

## **Working lands yield essential resources, habitat, jobs**

Based on recent local discussions and issues, it is apparent that many people in Lane County think that all our natural spaces would be better off without active management. Somehow, we can go back in time, take people out of the equation, and let these spaces go back to their “natural state.” Seems silly, right?

There is no way to go back to a world without human influence. If you think about our natural spaces in the bigger picture, they are all affected by humans. Even pristine wildernesses like Crater Lake National Park are actively managed for beetle infestations and wildfire prevention.

At this point, there is no way to take people out of the equation. It is our moral responsibility to manage these spaces for human needs and our natural environment.

Natural resource professionals understand and observe the seasons and flora and fauna behavior daily – we are connected to the land and are stewards of it. Ag and timber lands provide crucial wildlife habitat that could very well disappear if these industries go away. You cannot provide any wildlife habitat or benefit if the land gets paved over for another shopping mall.

The key here is balance.

I am a small farmer just north of Coburg who is passionate about natural resources and educating the community.

Prior to starting my farm, I worked for the Oregon State University Extension Service for 10 years managing programs and teaching for the agriculture and forestry programs. My time with Extension was invaluable in regard to understanding what the scientific process looks like and what it means to apply these best practices to natural resource industries.

In terms of management practices, OSU Extension always took the “least toxic approach” first. We were trained to identify pest problems correctly and learn to apply preventative cultural or mechanical methods such as crop rotation to a crop issue. We scouted and monitored pest and disease pressure in different crops so that we could make decisions based on pest thresholds, or in other words – we had a certain amount of damage to a crop we were willing to accept before we applied pesticides to a crop.

Oregon agriculture and natural resource communities are pioneers in developing best practices that protect the natural environment but also provide effective active management tools.

On top of my farm business, I recently accepted a grassroots coordinator position for Lane Families for Farms and Forests (LFFF). Through Lane Families for Farms and Forests, we are working toward preserving the thriving agriculture and forestry industries in Lane County and Oregon for generations to come.

Once you recognize these industries as essential you understand that you do what it takes to preserve them.

I think that we can all agree that everyone needs to eat and have shelter as a basic necessity. Many folks do not seem to understand the full ramifications of supporting policies that seem beneficial to the environment on the surface, but would completely tie the hands of natural resource industries.

In order for us to feed and house people, these industries need to have access to all legal and effective

tools they can get. Modern tools like pesticide chemistries have been developed and tested to manage these crops and spaces efficiently. New equipment and processing plants are developed to effectively process and distribute these products. There is a whole network in Oregon based on natural resources that employs many of our community members with high quality and often high paying jobs.

I always come back to this question: If we suffocate these industries by taking tools away, what is the alternative? What does our state or our world look like if agriculture and timber cannot provide these products to people that need them?

For people that are relying on these products, there is no alternative.

As a society, we need to truly start trusting that these industries make the best management decisions that they can based on a myriad of factors. Many of the influences are out of their control, including weather, climate change, market shifts, processing bottlenecks, etc. Ag and timber need to be able to be agile in order to survive. For some comparison: If we experienced some kind of emergency and were heading into surgery, we would not question the doctors' decisions at that moment – we would trust their knowledge, expertise and experience.

There is also a gross misunderstanding of how these pesticides travel through the environment. People seem to pick and choose what kind of science they agree or disagree with based on their personal opinions or misunderstanding of an issue.

But here is the thing about science, there is no room to agree or disagree – if you believe in the scientific process and peer review – science is fact.

Science is not a subjective point of view. Data and testing by reputable entities provide the basis on which we in the natural industries make many of our management decisions. We follow the rules to ensure that if we apply a pesticide, it is appropriate for that crop, and we do so in a way that it stays where we apply it.

Science is both a body of knowledge and a process. We are learning more every day about these tools; policies and risk management recommendations are updated as new data is gathered. The National Pesticide Information Center based at OSU is a great place to start learning more about pesticides: [npic.orst.edu](http://npic.orst.edu).

I encourage everyone who is skeptical or concerned about farm and forestry practices to come out and talk with us. Most foresters and farmers are happy to explain exactly what their management practices are and why they do it.

I grow flowers. I don't spray for pests unless they are going to take out a crop.

If this happens enough, I am out of business.

I cannot provide a great local agricultural product.

I cannot provide a great natural habitat for pollinator plants for bees.

I cannot provide habitat for other critters that take shelter in my perennial border or eat the berries of plants that I have planted.

We don't spray if we don't have to; it costs time and money.

I understand that many folks have a lack of trust with "Big Ag" or timber, but most of these companies are family-owned and we make the best decisions for Oregon so that we can all enjoy these spaces for centuries to come.

If we are going to continue to provide products like food, fiber, and timber, we need to better understand how to support these industries – not stifle them.

Pami Monnette is a Lane County farmer and grassroots coordinator for Lane Families for Farms and Forests. She wrote this for The Chronicle.

April 20, 2023 | The Chronicle