Oregon celebrates National Agriculture Week 2008

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

ODA Director Says it is a Fascinating Time For Agriculture Oregonians and citizens across the United States have a chance to say thank you to the nation's farmers and ranchers this coming week, and maybe learn something about agriculture at the same time. That's the hope of Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Katy Coba as National Agriculture Week takes place March 16-22. The annual event is designed to salute the more than two million agricultural operators in the U.S. and well over 39,000 farmers and ranchers in Oregon. Coba believes 2008 will go down as a memorable year for agriculture."This is a fascinating time for the industry, both in Oregon and throughout the U.S.," she says. "We are seeing prices at an all-time high for many commodities. We are seeing record agricultural exports. And we are certainly seeing a lot of attention paid by consumers as to where their food comes from. I expect all this to lead to a debate on agriculture and food, where it comes from, and where we want our agricultural products to come from in the future."A recently completed Oregon State University study- commissioned by ODA- looked at agriculture's impact on the state's economy. The study confirms the industry's vast contributions:

Agriculture is directly and indirectly linked to $25.8 billion in sales of goods and services, accounting for 10.6 percent of the state's total sales .

Agriculture directly or indirectly supports 214,511 full or part-time jobs, accounting for 10.1 percent of all jobs in Oregon.

Oregon farms and ranches occupy 17.1 million acres, or 28 percent of the land in Oregon.

With the value of Oregon's agricultural production at an all time high, some might expect that more land is being used to grow crops and raise livestock. But that increase in production is actually being done on less acreage, both statewide and nationwide."The year is now 2008, and farmers are as good as anyone at taking advantage of research, development, innovation, and technology," says Coba. "We see the results in terms of higher yields of product per acre. Interestingly, we also see the use of pesticides as flattened out. Farmers don't have to increase pesticide use in order to get those increased yields."As she has said repeatedly in recent years, Coba believes the importance of agriculture's contribution to Oregon's economy is quite clear. But she also stresses the increasing importance of agriculture's contribution to the environment."Farmers and ranchers realize that to get the most out of their land, they have to take care of their land," says Coba. "Producers are very conscious of taking care of the natural resources." Statistics can demonstrate the positive impact agriculture has on Oregon's natural resources:

Oregon farmers and ranchers provide food and habitat to over 70 percent of the state's wildlife at different times of the year.

Erosion on cropland and rangeland has been reduced by more than 35 percent in the past decade due to changes in practices by Oregon farmers and ranchers.

Oregon farmers and ranchers have nearly 600,000 acres enrolled in federal conservation programs.

Oregon leads the nation in the number of water transfers, and the amount used for conservation and wildlife.

While less than two percent of the nation's population is directly involved in raising crops or livestock, those farmers and ranchers are highly productive. Fifty years ago, one farmer produced enough food to feed about 26 people each day in the U.S. and abroad. Today, that number is more than 144. Despite all the staggering numbers, many Americans- and Oregonians- don't fully understand all that goes into agriculture. Coba hopes National Agriculture Week 2008 may change some of that. Her call to action this year includes a new component."I always encourage consumers to buy locally grown products, whether it's at the grocery store or at a local farmers' market," says Coba. "But the next thing I'd like consumers to do is take the opportunity to learn a little bit more about how agriculture works. We are so far removed from the farm compared to the generations before us. Agriculture is industry without walls. What farmers and ranchers do on the land is

indeed industry. It can be noisy, it can be dusty, it can happen at early hours of the morning. But in order for Oregonians and Americans to enjoy the wonderful products we produce, they need to understand all the work that goes into providing those products."Dedicating one week of the year to honoring agriculture is nice, but Coba would like to see year around awareness. For many consumers, that is already happening whether they know it or not."It's nice to have National Agriculture Week in the spring when things are greening, flowers are starting to bloom, crops are beginning to emerge, and we're seeing young lambs and calves," says Coba. "But each season, agriculture brings something special. With urban residents going to farmers' markets spring, summer, and fall, along with all the wonderful harvest celebrations held throughout the year, people beyond farmers and ranchers do take part in the celebration of agriculture."This is Coba's sixth National Agriculture Week as ODA director. Despite a lack of knowledge sometimes displayed by people not associated with farming, she appreciates that most people feel good about agriculture."I think Oregonians really do appreciate agriculture. I just challenge them to better understand what it takes to produce crops and livestock. That's my wish for this year's National Agriculture Week."

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