

People & Places

# Fighting ‘solar-industrial complexes’

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Yakima County Farm Bureau President Mark Herke has not said a word against windmills, but he has plenty to say about solar panels.

First, he says, don't call hundreds of acres of panels on steel posts screwed into the ground “solar farms.”

“We dropped that term a long time ago,” he said. “We call them solar-industrial complexes.”

While cows and sheep can graze around windmills, solar projects as configured now blot out agricultural use and take up far more land, Herke says.

He has gathered other objections to solar projects and presented them to decision-makers on behalf of the Yakima Farm Bureau and Farm Bureau members in neighboring Klickitat County.

The Yakima Farm Bureau last year opposed a 625-acre solar project east of Yakima on agricultural land, even though the development had, judging from public comments, local support.

Herke asserts the public has yet to catch on to how thousands of acres of solar panels might change Eastern Washington. When he became the county Farm Bureau's president in 2019, it wasn't an issue. It's become a top issue in just the past year, he said.

“The solar is coming on faster than people realize,” he said. “We're not quite a lonely voice, but we're close to that.”

It's not just the solar panels that will take up land, Herke said. To make up for



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

**Yakima County Farm Bureau President Mark Herke stands on the rocky hill his great-grandfather settled on in 1871 in Central Washington. Herke says the rush to build solar power complexes in the region will take land from agriculture.**

fencing off wildlife migration routes, developers may have to buy land elsewhere for the Department of Fish and Wildlife, taking more property out of private hands.

“I very much predict there will be more pushback,” Herke said. “I guess we're on the leading edge.”

Herke, 65, was interviewed at his home on a hill outside Yakima and the northern edge of the Yakama Indian Reservation.

It's the same rocky hill where his great-grandfather from Germany settled in 1871. The Herke family raises cattle, grows hay, harvests timber and mines rocks for construction.

Herke is worried about the “green rush.” In Western Washington, the term means stampeding to recreational

marijuana. To Herke, it means the race to build renewable energy.

The Washington Legislature in 2019 set off the rush by voting to rid the state's electrical generation of greenhouse gases by 2045. Only one senator and two House members from Eastern Washington voted “yes.” Complying with law, however, depends on land east of the Cascades.

“The people pushing it the most would give up the least — on their livelihoods, their landscape,” Herke said.

Gov. Jay Inslee and Democratic lawmakers this year moved to speed up the clean-energy revolution by expanding the jurisdiction of the Energy Facilities Site Evaluation Council to include energy-related industrial developments.

The council is made up mostly of unelected Inslee administration officials and is an alternative to winning approval from counties for energy projects.

Herke said he fears a more-powerful state council will further distance decision-makers from the consequences of the developments. “With counties, at least you can go and bang on a commissioner's desk,” he said.

Asked if there's any good place to put solar panels, Herke suggests the Hanford nuclear reservation.

The Yakima Farm Bureau's position on solar projects butts heads with property rights. The 625-acre solar project it opposed was supported by the two landowners who will lease land to the solar developer.



**Western Innovator**

**MARK HERKE**

**Age:** 65

**Position:** Yakima County Farm Bureau president; rancher

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in agriculture from Washington State University

**Family:** wife, Lisa; father, John, 93, owns the family businesses

S. Martinez Livestock Inc. told the state site council that it was leasing ground that gets very dry in the summer and has little value in the winter as pasture. The reliable lease payments will diversify income, but not affect its operations, according to the ranch.

The other landowner said the unirrigated farmland already was enrolled in a conservation reserve program, but the payments from the solar project will be more.

Herke said the county Farm Bureau wrestled with property rights, but came down on the side of preserving farmland for future generations. “If you want to protect farmland, you have to look beyond today and tomorrow,” he said.

# Famous Idaho Potato Bowl gets new director

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press



Danielle Brazil

BOISE — ESPN Events has hired Danielle Brazil as executive director of the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl, the college football game held each December in Boise.

She arrived March 21 to succeed Kevin McDonald, who retired March 31. McDonald had been executive director since 2007.

The game was first played in 1997 as the Humanitarian Bowl. It had several title sponsors before the Idaho Potato Commission assumed title sponsorship in 2011. ESPN Events has owned the bowl game since 2013.

Brazil worked as the

bowl's operations and marketing director from 2007 to 2017. For ESPN Events, she also directed the annual Wooden Legacy college basketball event in Anaheim, Calif.

She joined The College of Idaho as associate athletic director in 2017. At the private liberal-arts school in Caldwell, she led fundraising and managed revenue from sponsorships, gifts, ticket sales and special events. She oversaw marketing, community engagement, sponsorship and compliance.

“Danielle is highly respected throughout the community in Boise and within our organization, so we are thrilled to welcome her back,” ESPN Events Vice President Clint Overby said in a release. “Her experience makes her a perfect fit for this role as she continues the outstanding work that Kevin has done.”

“Right now, I am listening” as she settles into the new job, Brazil told Capital Press.

She and Events Coordinator Katy Murphree, also a full-time employee of ESPN Events in Boise, are meeting with sponsors, community partners and volunteers.

“We want to make sure we are continuing on the path set by Kevin and all of the

people involved in getting the bowl to where it is now,” Brazil said. Another goal is “to keep elevating our profile in the community.”

“It has been a very good relationship between the commission and Kevin,” Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Jamey Higham said. “He has been a great partner for us. He's just a good guy and he'll be missed.”

“We are excited to work with Danielle,” he said. “She's full of excitement and energy. We're looking forward to getting to know her and to continue on with the great relationship the IPC has with ESPN and the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl.”

Brazil, 39, grew up on her family's farm outside

Homedale, Idaho, driving tractor, moving irrigation siphon tubes and clearing irrigation ditch banks.

“Idaho's ag industry is a big passion of mine,” she said.

The state leads the U.S. in potato production.

As for the Potato Commission's bowl title sponsorship, “we are really proud of that,” Brazil said. “We want the game to be a three-and-a-half-hour ongoing industry spotlight.”

She said Frank Muir, commission CEO from 2003 to 2021, and McDonald “did a phenomenal job, definitely, with the marketing piece.”

The current game contract runs to 2024, and the annual fee is set at \$477,000.

# U.S. sunflower production expected to jump in response to Ukraine crisis

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press



Dennis Urbat

U.S. farmers will grow more sunflowers this year to make up for lost production in Ukraine, one of the world's top exporters of the crop.

Russia invaded Ukraine two months ago, throwing that nation's agricultural production into turmoil. Ukraine and Russia are the top exporters of sunflower oil in the world.

Sunflower planting begins next month in the U.S.

USDA projects sunflower acreage will increase 10% this year, but John Sandbakken, executive director of the National Sunflower Association, expects it to be closer to

**A field of sunflowers near Clayton, Wash. U.S. farmers are planting more sunflowers this year to offset the smaller crop in Ukraine, a major producer.**

20% more due to higher demand. “Our main goal is to promote the crop to as many growers as possible and increase acres as much as possible,” he said.

Total U.S. sunflower acres are projected to increase from 1.29 million last year to 1.42 million this year, according to USDA's prospective plantings report.

Sunflowers are currently bringing about \$38.50 per hundredweight. Sandbakken thinks it's possible the price will reach \$40 per hundredweight.

“We're at record levels for the price,” he said. “The return per acre is probably the highest it's ever been.”

Prices have risen about 20% in the last month, Sandbakken said.

“A very nice increase, showing that the market is looking to get more seed in the ground this year,” he said.

Production could probably double and still not meet demand, Sandbakken said.

The primary uses of sunflowers are for oil, bird food and striped seed for confectionary use, in baking or trail mixes or salted seeds.

If a farmer has the equipment, Sandbakken thinks sunflowers could present a good opportunity.

Sunflower growers are impacted by rising input costs like other commodity farmers, Sandbakken said.

“The sunflower is a very efficient user of fertilizer, with a large tap root that goes deep in the soil,” he said. “It can reach a lot of the nutrients left over from some of the more shallow-rooted crops, so we probably won't need quite as much.”

## CALENDAR

Website: <https://bit.ly/36o2wMD>

### THROUGH SATURDAY APRIL 16

**Spring Fair:** Washington State Fairgrounds, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. Celebrate spring at the fair and all things agriculture. Website: <https://www.thefair.com>

### SATURDAY APRIL 16

**Oregon Women for Agriculture Auction and Dinner:** 5:30 p.m. Linn County Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. Oregon Women for Agriculture is excited to host our annual Auction and Dinner returning in-person this year! Make plans to attend for a fun-

filled evening of socializing, sharing delicious food and bidding on an assortment of high-quality oral and silent auction items. Website: <http://www.owaonline.org/auction>

**Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in Roseburg:** Douglas County Fairgrounds, 2110 Frear St., Roseburg, Ore. The Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or unused pesticide products. Registration for this event is required by April 1. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, [kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov](mailto:kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov) Website: <https://bit.ly/3AdxFgp>

### THURSDAY-SUNDAY APRIL 21-24

**Spring Fair:** Washington State Fairgrounds, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. Celebrate spring at the fair and all things agriculture. Website: <https://www.thefair.com>

### SATURDAY-SUNDAY APRIL 23-24

**California Antique Equipment Show:** 10 a.m. International Agri-Center, 4500 Laspina St., Tulare, Calif. The show will showcase antique tractors, trucks and engines

and will include vendors and activities such as a tractor pull, hay-bucking contest and tractor driving. Website: <https://www.antiquefarmshow.com>

### SATURDAY-SUNDAY APRIL 23-24

**Oregon Ag Fest:** 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem, Ore. 97301. The goal of Oregon Ag Fest is to provide an experience for the whole family that is educational and fun. And, we keep it affordable! Kids age 12 and under are free; others are \$9. Parking is free. Website: <https://oragfest.com/>



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### THROUGH SUNDAY MAY 1

**2022 Wooden Shoe Tulip Festival:** Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm, 33814 S. Meridian Road, Woodburn, Ore. Experience the beauty of 40 acres of tulips and over 200 acres of outdoor space and activities this spring. We are again offering tickets online only this year to minimize crowds and allow for more time to enjoy our fields. Hours: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday; 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.