

Ag can be the author of climate solutions

The debate over climate change is no longer in the hands of the scientific community or political talking heads on cable news.

Rather, it has entered into the flow of societal commentary and demands action.

Agriculture has an opportunity. If we shore up our resources, we can make the case that we are a critical component of providing relief. We can help sequester the carbon that is changing our weather patterns and scorching parts of the planet that have not seen such heat in recorded history.

There is an increasing societal drumbeat to do what it takes to find solutions. We are among many who find ourselves in the crosshairs because, like others, we must transport our product to market. It's a huge policy issue affecting not just us.

But we can create an offramp for ourselves by earning greater recognition for the value that nursery stock brings to the table in fighting climate change.

Vast opportunities for our industry

Let's level set what is known. Nursery and greenhouse growers are some of the most productive growers in the world. Oregon sets the standard for what nurseries grow and ship all over the country and throughout the continent.

The environmental community, communities of color and justice advocates are all increasingly aware of the urban heat island effect. Metropolitan areas are reducing parking, promoting plugins for electric vehicles, and even disinvesting in core businesses in the city. The truth is, none of that will do as much as tree canopies. All cities need an integrated green infrastructure plan. Whether the OAN is in the halls of the state capitol or on the ornate granite corridors of Congress, we must step up and advocate for our role in resolving this major crisis in the minds of our children.

Beware of the tax man as an agent of change

The old adage remains as true today

as when I worked for the United States Senate. You tax things you want to go away. Nowhere is this more true than on the regulatory side of the climate debate.

Front and center are fossil fuels used to move product to market. A near second place is the demonization of natural gas. It is not worth debating whether these energy sources produce carbon. The more important question is, what are the suitable replacements? Is there a transitional period where industries and markets can adjust? They are not good at going cold turkey.

The move toward electric trucks and farm equipment is a slow road. Much of that is tied to performance issues. Never mind that the source material for e-batteries is China, which is the big polluter on the climate scene. The environmental community sweeps this under the carpet.

A transportation system is not built overnight. There needs to be a focus on infrastructure that allows for large-scale, multi-modal options. The same can be said for energy and the use of natural gas.

For three decades, natural gas was incentivized, mobilized and utilized across the business landscape. Efficiencies have been perfected. Any conversion to electric power will take time and more resources. What governments do is tax or significantly regulate to provide the hammer on use of fossil fuel and natural gas. If agriculture gets no help with a well-planned transition, the change is going to start feeling very punitive for our industry.

Morphing agency purposes

Another change is the expanding mission of state agencies as they morph to embrace environmental stewardship. Up to now we have had agencies devoted to energy, natural resources and taxation setting parameters and policy. Now, you can expect to see every agency getting in on the game.

The U.S. Labor Department was established in 1913, under President William Howard Taft, with a mandate to improve conditions for workers. Now, thanks to mission creep, it's a climate change agency. That is thanks to the Biden



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administration, which is pushing to focus on climate across the federal government. The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 includes massive climate provisions linking tax incentives for clean energy projects to workplace standards. While alignment of agency resources is preferred, competing voices make for muddled policy.

The Big Think in 2024

We expect to see the 2025 Oregon Legislature craft a transportation package. The OAN supported the large increase in transportation infrastructure dollars at the state level in 2017, but the promises made six years ago have yet to come to fruition.

The attempts to address freight-clogging critical pinch points have been put on the back burner. So far we have had price increases without the commensurate improvements.

We need to show that green goods are a benefit to the climate, and we need cost-effective ways to grow and ship products throughout the nation.

State and federal governments need to reward growers for the planet-saving products they grow. During 2024, I will be traveling throughout Oregon and talking directly with you about what our climate policy should look like. We want to know what the OAN can advocate for to remove barriers so you can do what you do best, which is grow plants.

We will draw upon science to quantify the carbon sequestration based on what you are growing and intend to grow. That's how our industry can take its place as the architect of climate solutions by, of and for agriculture. ☺