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OUR VIEW

# 'Buying the farm' takes new meaning

There's more to an agricultural land sale than a willing buyer and a willing seller.

A farm or ranch changing hands can impact neighbors and the local economy almost as much as the parties directly involved.

That's why when ag land goes up for sale it's a big deal — far more important than just dollars and cents.

Last week, EO Media Group reporter Eric Mortenson took a look at the sale of agricultural land across Oregon. What he found was the price of exclusive farm use land — a designation used by the state to identify the best ag land — has skyrocketed in recent years as it changed hands. Some remained orchards, vineyards, farms or ranchland, but other tracts were taken out of production for a variety of purposes including conservation, recreation and even a state park.

In each case, the sale can have a profound impact. Some examples:

- Neighboring farmers and ranchers see the price of expansion increasing, potentially beyond their means. At the same time, the comparable value of their land continues to grow, impacting their finances.

- The area where the state purchased ranchland for conversion to a state park has seen mixed impacts. Neighbors have seen the

pool of grazing land shrink, but nearby towns have seen the number of visitors increase.

Overall, the biggest impact is when land is taken out of production.

Because agricultural land is more than real estate, buyers and sellers need to take the local economy into account.

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For example, taking vast swaths of ranchland out of production will impact other ranchers and their ability to graze livestock. If livestock is no longer raised, that will impact the economy. Equipment will no longer be bought or serviced in nearby

towns. Seed and fertilizer dealers will see the number of customers shrink. Cattle will no longer go to market, impacting livestock auctions.

Considering that the average age of farmers across the West is about 60, what happens when agricultural land changes hands takes on added importance.

Whether land stays in the family or is sold to absentee landowners, how it is used profoundly impacts the region.

Overall, the best case scenario is the land will remain in agriculture, supporting ranchers, farmers and the economy.

Whether, or how, that can be mandated will remain a continuing debate across the West.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



## Culture Corner

A slave once lived in Umatilla, and not that long ago. Her name was Lola. She was a "gift" to the mother of Alex Tizon, the late Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and professor at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication.

Tizon died March 23. His final article — selected as the June cover story for *The Atlantic* — tells the story of Lola, a Filipino woman who was taken in by Tizon's family to cook, clean and take care of the children. She was not paid, berated for poor work and not allowed to return home after her own parents died.

In the words of Tizon, "No other word but slave encompassed the life she lived."

Tizon describes how Lola was brought home by his grandfather as an utusan, or "helper," and details the history of Spanish slavery in the Philippines that has persisted

to present day. It is clear in reading that Tizon struggled with the conflict after his family came to the United States, where they moved a number of times and lived for at least a short period in Umatilla.

Readers may also find themselves wrestling with their conscience, alternating between curious, sad, furious and, perhaps, empathetic. Already, "My Family's Slave" has garnered strong reaction on social media. Some have condemned Tizon and his family as monsters, while others are defending the author and encouraging a deeper understanding of Filipino culture. Issues of *The Atlantic* are available on newsstands, or the article can be read online at [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com).

— Reporter George Plaven



The cover of *The Atlantic*, May 2017



"HE WASN'T INVITED OR SUBPOENAED OR ANYTHING. HE JUST SHOWED UP!"

OTHER VIEWS

## Unfreeing American workers

American conservatives love to talk about freedom. Milton Friedman's famous pro-capitalist book and TV series were titled "Free to Choose." And the hard-liners in the House pushing for a complete dismantling of Obamacare call themselves the Freedom Caucus.

Well, why not? After all, America is an open society, in which everyone is free to make his or her own choices about where to work and how to live.

Everyone, that is, except the 30 million workers now covered by noncompete agreements, who may find themselves all but unemployable if they quit their current jobs; the 52 million Americans with pre-existing conditions who will be effectively unable to buy individual health insurance, and hence stuck with their current employers, if the Freedom Caucus gets its way; and the millions of Americans burdened down by heavy student and other debt.

The reality is that Americans, especially American workers, don't feel all that free. The Gallup World Survey asks residents of many countries whether they feel that they have "freedom to make life choices"; the U.S. doesn't come out looking too good, especially compared with the high freedom grades of European nations with strong social safety nets.

And you can make a strong case that we're getting less free as time goes by.

Let's talk first about those noncompete agreements, which were recently the subject of a stunning article in *The New York Times* (the latest in a series), plus a report from the Obama administration pushing for limits to the practice.

Noncompete agreements were originally supposed to be about protecting trade secrets, and therefore helping to promote innovation and investment in job training. Suppose that a company trying to build a better mousetrap hires a new mousetrap engineer. Her employment contract might very well include a clause preventing her from leaving a few months later for a job with a rival pest-control firm, since she could be taking crucial in-house information with her. And that's perfectly reasonable.

At this point, however, almost one in five American employees is subject to some kind of noncompete clause. There can't be that many workers in possession of valuable trade secrets, especially when many of these workers are in relatively low-paying jobs. For example, one prominent case involved Jimmy John's, a sandwich chain, basically trying to ban its former franchisees from working for other sandwich makers.

Furthermore, the terms of the clauses are often defined ridiculously widely. It's as if our hypothetical mousetrap engineer were prohibited from seeking employment with



PAUL KRUGMAN  
Comment

any other manufacturing firm, or in any occupation that makes use of her engineering skills.

At this point, in other words, noncompete clauses are in many cases less about protecting trade secrets than they are about tying workers to their current employers, unable to bargain for better wages or quit to take better jobs.

This shouldn't be happening in America, and to be fair some politicians in both parties have been speaking up about the need for change (although few expect the Trump administration to follow up on the Obama administration's reform push). But there's another aspect of declining worker freedom that is very much a partisan issue: health care.

Until 2014, there was basically only one way Americans under 65 with pre-existing conditions could get health insurance: by finding an employer willing to offer coverage. Some employers were in fact willing to do so. Why? Because there were major tax advantages — premiums aren't counted as taxable income — but to get those advantages employer plans must offer the same coverage to every employee, regardless of medical history.

But what if you wanted to change jobs, or start your own business? Too bad: you were basically stuck (and I knew quite a few people in that position).

Then Obamacare went into effect, guaranteeing affordable care even to those with pre-existing medical conditions. This was a hugely liberating change for millions. Even if you didn't immediately take advantage of the new program to strike out on your own, the fact was that now you could.

But maybe not for much longer. Trumpcare — the American Health Care Act — would drastically reduce protections for Americans with pre-existing conditions. And even if that bill never becomes law, the Trump administration is effectively sabotaging individual insurance markets, so that in many cases Americans who lose employer coverage will have no place to turn — which in turn tie those who do have such coverage to their current employers.

You might say, with only a bit of hyperbole, that workers in America, supposedly the land of the free, are actually creeping along the road to serfdom, yoked to corporate employers the way Russian peasants were once tied to their masters' land. And the people pushing them down that road are the very people who cry "freedom" the loudest.

Paul Krugman joined *The New York Times* in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

YOUR VIEWS

### Controlling invasive animals best way to maintain balance

Many biological studies have been done showing how invasive species affect the natural species of an area. In Wyoming the mountain goats are gaining in population and the bighorns are declining in population. I believe that we as humans should take some measures to try and prevent the natural species from being wiped out.

Some of the reasons that these animals are moving together are weather-related and just a lack of land. Both of these are consequences of human activity, and we need to take responsibility for this and try to keep these species from interacting. As the article said, the mountain goats carry pathogens that can kill the bighorns. We should try and keep the mountain goat population under control so the bighorns don't go extinct.

We also should not introduce any species that are not indigenous to an area. For example, the wolves that were released in Yellowstone National Park and have spread throughout most of the Northwest are not the native species of wolf and are causing a ton of damage. They are not being held in check and are diminishing deer and elk populations. They are also killing livestock and costing many farmers money and

hurting their lifestyle. We need to take action and start controlling the species that we force to move and the species that we introduce into an area.

Hunter Sater  
Athena

### Hermiston School District must go back to basics

The recent Hermiston school bond issue reminds me of a professor I had in college. He was very smart but had no common sense. This is why I think the school board needs to change their thinking — you can't keep building large campuses like schools with high maintenance.

Hermiston is a small city, not a college-like atmosphere. You can not expect the taxpayers to keep funneling money for huge school projects. I suggest you stop looking for the moon and get down to basics. You can start with the fact that a lot of us were educated in buildings three or four stories high with reasonably sized playgrounds. And the fact that we had to climb stairs didn't seem to bother us; perhaps it was good exercise.

My suggestion is to learn to live within your means and use some common sense when planning for the future.

Jim Tiede  
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

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