

# Cattle association backs expansion of smaller beef processors

BY CRAIG REED

For the Capital Press

WINSTON — Todd Nash, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, is hoping to see the expansion of some small and mid-sized processing and packing facilities in Oregon.

To help with the expense of upgrading those facilities or building a new one to increase processing capacities for Oregon-raised livestock, the state Legislature allocated \$2 million to the Oregon Meat Processing Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grant Program during the short session in February. The purpose of the grant program, according to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, is to help fund "equipment, physical improvements, technical assistance, processing hardware/software, on-site waste handling and education/training."

"If the cattle are raised here, fed here and then processed here, it would keep a substantial amount of money here to help our economy," said Nash, who was a guest at the Douglas County Livestock Association's Spring Conference on April 7.



Todd Nash, left, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, talks with Veril Nelson, a Sutherlin area rancher, during the Douglas County Livestock Association's Spring Conference on Thursday, April 7, 2022, in Winston.

"There's a million head of cattle here in Oregon and most of them have been shipped out, making money for the big packers and their shareholders. The small facilities in Oregon currently aren't able to handle that many. The current process hasn't been working out well for Oregon."

Nash, a rancher in Wallowa County in Northeastern Oregon, said \$10 million was requested from the Legislature, which reduced the appropriation. Applications for funding up to \$500,000 were accepted in February and March. Grants to help fund equipment will be awarded in May,

and projects must be completed by June 30, 2023.

There are four major meat packers in the U.S. — Cargill, JBS, National Beef and Tyson. Nash said they control about 85% of beef processing.

"Here in the Pacific Northwest for live cattle, there is no competitive bid, no open mar-

ket," Nash said. "You deliver your cattle and they pay you what they think they're worth."

Nash explained that large livestock producers with thousands of animals broker deals with the packers. Because of the volume, those deals aren't cost-effective for smaller producers, but that's what they're faced with due to a lack of competitive bids.

"If I did want to negotiate a price, it would only be if I could promise to deliver 1,000 animals in one day," Nash said. "The average producer in Oregon owns 35 to 40 mother cows so they have no leverage in the market when selling their beef. "We need those large facilities to consume large numbers of cattle in order to feed our large population," he added. "That works well for food security needs, but small and mid-size facilities also provide us with food security. It's a good investment for us to keep them going. All we can do is encourage that."

Nash said the four big packers have been able to buy cattle cheaply in recent years after the price for cattle dropped from a high in 2014 and 2015. He ex-

plained that retail beef prices didn't drop and the packers "have made massive profits going back to 2015."

"It's not a healthy situation," Nash said. "We have to have a competitive market. We need to invest and encourage the build-out of small and medium-size processors so there'll be competition. We need to let them flourish."

Nash said the mid-size facilities fit Oregon better because they allow beef products to be tracked rather than becoming lost in the process of the big packers.

"It's important to the consumer to know where the product was raised and how it was raised," Nash said. "That's where we can separate ourselves here in Oregon and capture a few more dollars in the cattle and beef process."

"The grants are there to entice people, to encourage people to pursue education in this area," he added. "Hopefully, entrepreneurs are going to figure it out and improve our facilities."

USDA has also offered to help small and medium processors expand.

## Council

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intended to cease ambulance service through the fire department on Sept. 30, 2022.

The city fire department provides ambulance service to an area that includes Baker City and about two-thirds of the rest of the county outside the city limits.

Under Oregon law, Baker County is responsible for choosing ambulance providers in that area, and three others in the county. The other three are in the Richland, Halfway and Huntington areas.

If Baker City does cease ambulance services, the county would have to find a new provider, likely a private ambulance company.

City Councilor Shane Alderson, who has been calling for a joint meeting with county commissioners, said he's pleased that the meeting has been set.

County Commissioner Bruce Nichols agreed.

"I'm very glad that it's happening," Nichols said.

He said he'd like to be able to reach an agreement on a one-year contract to maintain the city fire department as the ambulance service provider, giving both the city and county time to try to figure out a potential long-term solution.



Patrick Foss, left, and David Van Dyke of the Baker City Fire Department with one of the department's ambulances on Tuesday, April 12, 2022.

County commissioners last week discussed a request for proposals from prospective ambulance companies.

Baker City Manager Jonathan Cannon has told councilors that he doesn't believe the city can continue to operate ambulances because the cost to do so exceeds the revenue the city collects from ambulance bills.

The city projects that the gap will total about \$581,000 for the fiscal year that ends June 30, 2022, but that the shortfall will increase to almost \$1.2 million for the fol-

lowing fiscal year and continue to increase after that.

Ambulance runs account for 80% to 85% of the fire department's calls — fires are comparatively uncommon.

If the city were to cease ambulance operations Sept. 30, the city would need to reduce the number of budgeted firefighter/paramedics working a regular shift from 12 to six.

The union that represents those workers contends, in a letter that City Councilor Shane Alderson read during the Council's April 12 meeting, that "The decision to

possibly end the (ambulance) transport comes at a tremendous risk and cost to the residents who have relied on the Baker City Firefighters for many years."

Baker County, which is contributing \$100,000 to Baker City for ambulance services during the current fiscal year, recently offered to increase the amount to \$150,000 for the fiscal year that starts July 1, 2022.

Cannon told councilors he doesn't believe that a \$150,000 county contribution is sufficient to enable the city to continue operating ambulances.

## Arrest

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Baker City Police were called at 8:55 a.m. to a report of a restraining order violation in the 2900 block of Seventh St.

Police determined that Saarheim was in violation, as he was less than 150 feet from the address listed on the restraining order.

Saarheim was sitting in a vehicle, and after police told him he was under arrest, he drove away while an officer was holding onto the open door of the vehicle.

Baker City Police and deputies from the Baker County Sheriff's Office pursued Saarheim on city streets at speeds slower than the posted limit, according to a press release from Baker City Police.

But when Saarheim reached 10th Street he increased his speed as he continued north out of the city on Highway 30 toward Haines.

"Baker City Police terminated the pursuit due to the hazardous road conditions and the speeds (Saarheim) was traveling at," according to the press release.

Saarheim returned to the

address on Seventh Street at about 10:41 a.m. Saturday, and Baker City Police responded again.

Saarheim was outside of his vehicle, and "he again did not comply with commands," according to the press release. He "was taken to the ground by Baker City Police and he was taken into custody. No injuries were reported from the arrest."

## COVID

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Baker County, meanwhile, has continued a month-long trend of reporting no cases on most days.

Since the county set daily and monthly records for new cases in January, the height of the omicron variant surge, the number of reported infections has plummeted.

January's total was 646, with 230 during

February and just 14 in March, the fewest since June 2020. Baker County's first COVID-19 case was reported on May 6, 2020.

There were no cases reported in the county for the final 14 days of this March.

During the first 16 days of April, the county has reported six cases — half of those on April 1.

There were no reported cases for the most recent week, April 10-16.

State and federal officials have pointed out that recent figures could be underesti-

imating the prevalence of the virus, since many people are doing home tests, the results of which don't have to be reported to public health agencies.

The number of recorded tests in Baker County over the past month:

- March 6-12 — 193
- March 13-19 — 156
- March 20-26 — 131
- March 27-April 2 — 108
- April 3-9 — 145
- April 10-14 (results from April 15 and 16 not yet available) — 54



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Andrea Stone, left, has volunteered this month to help kindergartners at the Baker Early Learning Center create individual tiles, which will be joined into a collaborative project and installed on the outside of the BELC building. Here she works with Penelope Sanchez, Olivia Endersby and Lilly Smithson.

## Learning

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Stone worked with the BELC staff to design the project. The base is a type of mesh, which is taped to a piece of cardboard. Each child's letter was outlined in marker.

Once each student chose their colors — a very hard decision, in most cases — Stone dropped dollops of caulking in the shape of the letter.

Even the caulking tube was exciting on this cold spring day.

"That's ginormous!" Roberts said.

Once every child has completed a work of art, Stone will arrange them all into one piece with a metal frame and make it weatherproof. It will be installed on the east side of BELC, alongside the mosaic created by last year's kindergartners.

Angela Lattin, BELC director, envisions years of mosaic creations decorating this wall.

"It's a nice way for the kids to leave a legacy behind," she said.

Last year's creation features a variety of hearts.

"Everyone needed a little more love last year," she said.

The style of these mosaic creations are the same as those located in downtown Baker City, along the one-way section of Broadway Street, that were made by Baker High School art students with Stone's help.

Over the years — she doesn't know how many — Stone has worked on art projects with students at BHS, Haines, Keating and the YMCA Preschool.

The newest one at BELC, she said, is a good group project.

"It's like a community quilt," she said.

## Roberta Jo "Robbie" Borders

July 19, 1959 – March 25, 2022

Roberta Jo "Robbie" Borders, 62, of Baker City, Oregon, passed away peacefully at her home surrounded by family on March 25, 2022. A Celebration of life will be held on April 30, 2022, beginning at 2:00 PM at the Baker City Christian Church with Pastor Jesse Whitford Officiating. A reception will follow in the Christian Church Fellowship Hall.



Roberta was born in 1959, in Sandpoint, Idaho, to Robert and Buddy (Botts) Lee. Roberta grew up in Scappoose, Oregon, where she graduated from Scappoose High School in 1977. She went on to graduate from Portland Community College in 1995.

Roberta married Bob Borders in 1996 at Warren Community Fellowship and later moved her family to Baker City in 1999. She taught 3rd and 4th grade at Harvest Christian Academy in Baker City. In her free time, Roberta enjoyed quilting, photography, teaching Sunday School, singing, visiting the elderly, baking pies, and garage sales. She especially enjoyed spending time with her kids and family.

Roberta is survived by her husband of 25 years, Bob Borders, son Tom Fenter, daughter Breanne Rosen, mother Buddy Lee, sisters Rebecca Mikesch, Charla Willis, Daphne Fillebrown, and a brother Robert T. Lee. She is also survived by stepdaughters Christy Fenter and Jenette Cain and a stepson Jess Borders as well as six grandchildren and one great-grandson. She was preceded by her brother Robert Jr. and her father, Robert Lee. In lieu of flowers, the family would like contributions to be made to the Miss Robbie Borders Scholarship Fund through Gray's West & Company Pioneer Chapel at 1500 Dewey Ave, Baker City, Oregon 97814.

To light a candle in Robbie's memory or to offer online condolences to her family, please visit [www.grayswestco.com](http://www.grayswestco.com).

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