

Oregon is among the most farm-reliant states

State economy more closely tied to agriculture than many other states

By **MIKE ROGOWAY**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Farm employment has remained pretty steady in Oregon for decades, and the state’s economy is far more closely tied to agriculture than elsewhere.

“It’s roughly speaking twice as important to Oregon as it is to the typical state in the nation,” according to Josh Lehner with the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis. He compiled a fresh look at the state’s agricultural economy this month as part of his agency’s quarterly report to the Legislature.

As a share of all Oregon jobs, farming’s relative importance has been in steady decline for 50 years. Agriculture accounted for about 1 in 18 Oregon jobs in 1970; it’s just 1 in 40 jobs now.

The falloff has been much steeper elsewhere in the country, however, and the new analysis finds Oregon farms generate twice as much personal income overall than

in the average state. Some counties generate farm income at several times the national rate, small communities where Lehner said agriculture “is a key driver of all economic trends.”

The report serves as a baseline to monitor the effects of a new law that makes farmworkers eligible for overtime pay. The law, approved by lawmakers last winter, phases in overtime pay over the next several years and gives farmers tax credits to help offset the higher costs.

The overtime mandate was intensely controversial, with farmers warning that the higher labor costs would put family-owned operations out of business. So the bill directed state economists to track the impacts from the overtime mandate.

While it’s too soon to see the effects of the overtime rules, it’s clear that agriculture is an economic force in Oregon, producing farm products with an annual market value of around \$5 billion.

Oregon has about 60,000 farm jobs, according to federal estimates, roughly in line with past years. Farm earnings represent 0.8% of personal income in the state, twice the national level.

Much of that income is concentrated in a small number of coun-



OSHA/Contributed Photo, File

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ties, where relatively small populations magnify the relative impact.

For example, Morrow County in northeastern Oregon – with a population of just 12,000 – has farm earnings 62 times the national average, according to the state economists’ report.

Farm incomes are also elevated in southeastern Oregon, the Willamette Valley and parts of the coast. In the state’s urban centers, among them Multnomah, Washington and Deschutes counties, farming income is far overshadowed by other occupations.

Taken as a whole, though, Lehner said agriculture has been a consistently durable part of the state economy, which ranks 15th nationally in its reliance on farm jobs.

“It matters overall to the state of Oregon,” Lehner said. “It is a larger economic sector.”

AVGAS

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determine whether this pollution endangers human health and welfare.”

The agency finally appears ready to do something about leaded aviation fuel, or “avgas.”

Questions remain. What does a realistic solution look like? And when will it come?

Small planes loophole

Lead as a toxic byproduct of burning gasoline in engines isn’t news.

In 1970, the EPA worked with the U.S. Congress to pass the Clean Air Act, which initiated a phaseout of leaded gasoline for automobiles that concluded in 1995.

But piston-engine airplanes, along with some farm machinery and heavy equipment, have been exempt from lead restrictions since 1996.

The primary reason is safety.

Tetraethyl lead is a heavy metal compound that’s added to avgas to prevent premature detonation or knocking. Aircraft engines must avoid knocking or risk sudden, catastrophic failure. Unlike car drivers, pilots can’t pull onto the shoulder and call for help when their engines fail.

There are about 170,000 piston-engine, general aviation (civilian) aircraft in the United States. Among states, Washington and Oregon rank fourth and 14th, respectively, in the number of registered general aviation aircraft. Most of these burn 100-octane low lead gasoline, commonly known as 100LL.

In February, the Federal Aviation Administration announced its new EAGLE (Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions) initiative, a plan that details the elimination of leaded aviation fuel by the end of 2030.

Getting unleaded avgas to market

Oklahoma-based General Aviation Modifications, Inc. (GAMI) is currently the only commercially viable producer of 100-octane unleaded avgas, which it



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The Environmental Protection Agency has been studying the environmental impact of small planes, like this one taking off in Hood River.

plans to distribute under the name G100UL.

Timothy Roehl, GAMI president and patent holder on G100UL, outlined the difficulties in bringing unleaded avgas to the market by 2030.

The company must first obtain a “Supplemental Type Certificate” approval from the FAA. The certificate grants permission to an applicant to modify an aeronautical product from its original design.

Roehl hopes general aviation aircraft in the United States will be certified to burn G100UL before the end of 2022.

Cost, however, is another obstacle.

“GAMI and its licensed producers’ cost to make G100LL will be 50 to 60 cents higher per gallon than 100 low lead fuel,” he said. “But that’s offset by longer times between engine overhauls and also longer intervals between oil changes.”

More time between engine maintenance is a byproduct of burning lead-free avgas.

This sounds promising, but GAMI has already experienced lengthy and unexplained delays in obtaining government approvals for its products. Why?

“Politics. Follow the money,” said Roehl, referring to the lobbying power of major refiners of leaded avgas.

He’s not the only one wary of a political derailment.

“One of the concerns we have is how can we finalize (a ban on leaded avgas) under the Biden adminis-

tration. What’s to stop a new administration from once again postponing and delaying on these issues?” says Miki Barnes, founder and president of Oregon Aviation Watch. “Even once it’s finalized there are groups that can delay this, and that includes the aviation industry organizations that want to continue using leaded fuel.

“Big lobbyists pump a lot of money into the pockets of political people. Oregon (Congress members) Peter DeFazio, Ron Wyden, Jeff Merkley, Suzanne Bonamici, Kurt Schrader, all of these people are recipients of money from general aviation lobbyist organizations. All of those members are on the Congressional General Aviation Caucus. Not one has spoken out about eliminating leaded aviation fuel.”

How bad is the problem?

General aviation is a small part of overall aviation, but it’s a significant source of local lead exposure.

A 2011 study reported that about 16 million Americans lived within 1 kilometer of a general aviation airport, and 3 million children attended school within that perimeter.

The closer the residence to the airport, the higher the blood lead levels in the children living there. Airport lead levels have been measured at more than four times the concentrations found in the general environment.

Exposure to high levels of lead may cause anemia,

weakness and kidney and brain damage. Very high lead exposure can cause death. Generally, lead affects children more than it does adults.

The most significant sources of airborne lead in Oregon and Washington are airports. According to Oregon Aviation Watch, Hillsboro Airport is Oregon’s top emitter of airborne lead — in 2016 it released nearly twice the emissions measured at Portland International Airport.

According to Barnes, the Hillsboro Aero Academy training program, which trains pilots from more than 75 countries, is a major contributor to airborne lead.

In March, the attorneys general of 18 states, including Oregon, sent a letter to the EPA “Concerning EPA’s Draft Strategy to Reduce Lead Exposures and Disparities in U.S. Communities.”

“The most recent emissions data from EPA show that these (piston-engine aircraft) released more than 930,000 pounds of lead into the atmosphere in 2017, and emissions from the general aviation sector are expected to increase in the coming years,” read the letter. “The Federal Aviation Administration predicts sector emissions will reach 1.5 million pounds per year by 2025 — a 66% increase in emissions from 2017.”

Though the EPA seems committed to action, it remains unclear what percentage of those future emissions will come from leaded avgas.

BEANS

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semi-retirement and begin operating Joe Beans again.

Guentert said he is grateful for the opportunity the MacLeods provided him.

“It has been an experience I will treasure,” he said.

The new Joe Beans will have striking similarities to the old one.

“It will be Joe Beans 2.0,” Colleen MacLeod said.

She said it will offer the same Joe Beans coffee, made from beans roasted daily by Al MacLeod, and the menu will include all the items that were on it before.

“We will have the same food, the same coffee and the same drinks,” she said.

The new Joe Beans will have striking similarities to the old one.

The MacLeods have long been fixtures in La Grande’s coffee shop and eatery scene, starting in the 1980s when they operated a catering truck. About 1990 they opened Highway 30 Coffee Company, a now-defunct cafe that once did roaring business on Washington Avenue, and in 2001 they opened Joe and Sugars, a restaurant and coffee house they operated for about five years on Adams Avenue.

Colleen MacLeod has lived in Union County since the early 1970s. Al arrived in 1969. The couple are working long hours preparing to reopen Joe Beans.

The fatigue they feel is negated by a sense of

anticipation.

“It is exhausting and exhilarating at the same time,” she said.

Al MacLeod, a musician with the local band The Wasteland Kings, said of reopening Joe Beans: “It is like a gig. We are on stage every day.”

Al MacLeod said he and his wife have missed keeping up on what is going on in the lives of their customers and their families since the ownership change.

“We are hungry to learn what’s going on,” he said.

Al MacLeod said when the opportunity to take back Joe Beans was presented, the couple jumped at the opportunity.

“We said, ‘Great, let’s do it,’” he said. “There was no hesitation.”

The MacLeods know that long days await them as they run Joe Beans, which will be open from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

“There’s an old saying, ‘It’s great owning your own business because you can work half days, and you choose whichever 12 hours you want,’” Al MacLeod said.

The MacLeods want Joe Beans to continue to be a place where people feel welcome, just as they said people did when it was Brother Bear and Joe Beans before that.

“We want it to feel like a clubhouse,” Colleen MacLeod said. “We want people to think, ‘This is my place.’”

LIZ

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Let’s say you’re married filing jointly and have \$60,000 in taxable income. The 12% federal tax bracket ends at \$83,550, so you could convert more than \$23,000 of your retirement funds without increasing your marginal federal tax rate. Conversions can affect other aspects of your taxes and finances, so consult a tax pro before proceeding.

Another way to potentially lower your tax bill may be to temporarily suspend your Social Security payments and take more

from your retirement funds. Because of the peculiar way that Social Security is taxed, people often face a sharp rise and then fall in marginal tax rates when they have other income, something known as the “tax torpedo.” A tax pro should be able to determine if delaying or suspending Social Security payments could help you reduce the effects.

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