

OUR VIEW

Closing the final chapter on PGG

It is usually difficult to find an upside when a once proud organization decides to fold, but the last chapter of the Pendleton Grain Growers story will resonate even as the firm fades.

Five years ago, members of the locally renowned cooperative voted to dissolve the business, putting the exclamation mark on a rich history that began in 1929.

For nearly 100 years, PGG was a vital part of the regional community and an economic force. PGG signs became part of the landscape of Eastern Oregon as the organization sponsored events in towns up and down the Interstate 84 corridor.

Since the members voted to shutter the organization, PGG stayed in operation as it endeavored to pay back debts and secure the best price for its assets.

The co-op was truly a success story, and the fact it was able to avoid bankruptcy, pay its debts and sell its properties in a methodical fashion says a lot about its leadership.

Last week, PGG announced it had distributed more than \$12 million to more than 1,000 of its members, one of the final steps before the organization dissolves totally.

That's a far cry from where the co-op was in 2014 when its debts exceeded its assets.

The co-op board deserves a lot of credit for its diligent effort to get money back to its members. It is an impressive show of gratitude and dedication to its 1,000-plus members.

Even now, as most of the co-ops operations are permanently closed, its board can, at every least, look back on this final move as a positive occurrence that wasn't necessarily preordained.

For most of us, the decline and fall of PGG will resonate as a wistful representation of the past. For the people who were members of the cooperative, though, the history of PGG will linger. Yet, instead of a negative perception, the actions by the co-op's board at the end of a long road to give back to its members is admirable.

The Pendleton Grain Growers board closes the final chapter on a storied history on a good note. The firm will fall into the pages of history now but its legacy — of pride and a commitment to its members — will not fade away.

That says a whole lot about the co-op we grew to know and to believe was as much a part of Eastern Oregon as the mountains, rivers and wheat fields.



Something special about those local eggs



REGINA
BRAKER
ANOTHER MILE

It was an early Sunday afternoon, getting together for lunch with friends, when I noticed a text message that just arrived. It was from my egg friend, letting me know that he and his family were in town, and he had eggs for us. Yes, when, and where were in the next messages, and once his family had finished their Sunday lunch at another restaurant across town, he stopped by my location and we completed the transaction out in the parking lot.

Most of our text communication is about eggs, but there are hints of what's going on in their family, too, busy with events around school activities for their kids and getting to family events around our region. Juggling their day jobs, farm obligations and the many interests that keep a family happy and healthy, this young one is an inspiration to me. And they remind me of what it was like to get around our eastern part of the state when our kids were growing up, following their passions with extra-curricular activities and connecting with kids from all kinds of backgrounds.

One egg text exchange was about coming back from a cross-country meet, with a son who also plays basketball. No apologies necessary, I replied, as I'm just happy to get some of those eggs advertised on their carton as "heir-

loom fresh, free range, laid on small family farms, blue and brown, (with rich amber yolks," and yes, we really can "taste the difference."

To me it's actually about more than that description. Supporting the small family farm, and recognizing the face of someone who nurtured the plants and animals that provide daily sustenance is in the mix, too. And appreciating the hours of commitment to getting that job done. I've learned so much about what goes into putting food on our tables by connecting with our local providers.

For many who grew up in farming, today's reality includes having a day job and carrying on the family legacy as hobby farmers. That's true of this family, as they have long generational roots in working on the land, and they are passing on those traditions to their two sons as well. Their daily routines are about an early start to the day, getting to work and school and sports practice, before getting home to care for the animals and early to bed. Chores for the kids are divided by age-appropriate care for their chickens, dogs, sheep and horses.

It's all part of the family's commitment to "taking care of the personal ecosystem." When needed there's reliance on others to help. As this story was emerging, a few more lambs arrived and got their start with the help of extended family. It's a life of reciprocated aid. And that, too, is a reason to value food that is locally produced.

Week nights and weekends devoted to their sons' sports competition bring connection to other families and support

for kids beyond their own household. Those obligations can be intense as children learn to deal with success and disappointment and gain skills in teamwork. I'm not sure we appreciate enough the incredible social investment made by parents who are willing to go those extra miles on behalf of the youth sports infrastructure largely run by volunteer efforts.

This give-and-take extends from one generation to another. Both parents in this family grew up involved in competitive sports, with mom competing as a state champion. When the time came to give back, she answered the call to be a mentor to the girls' high school team in her community.

For her own kids, she and her husband started and direct their youth boys' sports board to ensure non-school teams have a support infrastructure. That work has created a connection that remains when kids show their appreciation years later with a heartfelt hug, or a return from college to reconnect and show their gratitude.

This gift of time and caring extends across our region, touching so many lives. At this time of celebration and giving, we all can find inspiration, and look for ways to give back, or pass on forward what we've received in our own lives too.

Regina Braker, of Pendleton, is a retired educator with journeys through many places and experiences who enjoys getting to know people along the way.

YOUR VIEWS

Everyone deserves fair share of the good life

I was born toward the end of the Great Depression. The young couple who bore me and my siblings had very few resources, but they took advantage of the possibilities offered through the government programs that edged the country out of those troubling times.

A new irrigation reclamation project allowed young farmers like my dad to change sagebrush desert into productive farmland. As time went on and my parent's family grew, a government housing administration loaned money to improve our dwelling and the land. Of course, we eventually paid off the financial obligations incurred during the process. I say "we" because the entire family worked to make the venture a success.

I must say that I never heard my parents complain about taxes. They were always grateful for the advantages provided by the United States government. All their children became productive and valuable citizens of their

communities. We eight siblings attended the public school; we all had the opportunity to attend one of the state colleges or universities. I had a grant from the state Legislature to attend the state university to become a teacher.

Looking back and remembering the hard work on the farm, jobs while attending school and during summers, I am grateful for the opportunities that my state and national governments provided me. Even now with the advantages of Social Security and health care insurance, I benefit by living in this country. I do not discount the advantages of passable roads and highways, police and fire departments and the many other government programs that I seldom think about.

Yes, the United States came out of the Great Depression because the government created programs to assist people getting their basic needs met. Since then, the country prospered, and some people have become extremely wealthy and often passed their wealth from generation to generation. Others have fared less well. For many reasons, the middle class has virtually disappeared, and there are

families struggling to provide necessities for their survival. We have millions of people in great need. Raising a family for many is fraught with hardships and barriers. Struggling families need assistance just as the people at the end of the Great Depression received help to rebuild their communities and the country.

The whole point of this letter is to say that I want others to have advantages such as I had in my 85 years. I remember the hard work, even physical labor I endured, but I realize that even then I had help that is not easily available to everyone now. My desire is that in this century people who are disadvantaged have opportunities, as I had in the last century, to build productive lives and contribute positively to their communities. We need strong families and strong Americans.

We need the programs that will be available when the bills in front of the U.S. Senate pass and become law. When our fellow citizens receive their share of the good life, my share is not diminished. It is even better.

Evelyn Swart
Joseph

EDITORIALS

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SEND LETTERS TO:

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