

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Fewer farms in the middle a challenge for rural communities

Chris Mertz, director of the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service field office in Olympia, Washington, says that while the number of small farms continues to grow, larger farms continue to get bigger.

Farms both small and large, it seems, are feeding on the middle. That could have big ramifications for rural communities.

For purposes of the Census, the USDA defines a farm as any property that produces, or has the capability of producing, \$1,000 worth of agricultural products a year.

Because the bar is so low, there are a lot of farms — 98,405 in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

The USDA puts farms into one of three categories — small, medium and large — not by acreage but by total sales. A small farm is any operation with sales of less than \$250,000. By that measure, 90% of the region's farms are small.

Sixty-five percent of all farms produce less than \$10,000 in revenue a year. Nearly a third did not actually



EO Media Group Photo/Dan Wheat, File

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sell \$1,000 in product, but had the potential to do so.

A medium-sized farm has sales of more than \$250,000 and less than \$500,000. Just 3,477 farms qualify.

Large farms have sales of more than \$500,000, and there are 5,871 of those in the Pacific Northwest.

The census measures what it calls “farm concentration of market value,” which reflects how many farms make most of a state's income.

Just 2,870 farms in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, or 2.9% of the total, account for 75% of the region's \$21.8 billion in sales. Half the total is sold

by 645 farms.

As more production becomes concentrated in fewer farms, Mertz said it speaks to fewer small farms growing and succeeding as mid-size farms.

“Farming is a challenging occupation,” Mertz said. “You need to get to the point of having the resources available to pay all your bills, raise your family and to have a balanced life. Sometimes in the middle category, there might just not be enough revenue.”

More than 55,000 primary producers in the region have off-farm jobs, and 36,000 work more than 200 days a year off the farm.

There's nothing wrong with being a part-time farmer as long as there's an off-farm job available to sufficiently supplement the farm income. If there's not, that farm will be absorbed by a larger operation, or sold into hobby farms, and a family will have to move to find opportunities elsewhere.

The challenge for rural communities is to remain economically viable and able to provide the opportunities to support these farm families in the middle.



AMERICAN TRAGIC

YOUR VIEWS

Washington to allow composting of human bodies

It's not even close to Halloween! You've got to be kidding!

Just when you think the Democrats can't get any more stupid, Gov. Jay Inslee (running for Pres-

ident of the U.S.A.) signs into law a bill to allow composting Grandma and Grandpa and throwing them into the vegetable garden.

It's hard enough to get the kiddies to eat their veggies now, without putting Grandma into the pot!

Check your produce label at the store and do

not buy Washington-grown or you may be chewing on Grandpa's leg. Will be tough to scrub Grandma and Grandpa off the carrots and radishes!

New label: Grown With No Human Compost? Sick! Gross! The “new Frankenstein”?

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OTHER VIEWS

It's time to take a stand

There is no crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border. In fact, apprehensions of illegal crossings have plummeted over the last two decades, from 1.6 million in 1999 to just 400,000 in 2018, according to the U.S. Border Patrol. It is true that an increasing number of families are fleeing civil strife in Central America and seeking safe harbor here, as they have the legal right to do. For their efforts, they are being separated, detained, pushed into self-deportation and otherwise harassed in what is becoming one of the darker periods of U.S. history.

Most troubling on the border, though, is the presence of militias. Fueled by the xenophobic rhetoric of our president, these groups of armed men and women believe they are doing the country a favor by “assisting” the Border Patrol. One group in New Mexico, the United Constitutional Patriots, recently changed its name and moved to an undisclosed camp, after its armed members were accused of holding a group of border-crossers against their will — an act otherwise known as kidnapping. This kind of vigilantism plagued the lawless American West throughout the 19th century. Today, it represents an intricate fantasy world that is both sad and dangerous, as fake soldiers with real weapons threaten the safety of actual civilians fleeing actual violence.

Luckily, common sense can and sometimes does prevail. Citizens along the border are getting fed up with the ongoing antics of militias. In one town, Ari-

vaca, Arizona, a coalition of residents has come together to resist, refuse and otherwise retaliate against militia activity.

Writer Tay Wiles, who follows extremism throughout the West, assembles an intimate portrait of the town and the impacts that militia and violence have had there over the years. There, militia members are banned from some establishments, and residents have put plans in place to protect each other if these armed interlopers carry out any of the (mostly) hollow threats they have made against the town. As one resident tells Wiles: “We need to

take a stand.”

We should all learn from Arivaca, where neighborliness and decency have risen above national politics and provocation. In today's political climate, it is becoming all too tempting to bar the door, turn down the lights, and tweet from the safety of the couch. I would encourage everybody who truly cares about the West to take their own stand, wherever they may be. The region is facing many challenges, but every hand helps. If a militia has moved into town, ban it. If a racist makes a snide comment, confront him. If a colleague claims that climate change is a hoax, correct her. We can all act together on behalf of the American West, and right now that means standing against ignorance, racism and intolerance, in any form, whether it comes from the border, the White House or the house next door.

Brian Calvert is the editor-in-chief of High Country News.



BRIAN CALVERT
COMMENT



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