



GROWING

ELECTRIC

George Plaven/Capital Press
Robert Wallace, executive director of the Wy'East Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, demonstrates a new Solectrac compact electric tractor at his home in Dufur, Ore.

Farmers, nonprofit groups experiment with eTractors

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

DUFUR, Ore. — The first time Robert Wallace started an electric tractor, he was astonished by how quiet it was.

“I didn’t know if it was on or not,” Wallace said. “It was the most mind-boggling thing. It took me probably two or three weeks to get used to, not having a constant rumble of noise.”

Over the last year, Wallace has become well acquainted with the tractor as he used it to mow grass and perform other chores around his home near Dufur, Ore.

His demonstrations are part of a unique project in Oregon, field testing electric

‘I CONSIDER MYSELF JUST A REALIST. I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SAY IF IT WORKS, OR IF IT DOESN’T WORK.’

Robert Wallace, executive director of the Wy’East Resource Conservation and Development Area Council

tractors in rural agricultural areas like Dufur and allowing producers to see firsthand what they can do on farms and in orchards.

Data from the trials were also used by Oregon State University in a newly released study comparing the cost of ownership for battery-powered electric tractors to their diesel counterparts. Early

results indicate the cost may be comparable, depending on several factors, including the purchase price, fuel prices and maintenance costs.

Proponents of electric vehicles are quick to point out social and environmental benefits such as reducing carbon emissions that contribute to climate change. But Wallace said his main focus is simply

learning how the technology stacks up for rural areas.

“I consider myself just a realist,” he said. “I want to be able to say if it works, or if it doesn’t work.”

‘Inevitable transition’

Wallace is executive director of the Wy’East Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, a regional nonprofit based in The Dalles, Ore., dedicated to helping farms improve their energy and water efficiency.

As a certified energy manager, Wallace has spent most of the last decade working with growers to optimize their irrigation

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Biden nominates ODA’s Alexis Taylor for trade role at USDA

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Biden administration has tapped Oregon Department of Agriculture director Alexis Taylor to fill USDA’s top agricultural trade role.

In a statement May 13, the White House named Taylor as its nominee as USDA



Alexis Taylor

undersecretary for trade and foreign agricultural affairs, a position that has been vacant since President Biden took

office.

Taylor has not yet responded to the Capital Press’s request for comment.

The job is of major importance to America’s farming sector.

Farm groups nationwide have pressed for months for the Biden administration to fill the position.

In her new role, Taylor will be an ambassador responsible for overseeing international negotiations related to agricultural trade, developing USDA’s trade policy, facilitating foreign market access and promoting U.S. agriculture.

Taylor has many years of experience with U.S. agricultural trade policy, and her expected appointment was immediately welcomed by farm groups and lawmakers.

“U.S. agricultural producers need to have a leading voice on the world stage who can advocate for

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free and fair trade, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Thankfully, Alexis Taylor has the right background and experience to hit the ground running,” Sen. Chuck Grassley, a senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said in a statement.

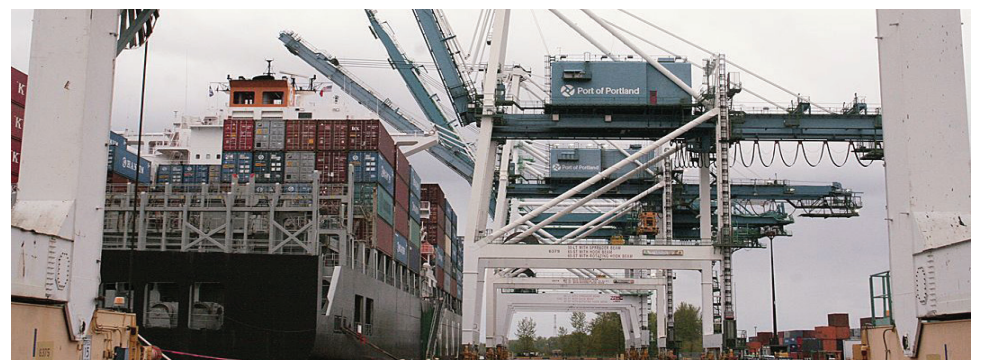
Grassley said he will support Taylor throughout the Senate confirmation process.

In a joint statement, U.S. Wheat Associates and the National Association of Wheat Growers also welcomed Taylor’s appointment.

“(National Association of Wheat Growers) welcomes President Biden nominating Alexis Taylor to this key role and encourage(s) the Senate Agriculture Committee to work diligently and expeditiously in considering this nomination,” said NAWG’s CEO, Chandler Goule.

Ted McKinney, CEO of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, applauded Taylor’s

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Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

Negotiations between the longshoremen’s union and container terminal owners have begun amid “terrible” port congestion, but experts are hopeful further problems can be avoided.

Labor talks begin amid port problems, but experts are cautiously optimistic

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Contract negotiations between the longshoremen’s union and container terminal owners along the West Coast have begun amid port congestion problems that are already crippling farm exports.

However, experts are cautiously optimistic that talks between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association won’t further impede port operations.

“I’m encouraged by the messages we feel we’re getting from both sides that they recognize what is at stake right now,” said Peter Friedmann, executive director of the Agriculture Transportation Coalition, which represents farm export-

ers. “They have both been very willing to engage.”

Negotiations began last week over the contract that governs wages, benefits and employment rules for the longshoremen who work at PMA terminals. The agreement expires on July 1.

When the previous contract ended in mid-2014, it resulted in work slowdowns that cost businesses, including agricultural exporters, hundreds of millions of dollars. A deal was struck in 2015.

Congestion at the ports is already considered catastrophic in 2022, with agricultural exporters struggling to obtain empty shipping containers to send farm products to Asia, Friedmann said.

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