OFB hard at work during COVID-19

Please visit OregonFB.org/covid19 for very important health and safety guidance for Farm Bureau members. There are resources available in multiple languages to keep ag employers and employees as safe as possible during the pandemic.

Message to Farm Bureau members
from OFB Executive Vice President
Dave Dillon
dave@OregonFB.org

We want our farm and ranch families to know that Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) has continued our work for our members non-stop since the COVID-19 pandemic came to the United States. On the public policy front, we have worked with government agencies, legislators, and the governor’s office, as well as a strong coalition of Oregon’s agricultural and other business leaders on a daily basis.

Job one was making sure the governor’s order did not unnecessarily shut down or limit agricultural activity or the businesses farmers and ranchers depend on to be #StillFarming and #StillRanching. That was not a small effort and it is ongoing.

At the same time, we’ve given ag a voice in agency decisions as they formalize their guidance for Oregon businesses. We are working at the federal level to ensure farm and ranch families have access to the assistance they may need in this uncertain time and to work through other areas that impact our members, such as labor availability and the urgency of keeping H-2A timelines intact.

We are also working with the broader business community to get relief from the new gross receipts tax (the Commercial Activities Tax or CAT). That tax has its first quarterly payments due this month. The governor and the state department of revenue have the legal authority to delay the tax or make other adjustments to help family businesses get through the cash flow crunch many are experiencing. The governor has asked the private sector to make sacrifices, such as limiting options for landlords when tenants can’t pay. We believe the state should be making the same accommodations under this new tax.

OFB is leading in many more critical public policy efforts.

Message to Farm Bureau members
from OFB President
Barb Iverson
barb@OregonFB.org

Farming and ranching is a complex industry. As farmers we know there is so much more than dropping a seed in the ground and watching it grow. We have gotten so good at our profession that it is often taken for granted by society.

Our current COVID-19 crisis emphasizes how well our system works. Besides runs on toilet paper and flour, grocery shelves are restocked daily and there is always food to buy.

But the public needs to realize that most of what’s in the stores now comes from last year’s crop. Farmers and ranchers are into a new cycle, and to continue doing what we do best, we need support and access to essential tools so next year’s grocery shelves are full. Fertilizer, labor, seed, parts, fuel, and all the other inputs — and the transportation to get them to us — are needed to plant our crops and take care of our livestock. These are all essential industries to agriculture.

Farming is also very diverse. For some farmers, the impact of COVID-19 will be minimal; for others, it will be devastating.

In farming, we are used to tough years, and the last few years haven’t been particularly good for Oregon agriculture. Our hazelnut industry was hurt by increased trade tariffs, and growers were impacted by the closing of NORPAC, which was Oregon’s largest fruit and vegetable processor.

Concerns going forward could be cash flow to operate, labor availability to prune trees and work in the field, trade impacts with countries tightening their borders, and the list could grow. Some sectors are seeing significant drops in prices on an already thin margin. These price changes affecting farmers and ranchers are rarely seen in the grocery stores.

If we really value food security and food availability, we need to make sure farmers and ranchers receive a fair price for their products so they can remain viable and in business.
Ditch-cleaning program ramps up

The Oregon Dept. of Agriculture (ODA) is moving closer toward rolling out its new ditch-cleaning program in certain parts of the state.

OFB advocated for creation of this program in the 2019 Oregon Legislative Session. After narrowly escaping a veto threat by the governor, ODA has been working steadily on implementation since its signing in late 2019.

What can farmers expect from this roll out? The program will authorize cleaning in dry historically maintained channels, commonly called ditches, during certain times of the year.

“Because this is a significant, brand-new program for ODA to administer, they’re going to move forward with implementation on a regional basis,” said OFB VP of Public Policy Mary Anne Cooper.

“This means that even if you have a dry ditch on your property that you need to clean, only certain regions will be eligible to use the program in the coming year, with statewide rollout occurring over five years,” she said.

ODA is in the process of finalizing the rules this spring, with the intention of having the program available to farmers in the first region to roll out this summer and fall.

Stay tuned for opportunities to comment on the draft rules and the roll out of this new program!

Make sure you’re signed up to receive emailed OFB Action Alerts; register at OregonFB.org/advocacy.

Please contact OFB staff for more details on the program and how to engage in the rulemaking process.

Dillon’s message continued

OFB has provided as much relevant and timely information for Farm Bureau members as possible at OregonFB.org/covid19. We created a comprehensive resource for farm and ranch employers, which is being updated regularly on OFB’s COVID-19 webpage. No state agency has been able to assemble this needed information, but your OFB team got it done.

We’re also reaching beyond the ag community via traditional and social media to let all Oregonians know the challenges you face right now as a farming or ranching family.

As an organization, nearly all OFB staff are working remotely. We have a small group in the office who are operating under new safety protocols consistent with the governor’s executive order. Your whole staff team is still on the job and reachable. OFB has also made video conferencing capabilities, conference call lines, and guidance on how to conduct County Farm Bureau business remotely in this time of isolation.

Our work, our thoughts and prayers, and our focus are all aimed toward helping our Farm Bureau member families and your businesses get through this pandemic. We know there is stress and pressure and unprecedented uncertainty in your lives right now, and my promise to you is that we are doing everything we can to help.

Iverson’s message continued

We should be proud of the job we have done in Oregon agriculture. And I know it’s not said often enough, but thank you. Thank you to all the farmers and ranchers who put food on our tables, provide countless other ag products, and take care of our land and water. Great job. Be safe. #StillFarming #StillRanching

Michaels wins PBS scholarship raffle

OFB partner Pacific Building Systems proudly announces the winner of its $500 scholarship raffle, which was drawn on March 24 in celebration of National Ag Day: Sarah Michaels, member of Douglas County Farm Bureau. Michaels is about to finish her third year at the University of Idaho in pursuit of a degree in nutrition.

“I would like to express my gratitude for receiving a scholarship as generous as this one,” said Michaels.

The deadline to apply for OFB’s Century and Sesquicentennial Farm and Ranch Program is May 1!

Learn more at CenturyFarm.OregonFB.org.
Michaels and her two sisters are the fifth generation on a Century Ranch in Days Creek. She grew up on the cattle and sheep ranch helping her parents (and active Farm Bureau members) Troy and Holly Michaels.

2020 OFB Buyers’ Guide launched

The online 2020 OFB Buyers’ Guide is now available at OregonFB.org. The guide features an updated and expanded selection of ag suppliers and new product listings in over 70 product categories of interest to Oregon’s diverse ag community.

If your company would like to be included in the guide, contact OFB’s partner Strategic Value Media about advertising. Email orfb-advertise@svmmedia.com or call 913.214.5200.

Help highlight Oregon ag during lockdown

Among the heroes of the coronavirus pandemic are U.S. farmers and ranchers, families who’re #StillFarming and #StillRanching to provide food and other important ag products for society, while most Americans have been instructed to stay at home.

With so many people relying on online education and entertainment, there’s a prime opportunity for us to highlight Oregon agriculture.

#1 Join the national #StillFarming campaign on social media

OFB Social Media Committee Chair Evan Kruse (above), of Douglas County Farm Bureau, urges you to help share the story of Oregon agriculture by posting a video or photo on social media of yourself at work using the hashtag #StillFarming and/or #StillRanching.

If you can, please tag OFB on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter so we can share your post!

#2 Take (and share on social!) a virtual tour of a farm or ranch

With most Oregonians stuck at home, including parents with kids home from school, there’s a lot of interest in exploring Oregon farms and ranches online.

OFB has a robust library of virtual farm tours, including visits to a cherry orchard, mint farm, cattle ranch, broccoli field, grass seed farm, fresh egg business, and more.

Check out our collection at OregonFB.org/videos — and please share them on social media!

#3 Explore (and share!) online ag education resources

The OFB Ag Education Committee has compiled an excellent array of online classes, activities, and games about agriculture for kids of all ages.

Check out what’s available at OregonFB.org/ageducation.

#4 Send OFB a selfie/head-and-shoulders photo of yourself

Help us create a giant collage of photos of Farm Bureau members for the OFB headquarters in Salem.

Send a head-and-shoulders photo of yourself on the farm or ranch and email it to annemarie@OregonFB.org or upload it to OregonFB.org/selfies. We’re #FarmBureauProud of our grassroots members, and we want to feature as many people as we can!
Reenergizing Wallowa County Farm Bureau

After a few years of dormancy, Wallowa County Farm Bureau is strong and back in action, with a full board of directors, including President Woody Wolfe, Vice President Joe Dawson, and Secretary Bobbi Baker.

Wolfe credits his decision to get involved and help rejuvenate the county after attending a couple presentations by OFB’s Mary Anne Cooper and Dennis Myhrum, who both spoke about the importance of Farm Bureau and the countless issues OFB works on for farmers and ranchers in the legislative, regulatory, legal, and public arenas.

Wolfe wasn’t the only person who became inspired to join.

“I believe Wallowa has been one of the top County Farm Bureaus for membership growth this year. Everyone sees the value in it,” he said.

Cattle and hay are the county’s top ag commodities, so rules and regulations around wolves and ranchers’ ability to protect their livestock are major concerns, as are cap-and-trade, the Corporate Activities Tax, and water issues.

Wolfe attended the 2019 OFB Convention in December, along with Dawson. Both were impressed with Farm Bureau’s democratic, grassroots policy development process.

“The rural voice is shrinking every day. Farm Bureau is probably the strongest avenue to hold on to that voice so farmers and ranchers don’t get forgotten in the legislature and left out completely,” said Wolfe.

NW Farm Credit Services and Umatilla-Morrow CFB launch flood relief fund

Led by a generous $10,000 contribution from Northwest Farm Credit Services and a donation by Umatilla-Morrow County Farm Bureau, OFB established a relief fund for victims of the massive flooding that occurred in Umatilla County in February.

The deadline to apply has been extended to May 1. Learn more at OregonFB.org/flood. Applicants do not have to be Farm Bureau members to apply or receive funds.

“Rural Oregonians help our neighbors in times of need. We set up this fund as a way to support local families and businesses who were most impacted by the devastating floods,” said Paul Goodwin, president of Umatilla-Morrow County Farm Bureau.

The fund’s current intent is to provide grants of up to $2,500 to help those who demonstrate uncovered losses (meaning losses not covered by insurance, or other public or private relief funds). Once the requests for funds are received and evaluated by the fund advisory committee, this range may be adjusted.

The Umatilla River has flooded over the years, but nothing ever came close to the 20,300-cubic-feet-per-second flow of this year’s flood. Farms, ranches, small businesses, homeowners, and others suffered significant damage.