

# Q&A: I think farming is truly a labor of love

Continued from Page 1

## Q: How would you characterize your relationship with Oregon farmers?

Well, I see our farmers and ranchers, what they produce and create and make, as very integrated into Oregon's economy. Our agricultural industry is very much a part of who we are. It's also culturally incredibly important. This family (she gestured to the farmers at Antiquum Farm) is taking farm-to-table to the nth degree, right? They are vertically integrated here and I think it is happening in Oregon because of the creativity and innovation Oregonians have. This is so a part of who we are.

## Q: But how would you characterize your relationship with farmers? For example: positive?

Ah! Haha. I'm not sure I would characterize it that way. I think I have a strong passion and concern for our farming and ranching communities. I don't know; you would have to ask them how they feel about me.

## Q: Where do you see common ground that you share with the farming community?

One is our work around wildfire, and our work to create healthier primarily forest landscapes through thinning, prescriptive burning and the work we're doing through the wildfire council.

I think the second piece I would say is drought. I've been really proud of the work my administration has done to invest — we put together a \$100 million drought package in December of 2021 — (and) the work we are doing now to figure out how we invest in both the natural and built environment to create a 100-year water plan for Oregon.

## Q: When and why did you become a proponent of prescribed burning?

I have been all along. One of my most devastating experiences (was) in John Day and specifically the Canyon Creek Fire (in 2015). We lost 50 homes. (I realized) we were going to have to modernize and update our fire-fighting efforts.

But, you know, we've had really challenging fire seasons '17, '18 — I think we got a bye in '19 — '20, and obviously, '21. After the Substation Fire (in 2018 near The



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

**Stephen Hagen, owner of Antiquum Farm, tells Oregon Gov. Kate Brown about his farm's targeted grazing operation — grazing goats in his forestland to reduce fuels and fire danger.**

Dalles), it was clear to me that we needed to rethink how we were fighting fires with the strategies, techniques, equipment and systems. So, we created the wildfire council in 2019.

## Q: How would you rate the performance of the Oregon Water Resources Department in managing the state's water, especially during drought? Is there anything you'd change?

I think this is incredibly challenging when you don't have enough (water). No decision is going to feel right; it's much like during the pandemic, right?

I think my goal for the department and frankly for the entire Western region is, we have to be working more collaboratively, more creatively. We have to be trying new techniques. I think we've got to do better about investing in wetland mitigation. And we're going to need help from our federal partners.

## Q: What's your response to farmers who say they don't feel heard by you? How do you perceive that you've listened to that community?

I mean, I will just tell you that the criticism I get from the progressive side is that I spend too much time listening to people. So, you obviously have to find a balance.

In my role as governor, it's harder firsthand, and so we work through organizations, right? Through the (Oregon Association of Nurseries), the Farm Bureau, (and) I work with members of the (State Board of Agriculture).

Could I have done more? Absolutely. There's no question about it. When I was (Oregon) Secretary of State

(2009 to 2015), I had listening sessions with folks like the Iversons (who run Iverson Family Farms and the Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm) and others to hear what was happening on the ground. It's honestly more challenging to do as governor — time constraints, and, you know, unfortunately, Oregon's been in crisis after crisis.

I think one of the biggest areas of conflict, frankly, is around climate change. I think that's where we most strongly butted heads.

We worked hard after our first version of "cap and invest" to really listen to both rural and agricultural community members, to forestry members, to make changes to the bill that would more closely reflect the need and be more responsive. I think we did that. We obviously ran into other issues — I'll just say politics.

## Q: When cap and trade bills on emissions didn't pass, why did you sidestep the Legislature and direct unelected officials to create the "Climate Protection Program," similar to cap and trade, without consent from legislators or the public?

Well, I would say conservatives sidestepped the legislative process when they walked out. I was very clear if there continued to be walkouts and the Legislature refused to tackle this issue, that I would take executive action.

We're obviously still in court battles, but I'm very confident that the courts will support my executive authority. We are in crisis and I have authority over state agencies, and they are taking action well within the con-

finer of the law. I would have preferred to do it through the legislative process; there's no question about that. That was impossible because people left the building.

## Q: Farmers have a spectrum of opinions about climate change, but even among farmers who agree with you that the agricultural sector should play a role in slowing climate change, many criticize your methods, saying they'd rather see positive incentives for private enterprise rather than more policies that punish businesses. Do you favor the "carrot" or "stick" approach to achieving your climate goals?

I always prefer carrot approaches. And what we liked about our legislation is that by creating incentives, it would have allowed us to create dollars to put back into our communities that have been underserved.

So, it was obviously a regulatory approach, but the resources would have been targeted into the communities that were on the front lines of climate change.

## Q: Can you describe a time when a farmer changed your mind?

Changed my mind — two people have been instrumental on multiple issues: Rep. Bobby Levy and her husband, Bob Levy. (The Levys farm in northeastern Oregon. Bobby Levy has served as a Republican in the Oregon House of Representatives since 2021.) I've worked with Bob on water issues. Bobby has been a source of information for me in terms of wolves, frankly, and in terms of ag and ranching policy.

## Q: And what shift has happened or is happening in your mindset?

I think it's really important to hear other people's perspectives and be able to listen and look at things from a broader lens. Conversations that I've had over the years with Bobby and others provided a different lens for me.

I will tell you that my votes on cougars in the Legislature are different than probably most of my counterparts in Portland. When Dan and I started dating, he was living in Enterprise, Wallowa County. (Dan Little is Brown's husband.) I had friends living in Wallowa County who were afraid to have their kids walk up Lostine Canyon because of cougars. I don't know that people have changed my mind, but I think folks have definitely broadened my perspective.

## Q: In Oregon's 2022 legislative session, many farmers asked you to veto the farmworker overtime pay rule, saying it could hurt their businesses. Have you decided yet if you'll sign the bill?

Yes. This was a really difficult issue, but we have two competing values here, right? We have the value that (people) who work hard in difficult and backbreaking conditions should be paid fairly, right?

And at the same time, we want to make sure that Oregon's family farms and ranches are able to make ends meet, to be able to put their kids through college and to be able to retire.

And so, I made a decision. I will be signing the bill. (She signed the bill one day after the interview, on Friday, April 15.) But I have to say, I see this as a start. In my conversations with folks in the ag sector, I encourage them to continue these conversations. I do not believe this bill is perfect by any way, shape or form. But I think you have to start somewhere. I think it's important that it start through the legislative process because you can make changes, right? This is a step forward. Changes will need to be made.

But here's the second piece. The alternatives were going to (Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries) and to the courts. I know from talking to the labor commissioner that would have been overtime immediately for 40

hours a week. At least this legislation was a phase-in.

I think the economic benefits are well-intended. I think the question is, do they meet the needs of our small family farms? And I don't know the answer to that. But I think the time is now.

I would encourage folks to sit down at the table now and if folks want to talk with me about it, I'm more than happy to have that conversation about how we could improve it.

## Q: Was there ever a point during the legislative session when you considered vetoing the overtime bill?

I try to keep an open mind. I met with the Farm Bureau and folks. I talked to the people that I know. I'll just say that. And my conclusion is this was better than what would have happened if I had vetoed the bill.

## Q: Some longtime Oregon farmers have recently moved their operations to states they view as more "business-friendly," citing the difficulty of running a farm business here under increasing regulations related to climate, COVID, etc. What's your response to those farmers who say that your policies drove them away?

Well, I think our policies, our goal of our policies is to make sure that we preserve the future of Oregon, that we keep people safe and healthy, and I would hope that for those folks who feel like we aren't doing the right thing or have gone too far to stay engaged with rule-making processes. That's really important to have your voice be heard.

## Q: Anything else you want farmers to know?

My sister (Molly Brown) was a cattle rancher for 25 years. And she is back cattle ranching (in Montana). It was through her that I also gained a different perspective. People ask if my job is stressful. No question. But I at least have control over a lot of things. These folks, you know, have to hope that it's going to rain when we need it to rain, and not rain and snow when it shouldn't. So, I think (farming) is incredibly stressful. I know folks work incredibly hard. I think it is truly a labor of love.

## Overtime: 'There's no way to tax credit our way out of this situation'

Continued from Page 1

Most farmers will be eligible for one of three tiers of tax credits, depending on whether they employ 25 or fewer workers, 25 to 50 workers, or more than 50 workers.

The tax credits will decline between 2023 and 2028. After that, credits will end or be re-evaluated by lawmakers based on economic studies required under HB 4002.

In her letter to House and Senate leaders, Brown acknowledged the new law "has consequences for employers," which is why she said it was crucial to include tax credits.

But both Cooper, of the Farm Bureau, and Stone, of the nursery association, said the tax credits are poorly designed, don't fit the agricultural sector and are likely impermanent.

"There's no way to tax credit our way out of this situation," said Cooper.

Brown wrote that the law may need to be changed and improved over time, so she said it's important that the conversation continue.

"I encourage legislators and stakeholders to continue their engagement on these issues, so that necessary and appropriate adjustments to the law can be made over time, during future legislative sessions," said Brown.

Both Stone and Cooper said their organizations plan to continue the conversation and hope future legislators and the next governor are more sympathetic to farmers' needs.

## Dean: College of Ag Sciences is second-largest college at OSU

Continued from Page 1

### First-generation student

As a first-generation college student in her family, Simonich said she initially had no idea what academia was.

Simonich grew up in Green Bay, Wis., where her father worked at a paper mill. Though she was never raised on a farm, she remembers fondly digging in the dirt with her grandfather, who grew berries, asparagus, potatoes and raised rabbits for meat. Several family friends also ran dairies in the area, where she would occasionally spend weekends.

"I certainly didn't grow up on a farm, but had enough of that experience to enjoy it and see the importance of it," Simonich said.

In high school, Simonich said she was a good student with an aptitude for science and math. Going to college, she said, was a natural progression and way to better her life.

Simonich earned her bachelor's degree in chemistry with a minor in environmental science from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. She got a job working at the same mill as her father to pay her way through undergraduate school.

From there, Simonich received her doctorate in chemistry from Indiana University and went to work as a senior scientist for Procter & Gamble, a multinational consumer goods company that makes everything from laundry detergent to snack foods.

"I did everything from ensur-



Karl Maasdam/OSU

**Staci Simonich is the first woman to serve as dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences at Oregon State University. She joined OSU as an assistant professor in 2001.**

ing the safety of their products to developing and finding new chemistries," she said. "I found that fascinating, but I wondered if there was more."

Simonich had never considered becoming a college professor — at the time, there were no female chemistry professors at IU, she recalls.

But when she saw an opening for an assistant professor at OSU, she asked herself, Why not?

"It was a bit of an adventure," she said. "I wanted to ensure I had a long and enjoyable career where I could contribute to the next generation.

I thought I could better do that here."

### Supporting agriculture

Between her time in private industry and the different leadership positions she has held at OSU, every step of her career has prepared her to be dean, she said.

"I didn't even know what a dean was when I started at UW-Green Bay," she said. "It makes sense now."

The College of Agricultural Sciences is the second-largest college at OSU, behind only the College of Engineering. Simonich is in charge of nearly 800

staff and faculty in more than 40 academic programs, and 13 agricultural experiment stations from the Oregon coast to the high desert.

Simonich will retain the duties she held as executive associate dean, and continues to meet with industry partners. After she was named dean, she spent several days at the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland, meeting with Northwest growers, supply chain managers and sales representatives.

Simonich said she plans to spend a lot of time traveling this summer, attending field days at the university's research stations and community events like the Pendleton Round-Up.

"I look forward to getting out," she said. "Our goal as a college is to support all of our stakeholders and address their needs."

On campus, Simonich said she will build on the college's strengths, including strong student enrollment, research and extension programs.

The college is also dedicated to providing equity and opportunity for everyone while growing Oregon's diversity as a state, she added.

"Now more than ever, we must be out there working collaboratively with Oregon's densely diverse agricultural and natural resource industries and communities to advance scientific discovery, create economic opportunity, develop future leaders and strive each day to make tomorrow better for all," Simonich said.