

# The most important industry in the world

Nothing is more thrilling to a farmer than planting a seed and standing back to see what happens. Every year about 2.1 million U.S. farmers do just that.

Some plant thousands of acres; others plant a patch of land the size of a small backyard. Still others take former industrial sites in places such as Detroit and Philadelphia and convert them into urban farms.

They are all participating in a 12,000-year-old ritual that has allowed humans to escape the role of hunter-gatherer and create a society where big ideas can be pursued. Once crops could be grown efficiently and animals could be domesticated for milk and meat, humans were free to think beyond their next meal.

Today, farming is done across the globe. In China, farmers have cultivated rice for more than 7,500 years. In Bolivia, another ancient crop, quinoa, attracts extraordinarily high prices among so-called foodies in the U.S. In Brazil, ranchers raise beef cattle similar to those first brought to South America from India.

Agriculture is important everywhere, but nowhere is it more important than in the United States. It was agriculture that helped a handful of colonies blossom into a booming economic powerhouse and world leader. Last year, U.S. farmers raised more than \$400 billion in crops and livestock on slightly more than 900 million acres.

U.S. farmers feed their fellow Americans — and much of the world. U.S. wheat, for example, can be found in noodles sold by a Tokyo street vendor, in flat bread baked in a stone oven in Algiers or in a steamed bun sold in a Jakarta restaurant.

Other crops and products fill the shelves of shops and stores around the world, helping to feed 7 billion people.

Who is the American farmer? Though statistics tell us that the average age is about 58 and the average farm is a little more than 400 acres, no farmer is typical. Just as every family is different, so too is every farmer. Some families have farming in their blood; they have tilled the land for generations. Others are new to it. Starting small, they add equal parts of inspiration and perspiration in an effort to grow new life and a livelihood from the land.

Ours is a society that reveres high technology. Smart phones, electric cars and all manner of computer-enhanced gizmos are seen as the wave of the future.

Yet, without agriculture, without food and fiber, none of that would exist. Before there could be iPhones, there had to be plows and tractors and combines.

National Ag Day is March 18. It is a day to talk about how food is produced, and about the integral role farming and ranching play in society.

And it is a celebration of the most important industry in the world.

## EDITORIAL

The voice of the Chieftain



## Wolf attack a cow man's nightmare

### GUEST COLUMN

Mack Birkmaier

Wolves attacked and stampeded 250 head of very pregnant cows (calving start date March 1) on the Birkmaier private land on Crow Creek pass Feb. 12, 2015. The cows were wintering on the open bunch grass range receiving one-half feed of alfalfa hay. This 1,700-acre piece of land is about 10 miles northeast of Joseph. These cows were to be moved to the Birkmaier home ranch at the mouth of Crow Creek the last of February (the ranch is about 20 miles north).

With no warning from agency people, who normally warn producers of wolves in the area, the wolves attacked in the night. The herd split into three groups. One group of about 70 cows went east, running in total panic, obliterating several barb wire fences. These cows ran about two miles to the Zumwalt road, then south and west about five miles down the OK Gulch road to the Wallowa Valley, then north to the Birkmaier ranch land, about three miles, then reversed and ran about three miles south where they were stopped. These cattle were wet from the condensation of cold air on their overheated bodies. Their tongues were out gasping for air.

Another bunch went north through several fences to the Krebs ranch, about four miles, then back and were going in a large circle still running when they were stopped. A third bunch stayed in the pasture, but were in a high state of panic. The cattle could not be fed for two days. They ran away from hay and the pickup trying to feed them. None were killed, no broken legs or stifled joints; some cuts from barbed wire, not serious. We thought we were lucky. The rest of the story, we feared, would be told at calv-

ing time and maybe before. By the way, the attacking wolves, from the Umatilla Pack, were at Dug Bar on the Snake River the next day (32 air miles away and over a mile climbing and descending).

Now about fladry and why it wasn't used. Fladry was not an option under these conditions on a large area with cattle grazing out in the winter time. Fladry is an electric wire with strips of colored plastic attached. Wolf cheerleaders, both local and everywhere, claim this cure-all is the answer to end all wolf depredations. Our experience: It may have a place on small acreages; we find it hard to keep it electrified. Wet snow will take it to the ground, wind blows tumbleweeds and mustard plants into it and if you use existing fences to put it on, wind blows it into the wires of existing fence and shorts it out. To use it on larger acreages requires a separate fence and many electric fence controllers and it's just impractical.

In the early days of the wolf debate, fladry was offered as a tool by the agencies and enviro groups to suck stock producers in to thinking they could use this to protect their animals. If it was practical it probably wouldn't be stacked up in the courthouse. Talking to other ranches in other states confirms our belief that most ranchers know it doesn't work, and so does the wolf.

As I write this on the 11th day of March, 50 cows have calved. Our worst fears are coming true: one aborted a few days after the attack; three back-

wards hind feet first; one upside down and backwards (the hind leg of this calf penetrated both the vaginal and rectal walls); one more upside down and backwards; one tail first (breech); two with legs turned back; one with head turned back. Several vaginal prolapses probably caused by improperly positioned calves. Is this indirect loss or what?

My son Tom and his wife Kelly have had to deal with this horrible task night and day, 31 miles from vet clinics and assistance. What kind of people support turning the terrorist of the animal kingdom loose on these defenseless animals and inflicting this kind of pain and loss? When I think of my family out in the barn trying their best to save these poor animals — it takes hours with good luck to straighten and get them out — I get damn mad. Who do I blame? After devoting about 10 years of my life to fighting this invasion of wolves from neighboring states through the political system, attending numerous ODFW hearings and workshops all over the state and participating in the largest "no wolf" hearing in the state of Oregon at Enterprise, and losing it all when we were slam-dunked by the ODFW commission in Troutdale (who, by the way, didn't have guts enough to attend the Enterprise hearing) yea, I'm bitter.

We lost eight calves this summer, we were compensated for one. If we aren't compensated for indirect loss from wolves, our ranch and all others are in serious jeopardy.

Mack Birkmaier, a past president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, is a lifetime rancher on Crow Creek and Joseph Creek.

## Bette Husted comes back to Joseph

I met Bette when she was teaching English at Joseph High School in the late 1970s. I had opened the Bookloft in Enterprise, she was a customer, and we trumped up a student writing contest. It was open to all schools, but there were always more Husted student entrants and \$10 winners. I won't spill the beans here on some of our neighbors who run ranches and local businesses who, at the age of 15 and 16, sometimes wrote poems. Good ones too.

I will tell you that when the Joseph Center invited Bette back to town as part of our March celebration of women, I heard from several former students and parents of students who claimed that Bette was the best. She and her stories and invitation to stories were lights for many in those tough teenage years.

Her tenure at Joseph was 11 years; in 1987 she moved to Pendleton and a long teaching career at Blue Mountain Community College. We stayed in touch, as Bette came back to Fishtrap conferences and sent her students — sometimes tribal members newly finding written voice — to our workshops. Her own poems began showing up in various publications, and then an award-winning book, "Living on Stolen Ground," was published.

That book was as soft and quietly powerful as she must have been as a teacher. It showed a poor, hardscrabble white family hanging onto any edge while living at the edge of the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. The title referred to reservation land that was stolen from Indians via the Allotment Act, one of the many attempts at forced assimilation, often defined by its proponents as the process of "killing the Indian to save the man."



### MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

In the late 1800s the government decided that it would make farmers of Indians, so "allotted" tribal lands to individual Indians. Some tribes resisted, knowing that it would disrupt their culture. The major architect of the program, a well-intentioned woman named Alice Fletcher, came to the Nez Perce reservation herself to allot lands, and over a four-year period successfully assigned 80-acre allotments to many tribal members. (She tried to allot land to Chief Joseph, then living at Colville, but he turned her down, holding out for a Wallowa return that of course never happened.) The Act allowed these tribal members to sell off their parcels after a 25-year period, and further allowed the government to sell off non-allotted lands as "surplus."

Fortunately, the Allotment Act was eventually abandoned, but a hundred years later less than 20 percent of the land on the Nez Perce reservation was owned by individual tribal members or by the tribe. The Nez Perce, like their Umatilla cousins and other tribes around the country, are addressing the issue now, repurchasing lost lands.

Bette has gathered and held these Indian stories for 50 years, turned them over in her mind, and reframed them in poems and stories. They've joined her own stories of growing up poor, and of being a woman in sometimes hostile male-dominated systems. Her stories are those of difference and survival, of making it

with grit and humor, friendship and family.

On Thursday night, she read to a small crowd at the Joseph Center and gave us some of them. One of her former students said she told her daughter she was going to be read to by her teacher — a long-ago remembered joy. We all craned to the soft voice to hear poems about a "perfect mother," and then a wonderful and complicated story about Pat Courtney Gold, a Wasco basket maker and fiber artist.

Other major pushes at assimilation, the Indian boarding schools — which flourished from the late 1800s into the 1970s — and the Termination Act of the 1950s, had pretty much decimated the basketry tradition among the Wasco. Girls were carted off to boarding schools where they could not speak their language or practice traditional crafts, and impoverished families sold off baskets and regalia as they fought to retain tribal lands and identity in the face of government policy aimed again at killing the Indian to save the man.

So when Pat Courtney Gold, with, I must mention, the encouragement of a brave and important white woman named Mary Schlick, who has made Indians and baskets a life work, went to making baskets, it was difficult to find examples of traditional designs and weaving patterns. She found some of them in a New York museum. Bette told us her story.

And that is what the best writers and teachers do, bear witness to a complicated and often unjust world, show us how some people — and they themselves — have navigated it, and nudge us towards doing the same.

Main Street columnist Rich Wandschneider is director of the Alvin M. and Betty Joseph Library of Western History and Culture, in Joseph.

## Wolf used as a pawn in a larger effort

### To the Editor:

As a full time rancher and farmer that has both cattle and sheep I would agree with Commissioner Roberts use of the word "minimally" on the effectiveness of fladry in regards to wolves.

Mr. Sykes and the environmental groups he helps represent have no problem with the use of the word "minimum" when it comes to the annual wolf count numbers.

The photo of the \$6,000 fladry rolls would only cover two miles and installation costs are not covered nor to maintain



and there are also specific requirements on installation. The important factors other than just fladry to consider are the close location of cattle to humans and their dwellings during calving and if wolves are even in the area at that time. As a result of endless litigation by environmental groups compensation for producers must use 30%

of the total amount received for preventive measures whether it works or not.

Mr. Sykes is on the Wallowa County Wolf Compensation Committee and is fully aware of all the numbers and budgets. Simply turning in "funding applications" to receive funds is totally dependent upon whether there is any available funding for the compensation to occur. The turning in of applications does not equal automatic or guaranteed payment.

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