

CONCLUSION

Farmers and ranchers interact with all of Oregon through the economic, environmental, and social benefits derived from Oregon agriculture.

The industry is diverse, complex, dynamic, and engaging. Simple and old-fashioned descriptions do not relate to modern farms.

It is a unique industry, highlighted by a wide range of farm sizes; operator age and succession challenges; local and international market demands; vagaries of weather, soils, pests, and, public policies; natural resource management issues; and intense economic pressures unfamiliar to other industries. In agriculture, inputs are bought at retail prices, output is sold at wholesale prices, and growers pay the freight both ways.

Regulations and public interest in agricultural resources have intensified over the past 25 years. In some arenas, growers and environmental interests are joining forces on projects of mutual benefit. In other arenas, the lines remain drawn and commonality (and common sense) seems far away.

As a society, we cannot live without agriculture—it is the occupation that supplies our sustenance and fibers for living. Yet, as time goes on, the gap widens between the

actual day-to-day production, and the perceptions and demands of an increasingly urban consumer. Agricultural literacy, a necessity just 60 years ago and for thousands of years prior, is no longer taught in schools. Perhaps the time has come to re-incorporate some aspects into our education programs. Perhaps “Agriculture in the Classroom” needs a boost of public support and official benchmarks to measure knowledge of plant and soil science, livestock husbandry, gardening, agricultural economics, and other agricultural topics.

Public policies are lagging the challenges facing the industry. (See the “Top 20 issues facing the industry” section of this report.)

Each of the issues noted in the top 20 challenges presents opportunities for private-public partnerships, points out areas where innovative research is imperative, and demonstrates the need for connections between higher education, high tech, and natural resource-based industries.

This report serves as a starting point for important policy dialogue and collaboration.

