

OREGON CATTLEMAN

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE OREGON CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

JULY/AUGUST 2026



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THE BALLOT**

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Thanks to everyone who submitted patriotic photos from across the state! Seven counties are represented in photos throughout this issue.

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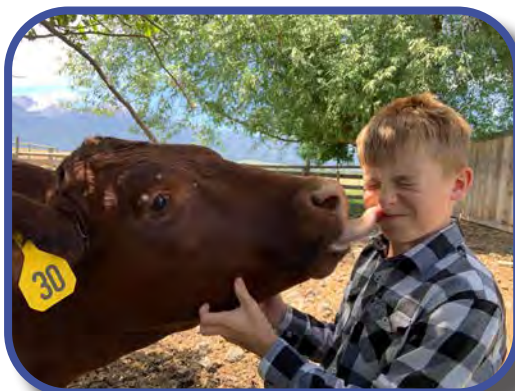
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ON THE COVER



FRONT

TJ Birkmaier, son of Tom & Kelly Birkmaier and grandson of past OCA President Mack Birkmaier with his steer named Eric! Wallowa County, Oregon



BACK- Destiny Weeks, Miss Rodeo Oregon 2026 on Dun the Right Way Ranch. She wanted an epic picture of her home county and home-raised AQHA Ruger. Photographed by Vixen Weeks | Joseph, Wallowa County, Oregon

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As We Celebrate America's 250th Birthday

Diana Wirth | 541-891-2295
OCA President

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, I am reminded of the citizens whose dedication, innovation, and courage built this nation. From those who serve in every industry to the men and women who have worn our nation's uniform, we are blessed to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

My message is brief this month to make room for important updates and a special article by Dennis Sheehy. I encourage you to read his piece. Dennis's words carry profound meaning, shaped by a life of service that began in the Marine Corps in 1966. He served bravely in Vietnam until severe injuries ended his military career. His commitment to creating a better future for the people of Asia led him to earn degrees in Asian Studies, Mandarin, and Rangeland Ecology, and ultimately to earn a doctorate in Large Herbivore Ecology from Oregon State University. His journey back to Asia—and the work he accomplished there—reflects a depth of patriotism few truly understand.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association is fortunate to have committee chairs such as Dennis, whose backgrounds, education, and personal interests enrich our organization. While ranching connects us, our broader experiences and perspectives strengthen our work. As president, I am grateful to each and every committee chair who serves the OCA—as well as those who support its endeavors.

By the time you receive this edition, we will know whether IP 28 qualifies for the ballot. Regardless of the outcome, our responsibility remains the same: to protect the right to raise animals for food, and to hunt and fish. We must continue confronting the misinformation that fuels threats to our industry. OCA is committed to addressing this challenge for our ranching families once and for all.

It is also PAC and endorsement season. Your Executive Board will soon begin discussions on endorsements and strategic use of PAC funds. Supporting and encouraging legislators who

champion our causes is essential to our mission.

I would like to personally invite you to the Oregon Cattlemen's Association Cattle-PAC event in Powell Butte on September 24th. With the support of the Malott Family of Central Oregon Ranch Supply—celebrating their 50th anniversary—and our generous Allied Industry Partners, this year's event will be exceptional. I hope you will join us as we raise funds and celebrate this milestone.

Finally, as we enter another difficult wildfire season, please know your OCA team is working tirelessly to support ranchers most affected by fire. If you are able, we ask that you consider contributing to the OCA Wildfire Assistance Fund, available on our website. We are also partnering with OSU Extension, ODA, and OEM to coordinate the distribution of supplies. We continue to pray for our ranching families, our state, and a mercifully rainy August.
DRW •



Jocko the ranch horse at Phoenix Cattle in Klamath Falls, Klamath County, Oregon. Photographed by Hana Elbert



Announcing the new vaccine from Hygieia Labs:

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Contact Jenna Chandler at Hygieia Labs for additional information.

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IP 28 Fails to Qualify for the Ballot

Rocky Dallum

OCA Lobbyist

It's official: IP 28 failed to qualify for Oregon's November ballot. That means voters won't have the chance to say "no" to criminalizing our long-standing statutory exemptions that allow ranching, animal agriculture, hunting, fishing, and wildlife management under state law. That is welcome news and a credit to everyone who helped educate Oregonians about the measure's sweeping consequences—but producers should not mistake this outcome for the end of the fight.

IP 28 was a serious threat, but it was also part of a much larger problem. Its proponents have repeatedly compared their campaign to end the killing of animals to the fight for women's suffrage. However offensive that comparison may be, we should take them at their word. They are not hiding the ball. Their goal is not to improve one livestock practice or strengthen one environmental rule. Their goal is to end animal agriculture—and there is no reason to believe they will simply go away because one signature drive fell short.

Other organizations pursuing the same broad objective are not always so direct. You do not have to look far to see attacks on cattle production repackaged as environmental or regulatory disputes. In July, Willamette Riverkeeper, the Animal Legal

Defense Fund, Center for Food Safety and Food & Water Watch filed a lawsuit challenging Oregon's newly updated National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System general permit for confined animal feeding operations. The lawsuit asks a court to set aside or send back a permit developed by the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality after an extensive public process. The program is designed to ensure compliance with the federal Clean Water Act.

Oregon already operates one of the nation's most rigorous CAFO programs. Permit holders must follow detailed nutrient management plans, maintain manure and wastewater storage systems, conduct inspections, keep records and operate under ODA oversight. OCA submitted comments supporting renewal of the permit and the registrations of several feedlots that rely on it. Those operations have invested significant time and resources to meet Oregon's demanding standards. They need regulatory certainty—not a moving target created through litigation by national advocacy organizations. OCA is now strategizing with other livestock organizations on how best to engage in the litigation and continue educating policymakers and the public about the strength of Oregon's program and the real-world consequences for producers. Particularly egregious is the lawsuit's use of the misleading term "factory farms," language designed to confuse and scare consumers. Oregon's feedlots are not factories. Neither are our dairies, hog farms, or poultry operations—particularly in a state with such high regulatory standards, including requirements for cage-free egg production.

This is the lesson for producers and policymakers alike: the threat will not always be dressed up as a simple call to ban beef. Sometimes it will be an initiative that openly states its destination. Other times, it will be a lawsuit, an agency rule, a local



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Former Director of the Oregon Water Resources Department

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Corey, Byler & Rew, LLP.

restriction, or a bill presented as a narrow change and positioned as necessary to “stop pollution”—which is already illegal. A failed initiative does not mean the pressure has disappeared; it means opponents will look for another route. OCA must remain engaged on all of these fronts, educate policymakers and the public, and support our producers.

That work is already underway as we look toward the 2027 legislative session. We are gathering information about potential legislation and participating in discussions on issues carried forward from prior sessions, including water management, corner crossings, wildlife management and a long list of other policies affecting agriculture, rural communities and the cattle business. Early engagement matters. By the time a bill is introduced, many of the most important arguments, drafting choices and other decisions may already have been made.

Campaign season is also just about to kick into high gear. OCA participates in AG-PAC, a coalition of natural resource organizations that pool political resources and engage candidates. Through AG-PAC, we will interview legislative candidates in August. Meanwhile, OCA will consider how CattlePAC can best support candidates and build lasting relationships with new and current policymakers who understand ranching. We are deeply grateful to the producers who contribute to CattlePAC.

IP 28 may be off the ballot, but the movement behind it remains. Protecting Oregon’s cattle industry requires vigilance in campaigns, courtrooms, agencies and the Legislature. OCA will be there, and we appreciate all of our members who stand up, share their stories and make our work possible. •

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News and updates from the OCA headquarters

Jem Connolly

OCA Membership Services Manager

Congratulations, America, on 250 years of making freedom ring! Our forefathers set historical precedents in their conviction that the citizens of this land should have rights and inherent freedoms. How exciting that the rancher of today gets to both enjoy and enact these rights daily!

Thank you to everyone who attended the 2026 Mid-Year Membership Meeting in Madras. The event was heavily attended, with over 55 members attending both days, 45 registered voting members, 7 VIP attendees, and 6 county associations also represented at the event. It was wonderful to see your active engagement throughout discussions of IP 28 and the proposed changes to ODA's Brand Program. OCA continues to hold Animal Health/Brand & Theft Committee Meetings to gauge opinions and determine the best course of action for the Association regarding these program changes. These committee meetings are open to all OCA members, and we welcome your participation and involvement in these crucial discussions. Dates, times, and links to the virtual committee meetings are announced digitally in the weekly Post newsletter and with emailed reminders. Please reach out to the OCA office if you are having issues accessing the meeting.

While many ranchers today

focus on succession planning and looking ahead, I am taking a moment to look back through historical archives and at the foundation of this association. As a part of the younger generation, I feel a sense of duty to preserve the history, pride, and tradition of Oregon's own pioneers. I am pleased to announce that OCA's Digitized Historical Archive is now available for viewing within your membership portal at orcattle.com. (Email and password required to sign in). Within this section of your membership portal, you can view a growing collection of the historical accountings, newspaper clippings, and images from the duration of OCA's existence, going back to when it was the Cattle and Horse Raiser's Association of Oregon. I welcome any additional images, names, dates, or descriptions that you might have for what is published.

This Independence Day, as I was gathered by the BBQ to share smoked brisket and homemade hamburgers with friends and family, it was clear that Beef is What's for Dinner. Beef continues to be a staple source of protein and nutrition in many American homes, and a hallmark of enjoyable holidays. A stark comparison to the headway IP 28 continues to make, with more than 146,000 signatures submitted at the July 2 deadline. These signatures, once verified, will determine whether IP 28 will

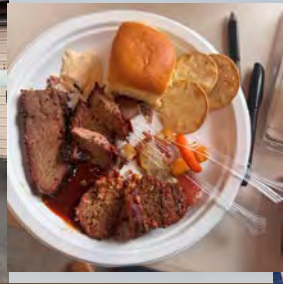
be on the ballot this fall. OCA's IP 28 webpage will contain updates about this process, which you can view and publicly share (orcattle.com/no-on-ip28). OCA has signed the Ag-PAC Coalition Letter against IP-28, and through our lobbyist Rocky Dallum, OCA continues to be actively involved with plans against IP 28. While signatures are no longer being gathered, please continue to engage with your friends and neighbors to share the truth behind IP 28, as many still have not heard about this petition.

Looking forward, OCA gathers next on September 24 at the Malott Ranch for our CattlePAC Fundraiser. Central Oregon Ranch Supply is celebrating 50 years of supporting ranchers and has welcomed OCA back for another great evening. Registration is now open; forms are included in this magazine and online. Plan a night-time date or buy a company table now to reserve your seat on this night of networking, entertainment, and fundraising. Donations are also being accepted for the live and silent auctions. Please reach out to me with questions or for the donation form.

Until then, may your tractors keep running, and your hay fields stay dry. •

2026 Mid-Year Membership Meeting | Madras, OR

Photos by Jem Connelly and Diana Wirth





2026 Nomination Process is Open

Matt McElligott

OCA Immediate Past President

In accordance with the responsibilities outlined in our association's governing documents, it is time to open the nominations process.

List of the office positions open for nomination and, per our bylaws, required qualifications of those candidates are as follows:

Positions to be nominated in 2026:

- District III - Randy Mills serving, eligible to run again
- District IV - Bobbi Aldridge serving, eligible to run again
- District V - Randy White serving, not eligible-position needs to be filled
- District VI - Jim Sly serving, not eligible-position needs to be filled
- OCA Treasurer - Andy VanderPlaat serving, eligible but would like to step down

ARTICLE VII:

Nominations. Article VII of OCA's adopted Bylaws prescribes in detail the rules, eligibility, and process for OCA office nominations. "Each nominee for Association office must be a Producer level member qualified to hold the particular office and in good standing."

Section e. Candidates may be dropped, but none may be added after publication of the report of the Nominating Committee to the Board of Directors at the Fall Quarterly meeting: additions may be made by nominations from the floor at the Annual Convention.

Section f. At the general Membership meeting at the Annual Convention, the Nominating Committee will place the slate of candidates into nomination. (Immediately after the action, the chair will call for nominations from the floor.)

Nomination of Candidates for District Vice President

(Article VII Section 4) Paragraph a: "The nominee or nominees for each office of District Vice President will be chosen from the candidates selected by the affiliated county associations within each District and submitted by the current District Vice President in a timely manner to the Nominating Committee." And, per Article VII Section 4 Paragraph b: "If no candidates are selected and submitted by the affiliated county associations within each District in a timely manner, the Nominating Committee will select a candidate or candidates for that office."

Nomination of Candidates for Treasurer. (Article VII Section 5)

"Treasurer candidates are nominated for a one-year term of office and may be nominated for additional terms."

Nomination

If you are aware of an individual who would be an exemplary candidate for one of the positions above or are interested yourself, please contact your area Vice President or the Nominating Committee Chair, Matt McElligott, lm1ivestocknp@gmail.com. All candidate names must be submitted no later than August 20, 2026. •

A large herd of black cattle is grazing in a vast, open field of dry, yellowish grass. In the background, there are rolling hills under a bright blue sky filled with fluffy white clouds. The scene is captured from a low angle, emphasizing the expanse of the landscape.

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Reflecting on Patriotism

The 250th anniversary of our nation's Declaration of Independence



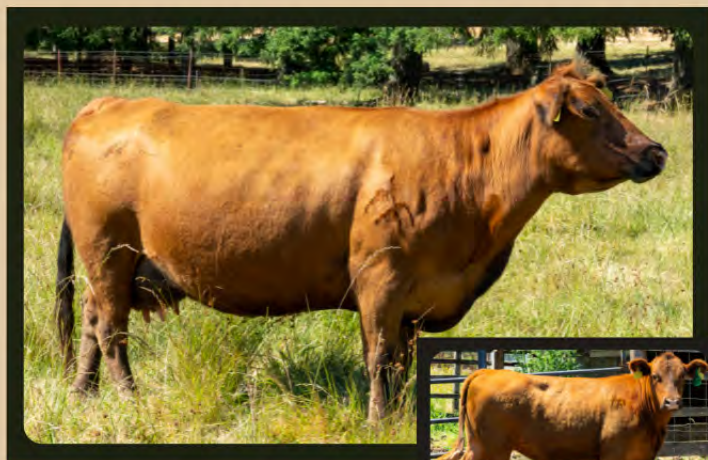
Dennis Sheehy
Wildlife Committee Chair

This year marks the 250th anniversary of our nation's Declaration of Independence from England on July 4, 1776. Although the Declaration of Independence led to the founding of the United States of America, this historic milestone would not have happened without the prior establishment of our military branches in 1775: the Continental Army on June 14, the Continental Navy on October 13, and the Continental Marines on November 10.

What is Patriotism?

People who volunteered for the Continental military are rightfully regarded as our country's first patriots (along with the writers and signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America). Volunteers from all thirteen colonies stepped forward as Patriots to create a desperately needed military. Probably without even knowing or understanding the word "patriot," they were willing to risk their lives, families, and future for a country and an idea that did not yet exist.

When people today are asked the meaning of "patriotism," most respond that it is "love and pride in your country, along with a willingness to stand up for it when needed. More expansive definitions of patriotism are "a feeling of loving your country more than any other, being proud of it, actions expressed as service and civic participation, and support for fellow citizens." Patriotism is also recognized as a commitment to working for the betterment of your country, adherence to its founding principles, visible



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*All photos taken by Brook Ferris of Snapshot Voyages

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Amanda Fox 541-321-1546
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actions that honor national symbols, and supporting the community through teaching, healthcare, or military service.

The early patriots had left their mother countries to gain freedoms they didn't have in countries of their birth. These freedoms included selecting their own leaders, freedom from tyranny, freedom to build a future for their family, and freedom from being "subjects" in a monarchy (i.e., owing personal allegiance to a monarch and governed by laws of the monarch's creation. Even before the Declaration of Independence from England, the American colonists had gained most of the freedoms they had sought and understood that these freedoms could be lost as the English monarchy tightened its controls over the colonies.

Source of Patriotism

Patriotism is a learned concept; it is not something you are born with. It is an act of faith and love, and it may be defined differently by different people. Most people learn patriotism from their parents, teachers, and the community in which they were raised. Parents should instill patriotism in their children, schools should solidify and expand on parental teaching, and the community should practice it.

Celebrating important holidays is an important act of patriotism. For most people, the most patriotic holidays are the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Memorial Day. All of these holidays are closely tied to family values and patriotism. Memorial Day is an especially important time to discuss family origins and service to the country with children and grandchildren.

Schools should impart the importance of national symbols and patriotism to students of all ages. This is true for both private and public schools. In the past, it seemed universally accepted that all schools were behind patriotism and informing students about civic duty and the absolute importance of being an American citizen.

In rural areas, 4-H clubs and FFA chapters promoted civic engagement, community service, and active citizenship. Both promoted service to the community, civic action, and a deep dedication to the American way of life. In towns and cities, Scouting also promoted similar patriotic values to its members. Rodeos then, and now, were very focused, exhibiting symbols of patriotism.

Patriotism and Military Service

The highlight of patriotism and respect for veterans and the military occurred after World War II and lasted until the late 1960s. At that time, there were many World War II and Korean War veterans in most

communities. There were also many active veteran organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion. Almost every town of any size had its own VFW or American Legion chapter.

Many, if not most, school students had at least one parent who had served in the military. Parents of other students had worked in the war industry or performed other service as a civilian to support the war effort. Holidays such as the 4th of July, Memorial Day, and Veterans Day were major events and were highly celebrated in rural areas and big cities alike.

Although the draft remains in place, volunteers are recruited to fill the different military occupational specialties. Recruitment for military service is based on volunteers. Military recruiters realize that a potential recruit will volunteer for military service if the family has a legacy of service; the military is engaged in a war that appears to be existential to the country's survival; and the potential recruit comes from a rural area of the United States.

The Military "Melting Pot"

The military has always been a "melting pot" for immigrants and minorities. It has provided a pathway to citizenship for immigrants, and for minorities to prove their loyalty to the country. Even though they might be subject to racism and segregation. During all of America's wars, patriotic Americans have stood up to defend these ideals, regardless of the challenges or discrimination they faced at home.

African Americans have served with distinction in every war that America has engaged in, from the Revolutionary War to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Second-generation Japanese, known as



Destiny Weeks, Miss Rodeo Oregon 2026 at the Elgin Stampede, Elgin, Union County, Oregon
Photographed by Jada Follett

Nisei, chose to volunteer to serve in the military during World War II even though their own families had been forced into internment camps. Japanese-Americans assigned to the all-Japanese 442nd Regimental Combat Team earned over 14,000 individual decorations for bravery, including 21 Medals of Honor. The regiment suffered almost 10,000 casualties during the war, with more than 800 killed or missing in action.

Native Americans and Hispanics who have volunteered to serve in the military during America's wars have served with distinction. Women have served with distinction as nurses and support staff since World War I, and now serve in most roles formerly assigned to men, including combat.

It was not until the Korean War that African Americans and other minorities were formally integrated into multiracial military units. President Harry S. Truman set this in motion when he desegregated the military with Executive Order 9981. By 1952, desegregation was fully established across all military institutions, creating an environment in which members of all races served alongside one another.

Although the Vietnam War was an unpopular war, seventy-eight percent of those who served were volunteers. Most minority groups are represented in proportion to their populations in the US. During the 10-year war, the military suffered over 58,000

casualties killed and 300,000 casualties wounded. When survivors returned home, they were not received with patriotic fervor, but with hostility and contempt. It felt as though the country had both turned its back on the military and put the blame on the veterans.

Where is Patriotism Now?

Looking at our country today, on this 250th anniversary milestone, it seems that quiet, unifying patriotism has been replaced by loud political divisions. People today often mistake political anger for love of country, forgetting that true patriotism isn't about tearing down your neighbors; it's about building up your community.

However, patriotism appears to be very much alive in rural areas where the sense of community overrides politics. These areas still have teachers who dedicate their lives to instructing the next generation, and where young men and women still step forward to serve in the military. Patriotism today might not look exactly like it did in 1775, or 1941, or even in 1966. But as long as we realize that our freedom is a hard-won gift, that being a good citizen means preserving family and community values and being willing to stand up for our country when needed, both patriotism and the country will still be around in 250 years. •

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Planning, Reading, Attending & Commenting on the PLC Front

Kelly Birkmaier & Mary Schadler

OCA Public Lands Council Committee Co-Chair

Well, here we are in the middle of summer, and as usual, I am wondering where the year has gone! For us up here in Wallowa County, and I have heard in other places as well, spring was atypical in 2026 as vegetation came all at once and earlier. This brought a small amount of panic, as noxious weeds needed treatment, harvests had to be cut, and plans had to be firmly in place weeks ahead of normal time.

On the PLC front, there has also been quite a bit going on, and planning, reading, attending, and commenting have been a must. There were the roundtables hosted by National PLC in April and May, the BLM's proposed grazing regulation revisions, and the Draft EIS for the Blue Mountain Forest Plan, which is now out for comment.

The roundtables were 11 meetings held across the western United States. These meetings were hosted by PLC, attended by top-level BLM and USFS staff, and open only to Forest Service or BLM permittees. This allowed for an open and constructive conversation between the permittees and the Washington-level staff of the two agencies. Conversation topics ranged from timber encroachment/fire reduction to infrastructure challenges, the use of virtual fencing, ESA concerns, the use of grass banks and target grazing, and much more. Having the Washington staff present was a real bonus as it allowed



the knowledge of concerns and praises to go right to the top of command. Local staff were also present and able to listen to the concerns voiced. At the end of the meeting, agency staff gave the permittees an update on each agency's work. Gilbert Jackson informed us that the Forest Service will be updating the grazing regulations, which should be out in August or September of 2026. Marlo Draper with BLM discussed revising the Recission Rule, improving the working relationship with other agencies to complete more tasks on the ground, and a paradigm shift to "outcome-based" grazing.

I am sure that more information will arise from these meetings, so please stay tuned. Also, if you missed the meeting in your area and have concerns or questions, please reach out to Mary or Kelly.

The comment period just closed with the BLM proposed revision of the grazing regulations. This is the first time these have been revised in 20 years! The proposed changes included expanding the application of land health standards to all BLM programs. The proposed change will better identify causal factors and dictate appropriate action, so that grazing

is not held responsible when it is the causal factor. The proposed changes require permit holders to be engaged in a production-oriented operation to eliminate abuse by groups that never intend to graze the permit or those that wish to hold it for conservation use. This creates flexibility in on/off dates, opportunities for grazing as a management tool, while still acknowledging and maintaining preference. The BLM is now analyzing hundreds of thousands of comments and will publish a final rule sometime in the coming months.

At the beginning of June, the Forest Service held several open house meetings announcing that the Draft EIS for the Blue Mountain Forest Plan is almost out. The meetings were designed to inform the public about the selected alternatives and the proposed alternative. A draft EIS was released on July 2, and folks have until September 30, 2026, to submit comments. This document covers three Forests, Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman, which is a large percentage of the eastern side of Oregon. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to Kelly. The draft Blue Mountain Forest Plan and information on how to comment can be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/umatilla/planning/forest-plan-revision>

As always, please reach out to Mary or Kelly with any questions or issues. •



The local FFA Chapter displays flower baskets around town in Imbler, Union County, Oregon
Photographed by Roxanne Graves



Timber with her heifer Windy, practicing for fair
Umatilla County, Oregon | Submitted by Zack Jordan

WELCOME

To our New & Recently Renewed Members



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Daniel Dankanich
William & Sandra De Jong
Lauralee Doman
Chris Heffernan
Jaime Helfrecht
Sara Hellberg-Wilson
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Kevin Martin
Alex McDonald
Todd Nash
Premier Feeds, LLC
Alexis Robinson
Josh Shockley
Simplot Western Stockmen's
Jared Sproul
Ashlie St.Clair
Jeremy & JoHanna Symons
Daniel Tague
Ernest & Tama Tosti
Nick Van Engen
Steve Witt
Mark Wunsch

Includes all recently processed memberships from June and July, through July 15, 2026

Liz Neilson attends NCBA Young Cattlemen's Conference on behalf of OCA



I am excited to share with the association about this year's NCBA Young Cattlemen's Conference that took place this spring, and I'm thankful for the nomination and support from OCA that granted me the opportunity to go on this trip.

Starting at the NCBA offices in Denver, we heard from Kim Brackett, NCBA President-Elect; Colin Woodall, NCBA CEO; Randy Blach of Cattle-Fax; and a variety of NCBA staff.

Colin touched on how NCBA operates from a 10,000-ft view and how the organization measures success through strategic planning and execution of the members' policy book. He walked us through the history of NCBA, and how the organization functions day-to-day. Colin also gave a briefing on NCBA's relationships with key Trump Administration officials, and the challenges they are facing in DC.

Randy Blach is a Cattle-Fax legend and gave an incredibly in-depth and informational presentation on the cattle market today and where it's going. There were a few pieces of information that really stood out to me:

- Last year, the margin of loss for packers was the greatest it's been, and this year is projected to be the same
- Last year, carcass weights increased an average of 25 lbs., which is equivalent to 2 million head worth of fed cattle

- While operations with <100 head of cattle are decreasing, the number of operations with 500+ head are increasing
- We are in a demand-driven market – at a 40-year high in beef demand from consumers. The demand growth is worth \$1,070/head
- We are at the lowest cow kill numbers in the last 4 years, and lower than the 20-yr avg.

Eric Moore, VP of Compliance, gave a very clear presentation on how NCBA separates the policy and federation dollars from the Checkoff contract dollars it receives. The number of checks and balances, the documents, and the stark division between the two were impressive. Checkoff dollars at NCBA are used solely for projects and programs that are reviewed and approved by the Cattlemen's Beef Board.

We had a full dose of all the Checkoff programs, including marketing, consumer outreach, research, and BQA. The level of behind-the-scenes work being done truly supports the increased demand I noted above. From working directly with food suppliers to monitoring internet traffic and world issues, and strategic marketing and beef promotion, the industry is benefiting from the checkoff dollars at work. One of the most shocking things we learned was the research on foreign materials found in carcasses. The number of foreign materials, especially birdshot and buckshot, in both fed and non-fed cattle, has increased. The concerning part is how broad it was – instead of being considered a regional issue, more issues are popping up across the country. This material often cannot be detected by metal detectors in plants and poses a serious threat to our demand if a consumer encounters it.

We were able to stretch our legs outside the office in Denver and visited the Kurer Feedyard in Greeley and Greeley Hat Works. This was a great opportunity for all of us to get to know each other better and start to shake off the awkward stranger feel. Soon after, we boarded a plane to Sioux City, Iowa, where we visited the largest Tyson Foods processing facility and value-added food processor, Empirical Foods. Commercial processing plants run like machines, and the entire facility was extremely impressive – from technology, organization, cleanliness, and overall efficiency, it's hard to wrap my head around the fact that they can process 6,000 head of cattle in two shifts. Empirical takes the trim from Tyson and other plants and separates the fat from lean to then create a lean ground beef product. This technology allows each small bit of lean from the trimmings to be used in the food supply.

In Ohio, we spent a day and a half at the Certified Angus Beef offices, becoming fully immersed in their marketing, brand development, and carcass and beef-quality programs. We talked extensively about the changes that CAB has made to their carcass quality requirements to accommodate larger cattle entering the food supply. Right now, a carcass that qualifies for CAB will bring an additional \$20.94/cwt.

\$192.65 on a 920 lb. carcass.

We then headed for DC and had a full day at the Capitol Hill Club hearing from the NCBA policy team, coaching us on the key issues that they are tackling. OCA President Diana Wirth outlined some of the priorities for Oregon producers in her article last month, but the Pet and Livestock Protection Act and the Fix Our Forest Act, along with support for funds through the Livestock Indemnity Program for EHD (Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease), were the focus of my conversations while in DC. It was clear that the impact these issues have on producers, and all Oregonians, is not a high priority for everyone in Washington. While we have representation that has championed these bills moving through the House, the road is long, and the journey is steep. Now is the time to keep our foot on the gas and continue to communicate to our lawmakers that these issues are real, they impact Oregonians, and we need immediate action.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to OCA for the nomination and support, and to each association member who invests in the next generation of cattlemen and women in Oregon. I'm excited for future attendees, and I'm confident this program will continue to immerse and develop young producers into industry leaders and trailblazers.



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ONTARIO VIEW FARM

This 76± acres features a diverse mix of 35± irrigated acres, pasture, cropland, and scenic wooded hills with springs and a small stream. Gated pipe irrigation and concrete ditch with siphon tubes. **\$560,000**

The BPOC – What is That?

The Importance of the Beef Promotion Operating Committee

Will Wise

CEO of the Oregon Beef Council



The BPOC is one of the most influential committees involved in the beef checkoff. Yet it took me some time to understand its importance. The BPOC is the Beef Promotion Operating Committee, and it has twenty members. This important committee oversees all funds authorized and collected under the national beef checkoff rules. Is that worth knowing about? Due to the scope of its purview and the sheer amount of dollars involved, it sure is.

The Beef Promotion Operating Committee includes ten producers elected by the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) and ten producers elected by the Federation of State Beef Councils (part of the NCBA). The Act and Order require that the Beef Promotion Operating Committee contract with national, non-profit,

industry-governed organizations to implement Beef Checkoff programs. These are commonly referred to as cooperators for the beef checkoff.

The BPOC is defined in the Beef Act as the body responsible for developing the annual budget, which must be approved by the full Beef Board and USDA, for developing plans and programs in the areas of promotion, research, consumer information, industry information, foreign marketing, and producer communications.

When I started with the Oregon Beef Council, there was an Oregon representative on the BPOC. I attended BPOC meetings in Denver a couple of times before BPOC meetings could be attended virtually by State Beef Council

executives. These meetings last a couple of days, so I do not sit through every minute of them. However, I want to keep apprised of where the millions of dollars are going, so I select discussion and budgeting for some of the bigger programs with specific cooperators. These meetings are fascinating in that the producers around the country who volunteer to serve on the BPOC are dialed in and well-informed.

Just to get on this committee is an involved process. Candidates apply and undergo an interview process before being eligible for appointment to the BPOC. In my experience, when I join BPOC meetings, I feel that all producer members give it their all and know the rules of the checkoff. This results in a professional, in-depth discussion about the proposals submitted for consideration, with the goal of optimizing the use of beef checkoff funds.

You may be interested in joining a BPOC meeting virtually. The next one is scheduled for September 2-3, 2026, at the Denver Airport Marriott at Gateway Park, located at 16455 E 40th Cir, Aurora, CO 80011 (and as noted above, you may attend all or part of the meeting virtually).

At this time, the ten members



Sharing the patriotic spirit with former Oregon Beef Council president Doug Maag and COO of Painted Hills Natural Beef Will Homer at Maag's Y-1 Farms in Vale, Malheur County, Oregon. Photographed by Gabrielle Homer.

appointed from the Cattlemen's Beef Board are from Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska (two appointees), Missouri, Oklahoma, Florida, Texas, and Wisconsin (two appointees). The other ten members are appointed by the Federation of State Beef Councils and currently represent Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska (two appointees), New York, North Dakota (two appointees), Utah, and Wyoming.

Why is this important? From my desk, I see the BPOC as a capable, serious group of producers that direct checkoff dollars in significant ways. In October 2025, the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) announced that for FY 2026 it will invest approximately \$38 million into Authorization Requests (ARs – or grant proposals). This came about due to the action at the September 2025 meeting in Denver, Colorado, of the Beef Promotion Operating Committee (BPOC), at which it approved

Checkoff funding for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025.

The total for all Authorization Requests submitted to the BPOC was about \$49 million, almost \$11 million more than the funds available in the CBB budget. I think you can see why this committee needs to do its job well. I think it does just that.

Over the past few years, I have had the pleasure of getting to know Ryan Moorhouse from Texas, who is the chair of the BPOC due to his role as chair of the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB). Ryan and I worked together on the board of the U.S. Meat Export Federation and, as good leaders often do, he moved on to chair the CBB. He is a solid industry leader, in my opinion, and has encouraged me to include Oregon in discussions across all parts of the major industry organizations. I appreciated this coming from a member from a big cattle state

such as Texas.

Here is a quote from Ryan that I saw on the CBB website about the BPOC that I liked:

"We continue to be impressed by the quality and creativity of the proposals our contractors bring forward each year, which makes funding decisions especially tough," said Ryan Moorhouse, chair of the Cattlemen's Beef Board and the Beef Promotion Operating Committee. "While we receive many outstanding proposals, our limited resources mean we can't fund everything we'd like. Inflation continues to reduce the impact of each Checkoff dollar, so prioritizing the most impactful programs is more important than ever."



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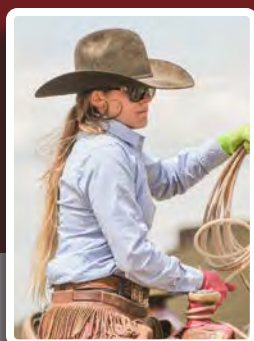


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Ranchers: Still Here as America Celebrates 250 Years

Morgan Kromm | 805-801-9960
OCW President | orcattlewomen@gmail.com



Last month, Americans across the country gathered with family and friends to celebrate Independence Day with barbecues, rodeos, parades, and fireworks. As those celebrations faded into memory, the significance of this year remains. In 2026, our nation marks 250 years of independence, an extraordinary milestone that offers an opportunity to reflect not only on where we've been, but also on the people and industries that have helped sustain America every step of the way.

Two hundred and fifty years is a remarkable span of time. Since our nation's founding, Americans have endured wars, economic downturns, natural disasters, political disagreements, and periods of tremendous change. Entire industries have emerged, transformed, and disappeared. Technology has advanced in ways unimaginable to those who signed the Declaration of Independence. Yet despite all that has changed, some things have remained surprisingly constant. Agriculture is one of them.

Long before interstate highways, smartphones, and social media, people were raising livestock, growing crops, and working the land to provide food for their communities. Today, ranchers and farmers continue that same work, even if the tools and technology

have changed along the way. While modern agriculture looks different than it did a century ago, the responsibility remains the same. Every day, producers across the country care for animals, steward natural resources, and work to provide food for families they may never meet. I think that continuity is something worth celebrating.

As ranchers, we often become focused on the challenges directly in front of us. Depending on the year, it might be drought, wildfire, rising costs, market volatility, labor shortages, regulations, or any number of other concerns. Those challenges are real, and they deserve attention. But when viewed through the lens of history, it becomes clear that uncertainty is not new to agriculture. Every generation of producers has faced obstacles that tested their resilience and forced them to adapt.

The ranchers who came before us endured harsh winters, economic hardship, and unpredictable markets. They navigated changing policies, technologies, and public expectations. They made difficult decisions, learned from mistakes, and found ways to keep moving forward. In many ways, today's producers are doing exactly the same thing. That ability to adapt while staying grounded in a core

set of values may be one of agriculture's greatest strengths.

The methods of ranching have evolved significantly over time. Today's producers have access to genetic tools, nutrition programs, grazing management practices, and technologies that previous generations could scarcely imagine. We continue to improve efficiency, animal care, and environmental stewardship while producing more food with fewer resources. Progress is not something agriculture has resisted; it is something producers have embraced for generations.

At the same time, the values that support rural communities have remained remarkably consistent. Hard work still matters. Personal responsibility still matters. Stewardship still matters. Family, faith, and community continue to shape the way many ranching families live and work. Those values may not always make headlines, but they are woven into daily life across rural America.

One of the things I appreciate most about ranching is the way it reminds us that independence and community are not opposing ideas. We often celebrate the independence that comes with ranch life, and rightfully so. Ranchers are resourceful people who learn to solve problems,

make decisions, and take responsibility for the outcomes. But anyone who has spent much time in agriculture also knows that success rarely happens alone.

Neighbors still help neighbors during branding season. Volunteer firefighters leave their own work behind to protect communities when wildfires threaten. Producers share knowledge, equipment, and labor when someone needs a hand. Rural communities continue to demonstrate a spirit of service that has been part of American life for generations.

Those connections matter, especially as our society becomes increasingly disconnected from agriculture. Today, many consumers are several generations removed from the farm or ranch. They may never have the opportunity to see firsthand the care, effort, and commitment that go into producing food. That reality creates challenges, but it also creates opportunities. Every conversation, every educational event, and every positive interaction is a chance to help people better understand the work we do and why it matters.

As members of the cattle industry, we have an important role to play in that effort. Whether we're serving beef at community events, volunteering in schools, mentoring young producers, or simply sharing our stories, we help strengthen the connection between consumers and the people who raise their food. Those relationships will become increasingly important as we look toward the future.

The future of ranching will depend on more than cattle prices or rainfall totals. It will depend on our ability to support the next generation, create opportunities for young producers, and continue building public trust in agriculture. It will require innovation, collaboration, and a willingness to



Kendall Noyes during the Patriotic tribute at the Elgin Stampede. Elgin, Union County, Oregon | Photographed by Jada Follett

adapt to changing circumstances while holding onto the principles that have guided the industry for generations.

As America continues celebrating its 250th year, I believe there is reason for optimism. The challenges facing agriculture are significant, but so is the determination of the people who work within it. Ranchers have never been strangers to hard work or uncertainty, and history has shown that resilience remains one of our greatest strengths.

For two and a half centuries, Americans have worked to build communities, care for the land, and provide for future generations. Ranchers have been part of that

story from the beginning. While the world around us will continue to change, the commitment to producing food, caring for our resources, and strengthening our communities remains as important today as it was generations ago.

The 250th anniversary of our nation is more than a celebration of the past. It is a reminder that the choices we make today will shape the legacy we leave for the next generation.

My hope is that, years from now, those who come after us will be able to look back and say what we can say about those before us: through every challenge, ranchers were still here. •

Effects of Wildfire Smoke on Cattle Health and Performance

Dr. Juliana Ranches | Beef Specialist

Aline Cristine Rezende dos Santos | Graduate Research Assistant

Oregon State University, Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center (EOARC); Burns, OR

Factors that Influence Wildfires and Air Quality

Wildfires have become more frequent and severe across the U.S. and globally. Since the 1980s, the area burned by wildfires has increased, peaking in spring and summer (EPA, 2023). Wildfire smoke contains a complex mix of gases and fine particles, with PM2.5 (particulate matter ≤ 2.5 microns) being particularly harmful. Human health research has shown that these tiny particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream, contributing to respiratory, cardiovascular, and neurological issues.



group has developed a methodology to produce wildfire smoke indoors (measured with PM2.5) mimicking natural wildfire smoke conditions that livestock are exposed to during wildfire season.

Simulated Wildfire Smoke Exposure Study

One of the limitations of studying the effects of wildfire smoke exposure and the effects on livestock health and performance is due to the unpredictability of wildfires, therefore hindering the ability of researchers to plan and execute such studies. To overcome this challenge, our research

In a recent study using this methodology, a total of sixteen heifers (Angus $\times$ Hereford, weighing 230 kg and 8 months) were individually housed in pens within a completely closed barn for 36 days. The study was divided into three phases: baseline, smoke exposure, and post-smoke exposure. The baseline phase lasted from d-7 to -1, during which heifers were adapted to their new environment. The smoke exposure phase occurred from d0 to 7, during which the heifers were exposed to controlled smoke for 7 consecutive days. The post-smoke exposure phase was from d8 to 28, during which heifers were monitored for three 3 weeks. Throughout the study, blood samples and body weights were collected once a week. Heifers were individually fed alfalfa hay ad libitum, and feed intake was monitored daily.

Preliminary results showed that the study's air quality, measured by PM2.5, varied over time, with a daily average of 142 g/m during the smoke-exposure phase, exceeding the EPA standard of 35 g/m.

Analysis of blood markers showed that heifer plasma ceruloplasmin peaked during smoke exposure and was elevated for a week post-smoke exposure before returning to baseline values. This observed increase in plasma ceruloplasmin is consistent with our previous study on natural smoke exposure, in which we observed increases in both plasma ceruloplasmin and cortisol (a stress hormone) in calves exposed to smoke. It is becoming



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clear that smoke from wildfires is an environmental stressor that triggers an immune response, which is energetically costly for the animal.

During the study, heifers' feed intake increased gradually over time, which was expected for these recently weaned growing heifers with ad libitum access to feed. However, during the smoke exposure phase, feed intake remained stagnant, with no changes observed in daily intake. In fact, a principal component analysis of the heifers' behavior revealed a 18% reduction in feeding and watering behaviors post-smoke exposure when compared to baseline values. Consequently, although the body weight of the heifers increased over time, after smoke exposure, no changes in body weight were observed,

and feed efficiency declined sharply.

Collectively, these initial findings suggest that wildfire smoke exposure can trigger an immune response, leading to behavioral changes negatively impacting cattle growth performance.

Tips for Managing Cattle During Wildfire Smoke Exposure

Unfortunately, limited strategies are available once fire and smoke start; thus, preparedness is key. If you are in a fire-prone area, take action before wildfire season:

- Create an evacuation plan.
- Make sure cattle are familiar with transport.
- Keep ID records up to date.

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- Identify alternative grazing or holding areas.
- If evacuation is not possible, designate a low-risk area with 7-10 days of feed and water.

Unlike fire, smoke travels great distances; in regions where wildfire smoke is common, long-term exposure can compromise cattle's health, particularly their respiratory systems. Based on our findings and guidance from the American Veterinary Medical Association and the EPA, the following is recommended:

1. **Limit Handling and Activity:** Avoid moving, processing, or transporting cattle when smoke is present. Physical exertion increases inhalation of harmful particulates. Delay stressful practices like branding and/or weaning until air quality improves.
2. **Provide Ample Clean Water:** Ensure constant access to fresh water near feeding areas. Hydration helps maintain airway moisture and aids in clearing inhaled particles.
3. **Reduce Dust in the Environment:** Dust exacerbates the effects of smoke. Use low-dust feed and lightly mist dry pens or alleyways to suppress airborne particles.
4. **Monitor for Signs of Respiratory Distress:** Watch for coughing, nasal discharge, labored breathing, or decreased feed intake. Animals with pre-existing conditions are more vulnerable.

5. **Allow Recovery Time:** Even after the smoke clears, livestock need time to heal. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for full recovery. During this time, minimize stress and avoid strenuous handling.

Final Thoughts

Our recent studies demonstrate that wildfire smoke exposure can lead to physiological and behavioral changes in cattle. From increased inflammatory markers to altered feed intake, the consequences of smoke should not be underestimated.

Livestock producers in smoke-prone regions should take proactive steps to protect animal health. By understanding the risks and implementing practical management strategies, producers can reduce the negative impacts of wildfire smoke and maintain herd productivity.

Disclaimer

Portions of the information presented in this article were previously published in an online article in *Progressive Cattle* (June/2025).

Acknowledgment

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Obituary: Randy Kessler



Randal (Randy) Ervin Kessler, 73, Umapine, OR, passed away in his sleep on June 18, 2026. He was born October 13, 1952 in Walla Walla, WA to Ervin and Arlene (Schubert) Kessler.

Randy grew up on his father's row crop farm but quickly gained interest in livestock, and at the age of 9, after joining his first 4H club, informed his leader that he was going to get a Black Angus heifer, go to the county fair every year, and sell bulls. His parents gifted him his first heifer, Triple T Eileenmere Lassie, in 1961; he sold his first bull in 1964 and never looked back.

Growing up in 4-H and FFA, Randy was surrounded by great mentors he spoke fondly of throughout his life. He earned his American FFA Degree and ran a 50-head cowherd upon graduating from Umapine High School.

There may not be anyone more proud of Umapine, Oregon, a map dot Randy centered his world upon. He moved 9 times in his life, all within a 3-mile radius. Going through a small rural school often means smaller sports programs and always the jokester he loved to tell newer acquaintances that he was at one time one of the most highly recruited athletes at U of O. Many would look at his small build in a bit of confusion for a second before he explained "Umapine of Oregon, where if they didn't have my body, they couldn't fill a football team."

Randy met his late wife, Dawn Cargill, at the Benton Franklin County Fair. Together they became one of the greatest teams the purebred cattle industry will ever have the honor of watching grow a program in the Pacific Northwest.

Angus cattle were Randy's passion, and he never wavered from his commitment to caring for his cowherd and the customers he gained through years of private treaty and consignment sales and eventually an annual bull sale starting in 2007.

In 2012, Randy's herd, Kessler Angus, was designated as a Historic Angus Herd by the American Angus Association, granted to those that have been continuous breeders of Angus cattle for 50 years. One of his greatest honors was being named a Walla Walla Fair Legend in 2024. 2025 was his 63rd consecutive year exhibiting cattle at the Walla Walla Fair; he never missed a year of leading an Angus female onto those grounds, even through his battles with cancer in the early 2000s.

Randy is survived by his children, Tierra (Robert) Duke, Cheyenne Kessler, and Cody Kessler; siblings, Vicki (Rocky) Robbins, Susan Moore, and Jeannie Kibler; and grandsons, Wyatt & Henry Duke. He was preceded in death by his wife, Dawn; parents Ervin & Arlene; and his grandparents. •

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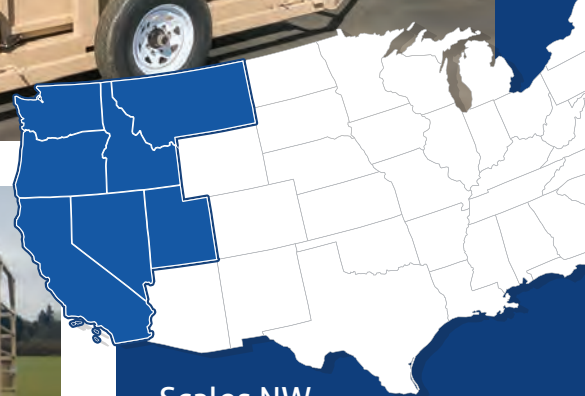
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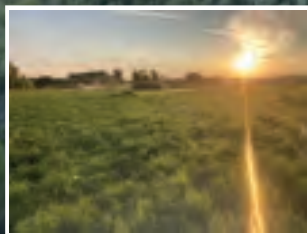
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