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Farm Bureau celebrates women’s contributions to agriculture

SALEM, OREGON: Oregon ranks fourth in the nation for the number of farmers and ranchers who are women, according to the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture (2017). There are 29,868 female farmers and ranchers in Oregon, representing 44% of the state’s agricultural community.

Nationally, 36% of all U.S. farmers and ranchers are female, according to the census.

To celebrate women’s contributions to Oregon agriculture — and the impact of public policy on all farm and ranch families — the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) Women’s Advisory Council will host a cake-and-coffee reception for lawmakers and the general public at the state capitol on Monday, Feb. 3, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

February 3 also marks the start of the 2020 Oregon Legislative Short Session.

“Farm Bureau members will be at the capitol to remind lawmakers that their decisions directly impact our ability to grow crops, raise animals, contribute to the economy, and stay viable and sustainable for the next generation,” said OFB Women’s Advisory Council Chair Janice Flegel, who runs a cattle and hay ranch with her family in Crook County.

“Women play an essential role on Oregon’s farms and ranches in every capacity, as owner-operators, as bookkeepers, as mothers, and as advocates for agriculture in the legislature,” said Flegel.

Agriculture is unique in that, unlike other industries, almost every aspect of public policy affects farms and ranches, including laws involving land use, labor, water, wildlife, taxes, transportation, and many other broad categories. Agriculture is also different in that farmers and ranchers cannot simply pass along increased costs to their buyers because their product prices are set by the commodity market. Also out of their control are factors like the weather, pests, disease, and market trends.

In Oregon, female farmers and ranchers are involved in producing all of Oregon’s 225+ agriculture commodities, from cattle, sheep, and dairy cows — to berries, vegetables, and wine grapes — to hazelnuts, grass seed, and nursery products.

OFB First Vice President Angi Bailey owns Verna Jean Nursery, located outside of Portland.

“My mom Verna Jean Hale started the nursery in 1967,” said Bailey. “She was a woman who worked in agriculture her entire life, who was not bound by any preconceived notions of what she should be
and certainly was not slowed down by any barriers to success. I knew from watching my mother that my gender would not be a disadvantage when I took over the nursery."

“I'm happy to see that more women are taking the lead in farms and ranches,” said Mickey Killingsworth, Women’s Advisory Council member and owner of a sheep ranch in Jefferson County.

“Today when I go to town to make a big order of fertilizer or buy farming equipment, I don’t get asked where my husband is. It's not so unusual to be a female farmer anymore, which is a positive for agriculture,” Killingsworth said.

PHOTO: FBwomen1: The Oregon Farm Bureau Women’s Advisory Council will hold a public reception at the state capitol on Feb. 3. In 2019, council members were joined by (center) Rep. Shelly Boshart Davis, Oregon Dept. of Agriculture Director Alexis Taylor, and Rep. Brian Clem.

PHOTO: FBwomen2: OFB Women's Advisory Council Chair Janice Flegel is among the 44% of Oregon farmers and ranchers who are women. She raises cattle and hay with her family in Crook County.

PHOTO: FBwomen3: OFB Women’s Advisory Council member Kristie Glaser (left) spoke with Oregon Senator Betsy Johnson about a bill that impacted her family’s grass seed farm in 2019. She was accompanied by daughters Kendra and Brooke Glaser.

Learn more about Oregon Farm Bureau at www.OregonFB.org.

See the full Oregon profile from the 2017 U.S. Ag Census

See the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture’s highlights from the census

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

Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is a grassroots, nonpartisan, nonprofit, general farm organization representing the interests of farming and ranching families in the public and policymaking arenas. First established in Oregon at the county level in 1919 and the state level in 1932, Farm Bureau is organized in all 36 counties.

Oregon Farm Bureau President Barb Iverson comes from a multigenerational family farm from Woodburn, raising industrial hemp, grass seed, squash, vetch seed, hazelnuts, wine and table grapes, and operating the Wooden Shoe Tulip Festival, which attracts over 160,000 visitors each year. Barb is OFB’s 17th president.