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Farm Bureau saves Christmas!

Salem, Oregon, November 13, 2015 — ...Well, at least the business of Christmas tree farmers in Marion and Polk Counties that use helicopters for harvest.

At issue is a recently changed airspace designation around Salem Airport/Independence. On Aug. 20, the Federal Aviation Administration increased the designation of Class D airspace around the Salem Tower from approximately 5 nautical miles to 16 nautical miles. The rulemaking was a result of a biannual review that FAA undertook to address safety and topography concerns.

This change could have an enormous impact on the ability of pilots to operate anywhere within the enlarged Class D airspace if the weather was poor. This is because Class D airspace is designed to be controlled, and there must be full accountability of where aircraft are.

“Poor weather could effectively halt Christmas tree harvest by choppers that are located within the 16 nautical miles around Salem Tower,” said Gail Greenman, OFB director of national affairs.

Thanks to OFB’s work with our Congressional delegation, the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association, Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association, local ag pilot Terry Harchenko of Industrial Aviation Services, and others, FAA has issued a revised rule

that increases Class D airspace around the Salem Tower by only 1 mile instead of 11 miles.

“However, the proposed corrected rule will not be finalized until February 2016 at the earliest,” said Greenman.

That means that until February, helicopter and airplane operators are subject to the rule as it stands covering the 16 nautical miles of Class D airspace. And they must sign a Local Operator Agreement (LOA) with the Salem Tower to fly this year.

“This will impact the Marion and Polk Christmas tree harvest for 2015, as well as other farmers who utilize helicopters or planes as part of their operation between now and the end of February,” said Greenman.

Note: It is the helicopter operators that must sign the LOA, not the farmers. And it is critical that helicopter operators sign the LOA before Christmas tree harvest begins.

“What’s important for Christmas tree growers in Marion and Polk Counties to do is to ask their helicopter operator if the choppers will be working within the designated 16 nautical miles of Class D airspace this season. And if so, make sure the helicopter operator has signed the LOA before harvest begins,” said Greenman.

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* Note to Editors: “Farm Bureau” is a registered trademark; please capitalize in all cases.

The state’s largest general farm organization, Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is a grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing the interests of the state’s farmers and ranchers in the public and policymaking arenas. First established in Oregon in 1919, Farm Bureau is organized in all 36 counties and has 7,000 member families that are professionally engaged in agriculture.

Oregon Farm Bureau President Barry Bushue is a third-generation farmer raising a variety of vegetables and berries at a nearly century-old farm near Boring, Oregon. He is OFB’s 15th president.