

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

ANDREW CUTLER  
Publisher/Editor

KATHRYN B. BROWN  
Owner

ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Editor/Senior Reporter

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## OUR VIEW

### What's happening with farmland across the nation?

For decades there have been concerns that foreign investors are buying up farmland in the United States.

That this is a hot-button issue for American producers and a strategic policy concern for politicians is understandable. Wealthy foreign buyers make it harder for domestic producers to compete for available farmland. Well-heeled investors of all types always push out smaller potential buyers. The thought of some foreign actor taking control of the domestic food supply is frightening.

There's no doubt that foreign investors are interested in snapping up American farmland. We are more concerned with what foreign investors are doing with the farmland they buy than we are that they are buying it in the first place.

Our reporting of USDA data shows that in the 40 years or so that records have been kept, foreign investors have bought more than 35 million acres of U.S. farmland worth \$62 billion. In all, that's an area larger than the state of New York.

According to USDA staff, outside investments are on the rise. Filings show foreign holdings of American farmland increased by 141% between 2004 and 2019.

In 1978, Congress passed the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act, which required foreign buyers to report their transactions.

Foreign buyers have purchased 1.2 million acres of Oregon farmland — roughly 7.5% of the state's farm acreage, according to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture. The total is 1.5 million acres in Washington, and just 122,598 acres in Idaho.

The takeover of American farm production by foreigners is far from imminent. Their purchases in the last 40 years are equal to 3.9% of the farmland now in production.

Critics are convinced the reported numbers are low, and contend without proof that much more land is being bought than is being reported. They concede it would be impossible to quantify without combing through land records in 3,000 county courthouses across the country.

It is certain the USDA's numbers are misleading. Some of the land in question has been sold by one foreign buyer to another, while others have divested altogether. Tracking those transactions through USDA data is difficult. Also, not all foreign investors who have reported a purchase have a controlling interest in the land.

We agree that foreign purchases should be monitored. It would be a dangerous problem if foreign interests gain control of U.S. agriculture.

To be clear, we would prefer that U.S. farmland stay in the hands, or at least the control, of U.S. entities. But, the more pressing concern is keeping farmland productive.

Foreign investors are joining domestic companies that are interested in building alternative energy facilities or other real estate developments on farmland.

Turning cropland into windfarms, shopping malls and subdivisions is a greater danger to agriculture, and in turn the country, than a French company buying vineyards here to make wine.

Once farmland is built over, it's gone for good. No farmer, foreign or domestic, will ever farm it again.

## 20 years later, reflecting on 9/11



BRIGIT FARLEY  
PAST AND PROLOGUE

Our country will mark the 20th anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon this Saturday. So many emotions and images emerge in a reflection on 20 years, but there is one word that keeps coming to me time and again.

That dreadful day and its aftermath became a study in contrasts.

The attacks managed to showcase in one terrible event the best and worst in human beings. The planners and hijackers took aim at institutions thousands of miles from their homelands. They hated the Pentagon, WTC and personnel more than they valued their own lives.

In contrast, hundreds of firemen, police and emergency workers rushed into the burning buildings, putting their lives in grave danger, to save as many lives as possible. Stephen Siller, a fireman with Squad 1 in Brooklyn, was among them. The father of five children, Siller had just finished a shift and was headed for the golf course. When he heard of the attacks on the radio, he rushed back to his firehouse, where he saw that the Squad 1 crew had already left.

The city had closed to traffic all bridges and tunnels, but Siller was undaunted. He threw on his gear and ran through the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, to the WTC, where he died with his comrades, attempting to rescue people in the south tower. Could there be a more compelling demonstration of love for humanity?

In the aftermath, the enormous shock and grief in New York, a tough-minded,



hustling city whose unofficial motto might be, "get outta my way," morphed into a free-floating compassion. Riders nodded to other riders on the subway, where studied indifference is the norm. The city streets were bustling as ever, but people seemed to take more care to avoid jostling passersby.

Three weeks after the attacks, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani appealed to visitors to attend a nearby funeral, as there were so many taking place simultaneously that some services might lack mourners. My dad and I happened to be in the city for a concert, so we went to St. Ignatius Loyola to help commemorate the life of 31-year-old firefighter Thomas P. Cullen III.

Cullen, we learned, had graduated from Fordham University and planned to attend law school, but discerned a calling to the fire service and waited years for his chance. He left a young wife and 2-year-old son. We were moved to discover we were sitting with individuals

from the UK, France, Brazil and Japan, all come to honor a stranger's ultimate sacrifice. They introduced themselves after the funeral and spoke of their deep sorrow for this country.

That same evening, Dad and I attended our Berlin Philharmonic concert at Carnegie Hall. Before the performance, the conductor turned and asked the audience to stand. The orchestra then played a slow, funereal rendition of the National Anthem, in memory of the 9/11 dead. There were few dry eyes among the concertgoers afterward.

Long-term responses to the attacks contrasted sharply as well. The strike in Afghanistan against those who harbored the 9/11 plotters seemed proportionate, but it and the ensuing war with Iraq became occupations. These spawned resistance that killed many American service personnel and local civilians and damaged the U.S. image abroad when evidence of torture emerged. The shambolic U.S. exit from Afghanistan serves as a fresh reminder

of the costs of the "war on terror."

Yet in the U.S., many people worked to bring forth something positive from the tragedy. President George W. Bush called upon Americans to rise above blaming American Muslims for the attacks. He modeled generosity and broad-mindedness by appearing in public with prominent Muslim leaders. Stephen Siller's family had an inspired idea as they sought meaning in Stephen's death: They would invite people from around the world to "follow the footsteps." On a September Sunday each year, participants pay \$50 to join about 30,000 of their new best friends to run or walk Stephen's 9/11 route from Brooklyn, through the Battery Tunnel, to the WTC site. A post-race block party caps off a wonderful day of remembrance. Proceeds from this and similar events around the country go to the construction of smart homes for disabled veterans and assistance for children of fallen first responders.

Former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo hinted at maybe the greatest good that could come from the attacks. Recalling his shock and horror at witnessing thousands of people murdered at their workplaces on an ordinary September Tuesday, Cuomo suggested that everyone take the words "carpe diem" to heart.

"9/11 is not going to teach you what to do with your life," he said in an interview, "but it will teach you to do with your life."

In other words, live and remember. Call that friend. Plan that trip. Seize the day. Tomorrow is not promised.

*Brigit Farley is a Washington State University professor, student of history, adventurer and Irish heritage girl living in Pendleton.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### We need to change with the climate

A recent "Our view" editorial in the East Oregonian, written after the release of the most recent report from the inter-governmental panel on climate change, implied that there are two sides to the climate debate.

But those two voices are really the same language spoken with a different accent.

It's understandable that there's a desire to put a positive spin on this. But getting policy proposals from academic experts is like buying your food from an auto dealership. That's not their business. It takes decades to get a dam built, decades that we don't have. And that's before we talk about the disappearance of salmon and steelhead, whose numbers have dwindled to nothing. The steep drop off is because we've already dammed up so many streams. Those fish evolved in fast-flowing waters and that's what's in short supply.

That said, there's much to be optimistic about, but it's new stuff, stuff that will turn things upside down, and that's hard. This isn't about technology. Electric vehicles, charging stations, solar panels, wind turbines, battery storage, digital controls to connect them all — all that stuff exists. It's about changing the way we do business, about who makes money and how it's made.

We need a clear understanding that we have only a few years left to turn the ship around. We have to adopt those new ideas, to move in with them psychologically, socially, and culturally. We need to change with the climate.

We also need to protect our waterways. That's why the River Democracy Act should be supported by Union County. A changing climate is a serious threat to all of us because our fresh waters are what keep us all here and make agriculture possible. Whether that water comes as rain or snow, and how long it stays in the mountains, that's up to us. Capturing

that water in reservoirs that will only heat up with the climate is a sure route to more fish kill. We need to protect what we have.

It's time to get real about what we face and what it will take to deal with it. The old ways are gone. It's time for the new ways to take hold. That's the voice we all need to speak with.

Norm Cimon  
La Grande

### Action required to save Pacific Northwest salmon

As a retired fish biologist who still spends a lot of time with rivers, I've observed the impacts of warming rivers on fish and other wildlife here in North-eastern Oregon for many years. This summer has been grim.

Water temperatures are through the roof. In July, the entire run of endangered Snake River sockeye had to be trucked from Lower Granite Dam to their spawning streams. Water in the Snake was hot enough to kill them.

Climate change means that every year, we must be ready to implement drastic solutions like this on a moment's notice or risk losing runs of salmon and other freshwater species. Our "rubber meets the road" solutions need to be flexible and immediate — not 10 years from now, but today.

Securing a future for our region's iconic wildlife and fighting climate change should go hand in hand. Oregon is a leader in both these arenas, and Gov. Kate Brown was correct in her recent op-ed: A federal infrastructure appropriation is the right way to tackle these issues simultaneously. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, we need your leadership to secure federal investments for the Columbia Basin now. Climate-smart energy infrastructure, and regional programs such as compensation to farmers who share their irrigation water with fish, are working solutions that make a difference right now. Expand these solutions.

Urgent action is required, or we risk a future filled with litigation, climate

chaos and most certainly the extinction of many salmon species here in the Pacific Northwest.

Mary Edwards  
Joseph

### Compassionate people give hope in a time of unrest

The coronavirus pandemic, hurricanes and flooding, wildfires and the plight of refugees are fueling the division and political unrest in the United States, as well as the entire world. It is tempting to join in with the weeping and wailing and anger and blaming. And it tempts those of good will to sink into overwhelming depression and helplessness, not knowing how to deal with the suffering of so many human souls.

We forget to reflect on the courageous health providers who work long hours, sometimes unceasing, to care for the tragically sick and dying in our community and across the country. We forget to be thankful for the majority of citizens who care for the welfare of others in the community enough that they get their vaccinations and wear masks in public in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The astounding bravery of those people working to save the stranded in floods and devastation and to reconstruct the communities that are suffering is worthy of thankfulness, gratitude and praise. As are the tireless firefighters facing the wildfires' life-threatening danger.

The American servicemen and servicewomen, grateful for their assistance facing the enemy in Afghanistan, are providing an example of human compassion and brotherhood. Those workers and volunteers serving homeless refugees all over the world help to soften the suffering of so many without food, clothing and shelter.

I thank God for the compassionate people who work for the welfare of others and provide hope for us all.

Eveyn Swart  
Joseph

#### EDITORIALS

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#### LETTERS

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editor@eastoregonian.com,  
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,  
211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801