

Clatsop County lost 8 percent of its agricultural land

The Columbia Press & news sources

Oregon has lost 10 percent of its farmland in the past five years.

New Oregon data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that 340,000 acres

fell out of agricultural production from 2012 to 2017, more than three times the number of acres lost from 2007-2012.

Clatsop County farmers reported losing 1,312 acres, or 8 percent of all agricultural land in the county.

Meanwhile, the average

market value of farmland and buildings increased by 57.5 percent, from \$5,548 per acre to \$7,153 per acre.

It's worse in neighboring Columbia County, where farmers reported the second highest percentage loss of farmland of any Oregon coun-

ty – 13,289 acres or nearly a quarter of all agricultural land.

"If we continue to lose Columbia County farmland at this rate, it won't be long before we lose the entire industry," said Randy Bergman, vice chair of the Columbia Soil & Water Conservation District.

Hoping to reverse or slow the trend, a coalition of agricultural and conservation groups is promoting House Bill 2729 to provide \$10 million for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP). The program was signed into law in 2017.

"Oregon's land-use program has slowed the loss of farmland, but it is not enough," said Chad Allen, one of 11 OAHP commissioners and owner/operator of Victor Dairy in Tillamook. "We need the legislature to invest in efforts to stem the tide before we lose even more land to nonagricultural uses."

Farms in Oregon and the nation are being lost to a range of development, often when one generation is ready to re-



Courtesy Rick McEwan

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is designed to support farmers and ranchers like Woody Wolfe, a sixth-generation Wallowa County farmer who's taking steps to conserve his family's ranch..

tire and there's no succession plan in place. Agricultural land makes up 25 percent, or 16.3 million acres, of Oregon's land. Yet two-thirds of Oregon's agricultural lands will change hands in the next 20 years, according to research from Oregon State University.

As each large farm is parceled out, the next generation has fewer viable acres upon which to make enough money to live as a farmer. Unfortunately, when land sells, it often garners more from developers than other farmers.

Funding OAHP allows Oregon to access federal matching dollars for projects that preserve farmland and support Oregon farmers and ranchers. If funding passes in the current legislative session, farmers and ranchers can apply for state-level grants to protect working lands, enhance natural resource values, and assist with succession planning.

"There is a well-funded federal program offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service that gives matching grants that help farmers preserve their land," said Sarah Beaubien, a director at the Tillamook County Creamery Association. "But Oregon has left millions of federal dollars on the table. ... If the state legislature wants to back up their commitment to Oregon farmers, it needs to fully fund this program."

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The week ahead

Groups & Events

TUESDAY

•Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce networking breakfast, 7:45 a.m., Astoria Brewing Company, 144 11th St., Astoria.

WEDNESDAY

•**Children's Storytime**, "Dinosaurs," 10:30 a.m., Warrenton Community Library, 160 S. Main Ave.

SATURDAY

•**Children's Storytime**, "Dinosaurs," 10:30 a.m., Warrenton Community Library, 160 S. Main Ave.