

# Farmland loss a national crisis, felt mightily in West

Anyone who has taken a recent drive in America's western states can see first-hand what we at American Farmland Trust have been saying for years: our farmland is disappearing at an alarming rate.

Between 1992 and 2012, 31 million acres of farmland and ranchland disappeared according to research from our recently released "Farms Under Threat" analysis — the most comprehensive study ever on agricultural land loss in the U.S.

While 31 million acres may not sound like a lot, at AFT, it set off alarm bells. It represents as much agricultural land as is in the state of Iowa. And, perhaps more importantly, 11 million of those acres were our best and most productive agricultural land — land most suitable for intensive food production with the fewest environmental impacts.

In a region so important to the nation's food supply, AFT's mantra and famous bumper sticker, "No Farms No Food," is more poignant than ever. This region grows over 300 commodity crops, from apples and cherries, to potatoes, to sweet corn seed, to hops. It also has one of the fastest growing populations in the nation, and with that comes the demand for housing, shopping malls, schools, and highways — all resources that eat up farmland.

If we want to continue to enjoy the benefits of local farmland and ranchland —



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Hannah Clark

not just for delicious food and as a pillar of our economy, but also for the many important environmental benefits it provides — we must come together as Westeners to take action now.

This was made abundantly clear in the recent article, "Western farmland continues to disappear," by Brad Carlson in the Capital Press.

Let me reiterate and even illuminate important points made in Mr. Carlson's article.

The numbers coming out of Idaho, as noted in the article, and the numbers coming out of the West in terms of farmland loss are downright scary. We need local and state officials to pay attention to this and to invest in funding and tools for farmland protection.

It is also important to consider how one allows development to happen. Planning is important. Urban sprawl and low-density development are both very damaging to farmland. It is easy to recognize urban sprawl and perhaps simplest to address, compact growth strategies have worked

well in communities. Low density development poses an equal threat to farmland, but is insidious, often not recognized before it is too late. This is development that pops up in rural areas creating pockets of houses surrounded by farmland.

Not only does this kind of development chew up prime land, it makes it more difficult for farmers to farm and often leads to the disappearance of key farming services and infrastructure like equipment and seed dealers.

Investing in tools like agricultural conservation easements is also critical. Agricultural conservation easements are a way to keep working farmland and ranchland working, forever — by extinguishing the development rights on a property and compensating the landowner for the value of those development rights. The land stays in production and in private ownership and can be sold or handed down to heirs — but with the promise that it will not be taken out of agriculture.

These issues get more and more critical with a massive generational transfer of land on the horizon. In Oregon alone, two-thirds of the agricultural land will change hands in the next decade or so — and the majority of those landowners don't have an identified heir or succession plan. Across the West, including in Idaho, AFT is advancing programming to help a new generation of new and beginning farmers access land.

We need to double down on protecting agricultural land in the West.

In Washington state, we're calling on the legislature to continue investing in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, the only state source of funding for farmland protection.

In Oregon, the legislature has an opportunity to fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, which would be the first state funding source for agricultural land protection and supporting a new generation of farmers.

And in Idaho, we are calling on elected leaders, especially in the Treasure Valley, to ensure good planning to protect our land base — and invest in supporting farmers and ranchers.

Perhaps it's even time to consider a funding source for agricultural conservation easements in Idaho. After all — No Farms No Food and perhaps even, No Future!

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Hannah Clark is American Farmland Trust's Pacific Northwest region director. She previously served as the executive director of the Washington Association of Land Trusts, a statewide coalition of 28 land conservation organizations dedicated to private voluntary land protection. Get in touch with Hannah at [hclark@farmland.org](mailto:hclark@farmland.org).

## STAYIN' ALIVE: A few safety tips for agriculture

Sierra Dawn McClain  
Capital Press

SALEM, Ore. — Many farmers consider their work rewarding, but agriculture ranks among the most dangerous professions in the U.S., according to the USDA.

Safety experts share a few tips on how farmers can stay safe in 2019.

### Deadliest roads

"Country roads, take me home." But drivers, be careful. The roads least traveled are the nation's deadliest, according to federal highway data.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's most recent report reveals drivers on rural roads die at a rate 2.1 times higher per mile traveled than in urban areas.

According to NHTSA, rural highways, which receive less federal money, are more likely to have outdated designs and potholes. Wild animals dart into traffic more often. Rural drivers tend to drive faster. They are more likely to drive drunk. And in a crash, they're more likely to die before getting medical help since hospitals are further away.

According to National Occupant Protection Use Surveys, people in rural areas also drive at higher rates without seat belts. Sixty percent of those who die in pickup trucks aren't using a seat belt, according to NHTSA.

Safety officials encourage rural drivers to wear seat belts, watch out for wildlife, be careful on old highways and recognize that the "it won't be me" mentality won't work when it is you.

### Crushing truth

According to researchers at Purdue University, more than 900 cases of grain engulfment have been reported in the U.S. in the past 50 years — with a 62% fatality rate.

Entrapment happens when a person gets sucked into grain and can't get out without help. This typically happens in silos or grain elevators but can also happen in freestanding piles.

Jose Perez, corporate senior manager at the Wonderful Company and member of the American Society of Safety Professionals, said communication is crucial.

"Tell someone when you're going

into the grain area," he said.

Perez said you should also have a lifeline. "Always have a harness and lanyard when you go into a silo," said Perez. "If you get engulfed like quick sand, having a line attached will save your life. This isn't new. It's just not utilized anywhere near enough."

### Overheated workers

One of the most serious dangers for nursery workers is heat illness, said Perez.

"Pay attention to the temperature inside greenhouses and how that impacts people," said Perez. "Create a good heat illness prevention program. Hydrate, hydrate."

Each year, the Northwest Farwest Show provides practical training sessions on nursery safety, said Zen Landis, the show's events and education manager. This year's show will be held Aug. 21-23 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Ore.

"It's so important for industry leaders to keep learning about safety," said Landis.

### Safety culture

Perez said agricultural safety is about mindset.

Perez said it's important to consider the culture and background of agricultural workers. He immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico, where he said he did not feel comfortable talking with managers. If an agricultural laborer comes from a hierarchical background, Perez explained, they may believe they should not bother the "boss" and should use whatever tool they've got.

"But 'get-the-job-done' culture can work against you if you've learned to think you shouldn't ask for help," said Perez. "Farm managers need to recognize workers' backgrounds and tell them, 'It's OK to ask for help. Please tell me when something is hard or dangerous.' And workers need to talk with each other, too."

### Keep learning

The North American Agricultural Safety Summit, hosted by the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America, will take place March 19-20 at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel & Casino in Nevada.

## Senate Republicans do their constituents no favors by denying climate change

I grew up in Southern Oregon where logging and pears defined our valley's economy. Even then old growth was growing scarce, and mills were closing. As a kid I smudged and picked in the orchards, now at risk from warming temperatures. I saw my first Shakespeare play in Ashland at age 11; that hundred-year-old community enterprise now loses money each summer from smoke-canceled performances.

The hard fact is, climate change is coming — is here — and however much we may dislike the solutions, we can't wish it away. Rural Oregonians are seeing these first effects already, from front-row seats.

HB 2020, the Oregon climate legislation choked off last month by 11 state senators, would have set a slowly declining cap on greenhouse gas emission sources, set Oregon on a path to a lower-carbon, lower cost future, and cushioned most Oregonians from the transition costs.

It would have enabled a near future in which low-carbon options would become more rapidly available: renewable wind and solar electric energy; electric vehicles (including farm and forest equipment); high efficiency heat pumps to heat and cool our homes and businesses.

It would have avoided one-size-fits-all carbon pollution regulation, instead applying a market-based trading tool (first proposed by Republicans) to allow industrial polluters to find among themselves the most cost-effective emissions control strategies.

The bill would have accelerated development of clean energy in Oregon, with much of the investment and jobs going to rural Oregon. These would be family-wage jobs erecting wind turbines and installing solar panels — the new hydro-power — that will require local labor for many years to come.

No one should pretend the transition from a carbon-intensive economy to a low-carbon one will be easy. Neither is it avoidable. Responsible legislators will help manage the transition, not deny its reality.

A small minority of Oregon legislators — 11 out of 90 — frustrated the will of Oregon voters with an unconstitutional, anti-democratic tactic: hiding out in Idaho to deny the Senate a quorum and thwart a vote on climate legislation 15 years in the making.

In doing so, they put their constituents and all Oregonians — especially your children, and mine ... and theirs — at risk in a climate-altered future of fire, flood, drought and disease. These impacts will fall especially harshly on rural Oregon communities and their resource-reli-



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Angus Duncan

ant local economies, the very people these Senators purport to be defending.

They ignored the economic upsets and rapidly declining costs of new technologies, industries and jobs already arriving in Oregon. They ignored the economic and environmental damage already being felt; the tropical diseases arriving to threaten our families; the struggles of asthmatic kids to breathe smoke-filled air.

They ignored the benefits of joining the many other states and nations committing to a low-carbon future, and seeing these benefits flow sooner, to more of us, bringing lower energy and transportation costs. Many of these new low-carbon technologies are already in the market, in our utilities and our homes where they will especially benefit the low-income households most at risk from climate change.

Therein lies the common-sense answer to the other nonsense proposition these legislators kept repeating: "Oregon's carbon footprint is too small to matter."

Wrong! Failure to move climate action forward in partnership with other cities, states and nations — that's the failure that brings pain and forecloses gain.

And acting together works. Oregon is one of 14 states joining with California in requiring stronger vehicle fuel economy standards in the face of Trump administration efforts to water these down. Collectively, our states make up 37% of the population and 30% of the new car market in the U.S. Collectively we are too important a market to ignore. So much so that the car companies are actually in Washington arguing our case for more fuel-efficient cars to the administration.

That's the kind of clout Oregon would have had with HB 2020, and will with its successor. We'll shrug off this legislative low blow and find the next pathway forward. We'll look to all responsible Oregonians, irrespective of party affiliation and concerned only with problem solving in the Oregon way — and in the interests of our children — to contribute their best ideas; to bring their buckets to the fire.

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Angus Duncan is the chair of the Oregon Global Warming Commission in Portland and president of the Bonneville Environmental Foundation.

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This month we are featuring an Early Head Start volunteer, Tasha Shaver from Enterprise. Tasha has been volunteering for a year and a half. She helps out with the kids when they wake up from naps, loves playing with the kids, and just having fun with them. The kids and the staff at Building Healthy Families and Early Head Start say,

THANK YOU Tasha, we appreciate you!

**BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILIES VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH Tasha Shaver**

Building Healthy Families  
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**ATHLETE OF THE WEEK**

**Owen Rooper**

This week's athlete of the week is Owen Rooper. The young cowboy took the Little Buckaroos rodeo by storm on Wednesday, July 24. Rooper mastered the roping, stick horse, bull riding and the stagecoach during his masterful performance, causing the entire rodeo court to insist on a photo with him.

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