And

I'm very committed for our grandkids to have access to salmon.

But I'm also committed, in part because I spent two decades in Central Washington, to understand the entanglement of the dams with the whole story of Eastern Washington, and the passions around dams. They're iconic, they're totemic, they're symbols of development. And they've meant so much to people in the family histories.

Mabel Thompson was a leader of the Democratic Party up in (Grant County). I remember her telling me the story that she was 8, 9, 10 years old or something when the water came onto the land. She said she remembered her family all dressed up in their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes and they walked out and literally watched the water come down the ditch. And that was just such a pivotal moment in their family history, and the whole community, obviously.

So I understand how embedded these dams (are) into the culture, thought process and economy, obviously, of Eastern Washington. I get both of these things. The question is, can we have both? That's the question we

want to try to get answered.

## How do you see overtime rules affecting farmers and ranchers?

**Inslee:** Well, they're affecting everybody by having adequately compensated people who feed us. The people who feed us are both the owners of the property and the people who work there, and they both are important in agriculture. And all of them need to be treated fairly, and I believe ... people who feed us ought to be treated fairly like other workers.

I believe in fairness for working people. And these folks work really, really hard. Everybody in agriculture works hard.

Sometimes people, when they use the word "industry" in "agriculture industry," forget the workers. They're part of the industry, and they ought to be fairly compensated. I don't think they should be in any diminished class. I do think historically, people who work on the land, who are not owners of the land, in our history of this country, have been treated as kind of second-class workers. ... That's not how I feel.

## How do you see COVID-19 rules and regulations affecting farmers and ranchers?

**Inslee:** I hope that both the people who work on the property and their employers care about the health of the people who work there.

We have tried to have reasonable rules that understand the difficult challenges that ag has, particularly with people who do not work year-round.

We have set COVID rules that have been both protective of employees and have been, with exquisite effort, in part on my part, because I was involved in many, many meetings, trying to fashion, for instance, the requirements for residential bed space and ventilation, to try to have things that would work for the employers as well. We spent hours and hours and hours trying to fashion something that would work for both parties here.

We did the best we could and we've had some success, although we still had losses of employees. Some employees lost their lives due to COVID. ... This is a really tough virus.

But I can just tell you that I was engaged in discussions with quite a number of orchardists, farmers, farmers' representatives, as well as representatives of employee groups to try to fashion these rules.

So all I can tell you is, I'm sure people can criticize the rules, but we exercised our listening skills as powerfully as we could to see what could work for everybody concerned.

And we have been very committed to getting access to folks who work in the agricultural industry to the things that keep them safe, including masks and vaccinations.

We have made intensive efforts to make vaccinations available to people who work in the industry. We set people up in the packing houses and farms to actually have vaccinations on site. I was at one of the first up in the Chelan district, and I think we did some good work there.

We have committed Washington resources as intensively or more so for agriculture than any other industry, I can tell you that.

One of our reasons is we wanted to have equity in the effort to fighting COVID and also help the industry by trying to keep people from being sick and not being able to work. So we've done a lot to keep the industry as healthy as humanly possible.

## Any message to farmers and ranchers?

**Inslee:** Thank you. Thank you for being so creative and innovative and diligent and we hope to help in the ways that we can. We've got the best ag industry in the world because we have the most creative agricultural leadership.

We find a lot of positive leadership in the ag industry. We found a lot of positive approaches when we worked through the rules on COVID. We are glad to keep that ball rolling.

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USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

**USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**  
**Local Work Group Meeting for Marion County**  
**February 25th, 2022 • 9:00am - 11:00am**  
**650 Hawthorne Ave SE, Suite 130, Salem, OR**  
Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84129206531?pwd=MmhEMFlrLjJ2N1R0OHFDSU83NkxwUT09>  
Meeting ID: 841 2920 6531 Passcode: 193642

For more information call: Les Bachelor 971-273-4816  
NRCS will hold their annual Local Work Group Meeting to gather input from farmers, ranchers, state and federal agencies, agriculture, energy, and conservation organizations regarding Farm Bill conservation priorities in Marion County.  
Request accommodations for persons with disabilities should be made at least 48 hours before the meeting to Les Bachelor at 971-273-4816.

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