

Women in Agriculture

Angie Bailey works to build understanding between ag and public

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Growing up on her mother's tree nursery, Oregon Farm Bureau President Angie Bailey was bundled into the family's turquoise blue '57 Chevy and went wherever mom was working.

"We bought the car from my uncle when he went into the service and eventually my mom used it as our field car," Bailey said. "It was full of blankets and toys. I would play in and around the car for hours."

In 1967, Bailey's mother Verna Jean Hale, who'd worked at a tree nursery for 19 years, started her own nursery acre by acre on land purchased from her grandparents. She continued as a full-time farmer until her sudden passing in 2005.

At the time, Bailey, Hale's only child, and her husband, Larry, lived in Hillsboro, more than an hour's drive from Gresham. He, a chemical engineer with a Ph. D from Stanford, was working at Intel while Angie, a communication arts major, was caring for their 3-year-old daughter with another on the way.

"We were focused on Larry's career trajectory when my mom passed away," Bailey said. "We suddenly found ourselves with a functioning farm that we had to figure out how to



Angie Bailey at Verna Jean Nursery in Gresham, Oregon. Bailey found a passion for building understanding between agriculture, the public, and policymakers after an unexpected plot twist took her and husband Larry back to the farm.

Photo by Larry Bailey

manage.

"It was April, and we had orders to ship," Bailey said. "We began transitioning back and forth between Hillsboro and Gresham every few days for several months until Larry suggested we move to the farm and make a go of the nursery full time."

Stepping onto the farm with little knowledge of the day-to-day management,

the Baileys were welcomed with open arms.

"People I would consider competitors offered assistance and guidance," Bailey said. "From there we stepped into a whole agriculture community that the general public and those shaping our public policy don't understand. I found a passion there."

According to plan, Larry went back to work after four

years but remained active in the business. Angie ran the nursery full time until 2016 when she accepted a job as a grassroots coordinator for Oregonians for Food and Shelter.

Bailey worked in this capacity until she became Oregon Farm Bureau President in early 2021.

Bailey is also a member of American Farm Bureau's board of directors and these

days Larry picks up most of the slack around the nursery, but their life together has proven to be a continual dance of teamwork, flexibility and mutual support.

"I wasn't built to do anything halfway," she said. "I do my level best to show up everywhere I'm invited."

"The strength of agriculture in Oregon lies in our diversity, and there's really no way to represent agri-

culture unless you show up and look into the faces of the people you represent," Bailey said. "The stories I hear when I'm attending a county annual meeting, visiting someone's ranch, answering the phone after a natural disaster or reading an email about the impacts of a potentially detrimental bill... These are the stories we share in Salem and Washington, D.C."

Bailey comes well prepared: She attended American Farm Bureau's Women's Communications Boot Camp, an intense and life-changing experience. She was also the first person from Oregon to complete American Farm Bureau Federation's Partners in Advocacy Leadership Program, an intense, two-year professional development program.

"When Larry and I went to Washington, D.C. for the first time the experience solidified our passion for, and investment in, Farm Bureau," Bailey said. "I remember sitting in congressional offices pondering how we could tell a compelling story about the impact of a piece of legislation in a way that ideally changes minds or, at the very least, makes people stop and think."

Farm Bureau director outlines future challenges

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**
For the Capital Press

VISALIA, Calif. —Tricia Stever Blatter, executive director of Tulare County Farm Bureau, confesses that deciding to make agriculture a career was not a tough decision.

"Nope!" she said, "It was written in my DNA; I'm certain! I truly found the AG industry to be my home, my family, and my friends. It was a very easy decision to pursue an ag career. I truly believe my success in life is because of the years I spent in 4-H and FFA."

She attended Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and received her bachelor's, and master's degrees and teaching credentials for secondary agriculture and found a real home in the Farm Bureau community.

Her first job out of college was in Sacramento, working for the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom as a teacher.

"I spent about three years working as an organizational field rep with 24 different county Farm Bureau offices. In 2007, I was named Tulare County Farm Bureau's executive director position. I have been doing the job for 18 years"

Blatter said she is not the first

to lead a county Farm Bureau.

"Women have been well respected leaders in Farm Bureau since county Farm Bureaus began back in the early 1900s," she said. "However, county Farm Bureau boards are usually very male dominated, 90 percent or more are usually men."

"But I will say that women in agriculture have to earn their place at the table," Blatter said. "It is not given that we will be treated equally, and we have to walk a fine line of standing up for ourselves in meetings and in advocacy and also respect that agriculture is a traditionally male dominated industry."

She highlighted the complexities of navigating such an industry as a woman, explaining that advocacy and representation often require balancing assertiveness with diplomacy. Addressing challenges both personal and systemic, she emphasized the importance of cultivating resilience and fostering inclusive leadership to chart a course for future generations in agriculture.

According to Blatter, there is a list of challenges facing California's Farm Bureaus. Those challenges include:

- Aging membership and consolidation of farms to fewer owners. Farm Bureaus lose members

every year as people retire, sell their farms to bigger operations and land ownership is consolidated.

- Farmers are aging in California and nationwide, the average age of a farmer is well over 57 years old, and their sons and daughters are not choosing to take over farms, which is going to create a significant change in ownership and transferring of farm assets and wealth over the next 30 years.

- California's green initiatives: environmental laws, climate change regulations and laws, and the curtailment of groundwater pumping rights are three of the most significant areas of law that are going to change the business model of California farms.

- Farms must get bigger to survive; small family farms of 20-40-60-100 acres cannot support a family, so bigger vertically integrated farms will be the future.

- Idling farmland to reduce groundwater over-drafting is a major precept of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in California and it is going to economically harm parts of California as land is idled. That will mean jobs are lost, farmland lost, more bare ground, more dust bowl problems, and more families leaving farms behind and seeking income off the farm.



Courtesy Gigi Kraus Photography

Tricia Stever Blatter of Tulare County Farm Bureau, outlines women in Agriculture.

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Women in Agriculture

Emily Battilega turns passion for chickens into a career

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

For her high school FFA project, Emily Battilega, Versova's director of sustainability, chose chickens and she has chosen them ever since.

"I got six laying hens and started selling eggs through my grandparents' farmers market booth," she said. "I went from six to over 100 laying hens in our backyard and from there everybody started asking me their chicken questions. If I didn't know the answer I would find it, and all that has gotten me where I am today."

Growing up in Canby, Ore., Battilega won a Clackamas County Farm Bureau scholarship and attended Oregon State University, majoring in poultry and animal science.

During that time, she interned at Willamette Egg

Farms in Canby.

In gratitude, Battilega has served on the Clackamas County Farm Bureau's board since graduating college and, upon graduation, took a full-time job with Oregon FFA.

In 2017 Willamette Egg Farms hired Battilega. The family that owned the egg farm since 1934 had recently sold it to Michael Foods, at which time many employees retired.

"We lost a ton of experience in a short amount of time just due to employees retiring, and I gained a lot of responsibility just by floating to wherever the needs of the company were," she said.

Her passion was — and still is — cage-free egg production. Battilega started by overseeing their cage-free production and leading the farm's compliance program. Over the next couple of years, she worked in food

safety, feed mill operation, pullet rearing and conventional production until they promoted her to farm manager in 2019.

"I was farm manager for 2½ years and absolutely loved it, but I knew I wanted a change of pace and to start a family," she said. "By that point Willamette Egg Farms had been acquired by Versova, and I was able to have a conversation about looking at other options."

They said she was just what they were looking for to fill their new director of sustainability position.

Battilega was skeptical at first and not sure she was the right person for the job, but they assured her they needed someone with an operations background to take Versova to the next level of improvement.

"It's the perfect fit for me," she said. "For us, sustainability is about the care of our people, our planet and our poultry. It's about being profitable and meeting the needs of now while not compromising the needs of the future. I'm doing

everything I used to do, but through a different lens, and am now supporting all 16 of Versova's farm locations across seven states.

"For me, it's all data driven, and I'm definitely a data-driven person — it's just how my brain works," she said.

Battilega has enjoyed her involvement with Versova's Women at Versova Excel (WAVE), an employee resource group that provides Versova women with tools and support to grow in the workplace, their careers and their communities.

"Our employees are about 30% women and, being in the agricultural industry, sometimes there can be barriers that women face whether we work in a chicken barn or a production environment," she said. "We come together to identify the inequalities that exist and figure out how can we improve."

"Some of the great work we have done includes modifying our maternity and paternity policies to make it easier on families, which I was able to benefit from



Courtesy Emily Battilega

Emily Battilega, shown here holding a chick at a Versova facility, has held several positions of leadership at Willamette Egg Farms in Canby, Ore., prior to its acquisition by Versova in 2021. In 2022, Versova named Battilega its first director of sustainability, supporting all 16 of Versova's farm locations across seven states.

when I had my first child last year," she said. "A lot of our facilities have shower-in, shower-out policies for biosecurity, so we make sure to stock our shower rooms with things that are overlooked because only

30% of the workforce is female.

"We're really coming together to do whatever we can to level the playing field so that women can be empowered to do whatever job they want."

Anna Lickley: Women have many roles in ag today



Submitted photo

Anna and Cole Lickley are both from long-time Idaho ranching families.

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Anna Lickley grew up in southeastern Idaho near Blackfoot, as one of the fifth generation on her family's ranch.

She went to the University of Idaho, studied ag education, then moved to Nebraska and worked for a non-profit organization, Center for Rural Affairs, managing its business center.

"My fiancé and I moved back to Idaho just before the COVID pandemic, to his hometown of Jerome. He worked for a commodity brokerage company and I got a job at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. Director Gould wanted to create a new program to service new and beginning farmers, veteran farmers, and help producers with succession and estate planning and we launched the program — the Idaho Farm and Ranch Center," Lickley said.

Anna and her husband, Cole, both come from ranching families.

"My great-great-grandfather settled our ranch in 1904. Cole's great-great-grandfather started their ranch in 1907. We wanted to be involved with both our family's operations in some way. Remote jobs enabled us to live in Blackfoot and help out while not being full-time employees of the ranch," she said.

They had their first child in 2022, a son named Louis, so Anna left her job with the ISDA to stay at home fulltime.

"My sister-in-law, Leah, and I started a direct-to-consumer beef

business in 2020. We market grass-finished beef to customers and sell it by the share — to people across southern Idaho and northern Utah."

Anna had another child last September, a girl named Inez.

"At the beginning of this year I returned to the ISDA to manage the Farm and Ranch Center, part-time, from Blackfoot," Lickley said. "So now I manage a program I care about and also get to raise kids and cows with my family. Those two kids are the biggest challenge and the biggest blessing in my life."

At this point the family ranch has several generations helping run it.

"My dad, Mark, is the main operator with my mom, Wendy. My brother, Seth, and his wife, Leah, and myself and my husband are all here on the ranch. Cole and I live across the road from my grandparents and they're still involved. Both in their 80s, they are like many people in agriculture their age, they're still at it."

This is often the way it is on a farm or ranch; the older generation doesn't quit at a certain age and retire; agriculture has been their life.

"Working on the same land that my ancestors did makes me aware of the sacrifices they made for this place. I appreciate the opportunity they've given me but I also have ideas of my own — as a young agriculturalist and as a woman," she said.

"I want the older generation to know how much I appreciate everything they've created, while also recognizing my individual-

ity. I can't be exactly the way my ancestors were."

It's a different world today. Women need to be noticed, appreciated, listened to, and treated as equal partners, she said.

Anna says that working for the Farm and Ranch Center and her family's ranch is fascinating.

"I'll create a handout about family business management then get in the pickup with my dad to move cows and see how all those principles can be applied in real life," she said.

"I read something recently, by a farm transition adviser in Canada. He said there are two big factors that have changed farm transitions. One is medical advances. In the past, when grandpa broke his hip at 60, that was likely the end of his work on the farm. Now, grandpa gets a hip replacement when he's 60 and keeps working until he's 80."

The other thing that has dramatically shifted the power dynamic is when women got the right to vote.

"Now, daughters not only want to be sitting at the table during business discussions; they also want their opinions to be valued at the same level as men. Gone are the days of the subservient farm wife."

Today women tend to take for granted the things they can do now.

"I try to maintain a humbled perspective and remember how hard the people around me have worked for what they wanted, while also empowering myself to advocate for what I want."

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Women in Agriculture

Sheri Nolan works behind the scenes for ag organizations

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS
Capital Press

Sheri Nolan, account manager for Ag Association Management Inc. in

Kennewick, Wash., has a unique but often overlooked role in coordinating the operations of various agricultural organizations.

Founded in 2000, AAM has been a leader in the Pacific Northwest agricultural association management industry, participating in 15 organizations that represent eight different commodity segments. AAM manages state, regional, and international agricultural associations, state commissions, and two federal marketing orders.

Managing these organizations includes executive secretary and other administrative services, convention planning, advocacy for legislation and promoting client interests throughout Washington, the Pacific Northwest, and nationally.

Nolan has over 30 years of experience in agricultural association management.

"I handle board meetings, field days, conventions, trade shows, websites, newsletters, and



Sheri Nolan

bookkeeping services and I am always multitasking," Nolan said. "I can be talking on the phone with someone about the vegetable association, and 5 minutes later discussing something with the hay growers. Five minutes after that, I might be working on another project with Far West Spearmint."

One of our largest conventions is the Pacific Northwest Vegetable Association, with more than 800 attendees. We also have smaller conferences that might include around 100," Nolan said.

The associations serve as a connection between growers and consumers.

Nolan has been working with ag associations since 1992.

"I don't have a farm or ranch background, but I began working for Carol Mercer, who managed ag associations," Nolan said. "After Carol passed away, I worked for the Maurer Company for many years before joining AAM. This is something I enjoy, and I appreciate the groups I work with."

Her job is different every day.

"We work with growers



Courtesy Sheri Nolan

Sheri Nolan, account manager for Ag Association Management Inc. in Kennewick, Wash., is shown all bundled up during a winter tour of an orchard.

in the mint, vegetable, oilseed, turf grass, alfalfa, fruit tree, and grape industries, among others," Nolan said. "We serve as their home office and work with their memberships. Most people don't realize what goes into the background of managing an association — like event planning. I collaborate with incredible boards of directors who assist me in securing relevant speakers for their specific industries."

She stays updated on

issues and topics that are important for each segment of agriculture.

"We are in tune with the challenges they face, pertinent research, and all the happenings in the field that everyone should be aware of," Nolan said. "Ongoing education and knowledge sharing are important today. We disseminate information to our groups on issues like chemical registrations or anything that's relevant to each industry."

People in agriculture have busy schedules, making it challenging to keep up with the communication needs of an ag association.

"We offer our communication support in addition to administrative services," she said. "We currently manage the websites for the groups we oversee and involve our groups in promotional and educational activities, including social media platforms and outreach events."

Services include website maintenance and updates, disseminating information on behalf of these groups — including data collection and distribution, market promotion activities, email blasts and announcements to members, newsletters, and social media channels like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and blogs.

"Currently, we organize seven conferences, multiple field days and summer study tours throughout the year and enjoy the opportunity to participate in these industries as they gather together," Nolan said.

"There are four of us in our office, and we each manage our own groups while helping each other with different projects. My boss, Shane Johnson (who owns the company), has an ag background and is incredible to work for. I've also

made a lot of friends along the way at conventions and events," she said.

"We advocate for promoting agricultural awareness and encourage our members to actively voice their opinions on agricultural issues," Nolan said. "Insights we gain from one organization, we share with others. Sometimes something arises in one of Shane's accounts, and he'll come to me, saying the hay growers should be aware of it, etc."

There are many overlapping issues and interests.

"Our International Fruit Tree Association group meets in different locations. We will be going to Ontario (Canada) for a summer study tour; we get on buses and visit different fields while engaging in educational discussions," Nolan said.

"At our February conference in Rochester, New York, one of the buses got stuck in a snowbank. Everyone got off the bus and pushed," Nolan said. "We had enough 'push power' with everyone working together. This is a great example of their teamwork — they always jump in and collaborate."

Debbie Reid-Oleson finds joy in ranch life

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS
For the Capital Press

Debbie Reid-Oleson's great-grandparents settled in the Blackfoot River Valley of Idaho in the 1870's and Debbie grew up on that ranch. "There were 17 of us cousins on the place and we all helped each other with ranch chores," Reid-Oleson said.

She graduated from University of Idaho with a degree in social work and later received a master's degree in counseling from ISU and had a 20-year career as a school counselor.

She married George Oleson, a third-generation rancher, and their Lazy V4 Ranch is just 10 miles from where she grew up.

"We've been married

44 years," she said. "While raising a family and ranching, many women have careers on and off the ranch. My income enabled us to do things we would not have been able to otherwise, and provided health insurance for our family. Many women in our ranching and farming community hold off-farm jobs to help fill out what a family needs."

She retired from the school job in her 60s and became more politically active. She was also a 4-H leader for 20-plus years and helped her own kids with high school rodeo.

"Justin, the oldest, is now a rancher and an attorney. Shawn is a rancher. My daughter Mimi is a rancher and a teacher," she said.

All three kids were active in high school rodeo

and went to the National Finals.

"I got to see a lot of the country, hauling their horses to rodeos," she said. "Now my grandchildren are doing it!"

All of them are hard workers; whether working or playing they give it their all.

"Ranching teaches us that we don't quit until the job is finished. There are many life skills learned, growing up on a ranch. You feed the animals before you feed yourself," she said. "A rancher also has to learn how to survive the disappointments and not let them defeat us. There are many life lessons that we can apply to whatever we do,"

"I love 4-H and did all kinds of projects with my kids including beef and horse projects," she said. "My daughter did a cat project one year and I taught all my kids to sew and cook. My boys are good cooks and can also mend their clothes."

Debbie is involved with many things and is on the water board for the Bingham County Groundwater District, trying to help come up with solutions.

Challenges continually arise but farmers and ranchers do what they have to do to make things work.

"We love the land and want it to be productive and sustainable. We fight weeds, drought, bad weather, and try to get along with all these people who are moving into our area," she said.

Sometimes you get a new neighbor who doesn't understand agriculture. Maybe their dogs are in your pastures chasing your livestock, or they don't



Courtesy Debbie Reid-Oleson

Debbie Reid-Oleson holds the rein of a horse while being photographed in the Blackfoot River Valley of Idaho.

understand water rights and make it difficult in an irrigation district.

"Most ranchers here depend on rangeland for summer pasture, and when we take our cattle to the hills and leave them there, we try to go at least once or twice a week to check on them, but it's hard to keep track of everything," she said.

"One year someone shot arrows into several of our cattle. We've drilled wells and put up solar panels to run pumps to supply water troughs up away from the creeks — to keep the cattle out of riparian areas. Some people steal our solar panels or vandalize the water system."

"I've been depressed by what's happening in the world in recent years, but ranchers don't give up. We still have hope and faith that things are going to be



Courtesy Debbie Reid-Oleson

Debbie Reid-Oleson's family moves cattle in the Blackfoot River Valley.

smoothed out," she said.

Her joy is being able to live on the land and take care of it, and hopes to keep farming and ranching — to grow food for this country in a way that is sustainable.

"We work with the circle of life, a rhythm with the seasons," she said. "This brings joy, hard work, and a satisfaction of living that we hope continues for future generations."

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Women in Agriculture

Writing rancher does what she loves for decades

By **DIANNA TROYER**
For the Capital Press

Sometimes weak or sickly calves are being nursed in the living room so they can be turned out to graze with the herd in spring. Deadlines for articles and books always loom. Cattle and horses need to be fed.

It's a lifestyle that is perfect for Heather Smith Thomas at Sky Range Ranch south of Salmon in east central Idaho.

For six decades, Thomas has written more than 15,000 articles for horse and cattle publications along with 23 books about horse training, livestock care, and life on the ranch she has called home since childhood.

"It's not often that you get to do the things you love," she said of writing, training horses, and raising cattle with her husband, Lynn, along Withington Creek beneath the Lemhi Range.

She still writes for more than 25 publications, getting up before dawn to write or do interviews on the East Coast before helping with chores, then squeezing in writing when possible during the rest of the day.

"I'm still enjoying my relationship with cattle, still trying to learn everything I can about these marvelous animals and sharing my experiences with my readers," she said.

Her current project is a book called "Raising Cattle on Your Homestead Farm."

Many of her stories are still posted at smallfarmers-journal.com. Her blog that she wrote for many years is also still posted.

Thomas' father, a Methodist minister who always wanted a small cattle ranch, finally fulfilled his dream along Withington Creek, instilling in his daughter



Photos courtesy of Heather Smith Thomas

Heather Smith Thomas checks fences on Sky Range Ranch south of Salmon, where she and her husband, Lynn, have been raising cattle since 1967. She also has written more than 15,000 articles and 23 books about ranching and livestock care.

a desire to one day run the family ranch.

In high school, Thomas launched her writing career.

"I started writing to express my interest and passion about animals, especially horses and cattle," she said.

Her articles helped pay for her education at the University of Puget Sound. During the summer between her sophomore and junior years, she wrote the manuscript for her first book, "A Horse in Your Life: A Guide for the New Owner."

It was published in 1966, the year she graduated from college with degrees in history and English.

After college, she and Lynn, who had known each other in high school and dated in college, were married in March 1966. They ran a small dairy farm near Gooding with the goal of saving enough money to eventually return to Withington Creek to run her



Heather and Ed get ready for a ride.

dad's ranch.

In 1967, they returned

and started purchasing his ranch "as well as half the ranch where we're living

now. For 40 years we leased the other parcels, putting it all together. With hard work

and my writing, this was enough land to have enough cows to create a livelihood."

Sky Range Ranch stretches for 5 miles along the narrow creek canyon.

"It was a tremendous challenge — to create new ditches and repair old ones, and build more than 10 miles of new fences and repair the old ones on parts of these ranches," she said. "There are more than 25 miles of fence and 10 miles of ditches on this strung-out place."

Thomas describes their ranch as "beautiful country but not very productive with steep hill pastures and limited hay ground in small meadows along the creek. To maximize our grazing potential, we have cross fences to facilitate pasture rotations and bought extra hay."

With crossbred bulls of several breeds, they developed a herd with genetics suited to the high altitude pastures.

A few years ago, the Thomases sold sections of the ranch to their son Michael and daughter Andrea.

"We're still doing what we love — just on a smaller scale," she said.

Along with technical books, Thomas wrote a three-book ranch series "in the James Herriot tradition," according to an editor at "Gulf Coast Cattleman." She describes heart-warming bonds with livestock, pets, and wildlife in "Horse Tales," "Cow Tales," and "Ranch Tales."

Whenever Thomas checks off another story on her list, often two will replace it.

"I'll never run out of things to write about."

Her books are available on Amazon or by contacting her at P.O. Box 15, Salmon, Idaho 83467.

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