

Farmers, foresters seek common ground with neighbors

Marie Bowers and Gordon Culbertson

As residents of Lane County, we are fortunate to live where the scenery is green and pristine, the air is fresh, and the water is some of the purest in the country. Within minutes of the city we can be out exploring the forests or driving through the fields that frame our local roads. The landscapes we enjoy so much allow us to naturally be locavores, from the wood in our house to the food on our tables.

Behind every tree and every crop grown in Lane County are passionate individuals who go above and beyond to grow the best crop possible. They are often unknown to the general public, as most farmers and foresters are quite content to stay in the forests and fields. However, we are finding we need to have more conversations with our community as farming and forestry practices are continually discussed, criticized and debated on the Register Guard Opinion page.

Lane Families for Farms and Forests (LFFF) recognizes a large disconnect between those who do not work on the land and those who do — in the same way that we are often unfamiliar with careers that require one to sit in a city office building all day. Since our inception two years ago, our goal continues to be to embrace Lane County's rich heritage of farming and forestry.

Our community grew and prospered as we shared the bounty of our forests and the farms. Today farmers and foresters continue to play a significant role in our lives and our local and global economy. Everyone has an interest in the great success and sustainability of Oregon's great natural resources.

Currently, more than 9,000 Lane County jobs can be directly tied to farming and forestry. Over 90 percent of Lane County is forestland, and 98 percent of the county's farms are family-owned and operated. Not only does this offer us beautiful landscapes and economic investments into our community, but it also brings a plethora of diversity.

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Diversity in farming and forestry is one of Lane County's and Oregon's greatest strengths. We lead the nation in lumber, hazelnuts, grass seed, blackberries, sugar beet seed and many more wonderful crops. All these crops and more are major components of our local farm and forest community.

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Farmers and foresters use a variety of methods to produce our abundance of crops, selecting the best tool or management practice on a case-by-case basis. Practices such as selective harvest, no-till farming, clear cuts and full tillage are not mutually exclusive of each other. Often times they are both used on the same forest or farm. True sustainability recognizes the need for the use of all methods and tools depending on the situation.

No matter how one chooses to operate and manage land, all must follow the regulations that govern management practices. Oregon has some of the strictest laws in the nation on how we use and manage the land. We are a leader in carbon sequestration, clean air and superior water quality. This is by no accident, nor an effortless accomplishment.

Farmers, Ranchers and Foresters have the strongest incentive to wisely use our natural resources. We utilize the latest precision technology to do more with less. It is more than an economic investment; it is an investment in future generations. It also ensures our families and community have the highest quality of life.

We, Lane Families for Farms and Forests, have a passion for sharing with our Lane County Community about all the great types of farms and forests that surround us. For two years LFFF has hosted community dinners, meet and greets and tours. Most recently we have begun talking with local civic organizations. Our goal is to connect with all of Lane County and introduce our local farmers, foresters and ranchers.

The atmosphere of open dialogue facilitated by these activities brings individuals together who find common ground. We can celebrate our individual passions while having a mutual respect and understanding of one another. It serves as a reminder that before we jump to conclusions about a farming and forestry practice there are knowledgeable, experienced people behind it and they care deeply about what they do.

LFFF would love for you to join us at our next gathering or come speak to your organization. Feel free to reach out to us on our website www.lanefamilies.com if you are interested in learning more about us.

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