

Wheeler: Oregon produces more than 200 commodities

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but he's a sixth generation Oregonian with rural roots. His family was in the timber business; the Tillamook County town of Wheeler, on the Oregon Coast, was named after his great-grandfather, who started a mill there. His mother's side comes from the Fossil area, in Eastern Oregon.

Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said Wheeler has a "very strong affinity" for Oregon ag due to his background.

"Because of his experience, he has that statewide perspective," she said. "He's very sensitive to the fact that Portland does have a big influence on the rest of the state."

Coba knows Wheeler; among other encounters, he stood in for then-Gov. Ted Kulongoski to accompany Coba on an Oregon ag trade mission to Asia several years ago.

"He hasn't consulted me (on ag issues)," Coba said, "but if he had a question I think he would be very comfortable calling on me."

'Increasingly clueless'

For his part, Wheeler said he's fully aware of both the urban-rural divide and urban-rural interdependence.

"You can't talk about success in the agricultural industry without talking about the role urban areas play," he said. "Urban communities in America are increasingly clueless about the challenges facing rural communities."

But he said urban and rural areas also have issues in common. During a visit to Roseburg, he heard people express concern about the homeless, just as they do in Portland. In Klamath Falls, there was worry about escalat-



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Riders line up to board one of the twin Portland Aerial Tram cars that will carry them up to "Pill Hill," Oregon Health & Science University. Portland's growth patterns are a concern to the state's farmers.

MORE ON PORTLAND MAYOR-ELECT WHEELER

Some political observers regard Portland Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler as Oregon's governor-in-waiting.

He was a Multnomah County commissioner before being appointed state treasurer in 2010 upon the death of Ben Westlund, then won election as treasurer in his own right in 2012.

He's literally written a book on good government. He holds an economics degree from

Stanford, an master of business administration degree from Columbia and a master's degree in public policy from Harvard. He has experience in private business.

He turns 54 at the end of August, is married and has a daughter, and comes across as intelligent, affable and fit — he climbed Mount Everest in 2002 and once did a snowshoe trek to the North Pole.



Edward "Ted" Wheeler

- **Age:** 53
 - **Political party:** Democrat
 - **Residence:** Southwest Portland, Ore.
 - **Family:** Wife, Katrina, and daughter
 - **Education:** Bachelor's in economics, Stanford; MBA, Columbia University; MA in public policy, Harvard University
 - **Professional career:** Author; employee, Bank of America and Copper Mountain Trust; lecturer, Northeastern University; small business owner
 - **Political career:** Multnomah County Commissioner, 2007-10; Treasurer, State of Oregon, 2010-present; Mayor-elect, City of Portland, 2016
 - **Volunteer work:** Neighborhood House, Oregon Sports Authority, Portland Mountain Rescue, Boy Scouts of America
- Sources: tedwheeler.com; votesmart.org

Capital Press graphic

ing housing costs, another Portland concern.

"If we just assume urban and rural communities are so different that we have nothing in common, then we're losing an opportunity to collaborate, share ideas and find common solutions," he said.

Wheeler said he has interacted with the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Cattlemen's Association and nursery groups in the past.

"The urban-rural divide has been around a long time," Wheeler said. "It's not new, and it's not unique to Oregon. There's always been people who exploit it for political gain. You won't see me do that."

Making a difference

He'll take office in a city that decides every election and can swamp statewide discussions of pesticides, labor, GMOs, wages or regulatory issues. Its land-

use, water use and traffic patterns can affect what farmers grow, how they grow it, how they get it to market and how they use and move equipment.

"Land and transportation are the two things he can make a difference in," said Jeff Fairchild, produce director for 18 New Seasons grocery stores in the Portland area. He deals with about 50 growers who sell to New Seasons, and must find ways to deliver their products to the city.

Dan Arp, dean of Oregon State University's College of Agricultural Sciences, said he would remind Wheeler that agriculture is the state's second largest economic driver. Oregon ag produces \$5 billion in annual farm-gate value and is a major source of jobs, Arp said.

The state produces more than 200 commodities and is equally diverse in terms of acreage and farming methods, he said. Portland's celebrated "foodie" cul-

ture is supported by an agricultural sector that provides high-quality foods and beverages, with an emphasis on sustainability, Arp said.

Coba, the state ag director, said development of the proposed James Beard Public Market, named for a renowned chef from the city, could showcase Oregon agriculture in downtown Portland.

"Clearly there's a passion around food in Portland, we all know that," she said.

Others in agriculture note Portland's influence on issues ranging from gas taxes to the minimum wage. Another said Portland ought to take greater advantage of nearby agricultural production to eliminate the city's food "deserts," the areas where poor people don't have ready access to fresh, healthy food.

Many in ag hope the new mayor realizes the Port of Portland and Portland International Airport are agriculture's pipeline to world markets, whether it's hazelnuts to China, wheat to Japan or blueberries to South Korea. Port delays, labor strife and an inadequate transportation infrastructure cost producers time and money, and they believe fixing those problems should be a priority.

Wheeler agrees, and said it is a statewide issue.

"A lot of the future success of the agricultural industry hinges on partnering with the urban area and the Port of Portland," he said.

"I think there's a general lack of understanding about what it takes to make agricultural enterprises successful from an economic standpoint," he said. "That's an area where I have a lot to learn and to share with my constituents, and I look forward to those opportunities."

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