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Tillamook down nearly 10 percent of farmland in five years Oregon legislators called on to help save farms

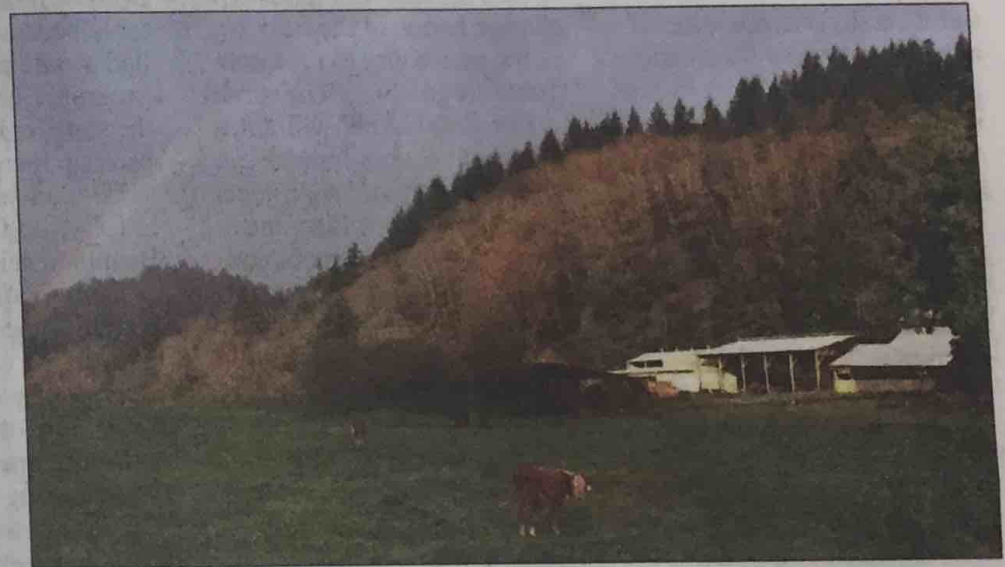
New data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that 340,000 acres fell out of agricultural production in Oregon from 2012-2017, more than three times the number of acres lost from 2007-2012 (98,000 acres). Since 1997, Oregon has lost nearly 9.6 of its farmland.

Tillamook County farmers reported the loss of almost 10 percent of all farmland in the county, or 3,615 acres. Meanwhile, the average market value of farmland and buildings increased by almost 25 percent between 2012 and 2017, from \$6,259 per acre to \$7,796 per acre.

"The dairy industry in Tillamook County cannot afford to lose farm-

land at this rate," said Chad Allen, owner/operator at Victor Dairy in Tillamook. "The future of this industry depends upon the legislature's willingness to step up and help farmers save their farmland and run a viable business."

The USDA's Census of Agriculture, released Thursday, shows that from 2012 to 2017 Oregon's total farmland is down 340,000 acres since 2012, an area significantly larger than the entire Portland Metro Area, and larger than all of Oregon's 10 largest cities put together. The number of mid-size and large farms (between 50 to 1,999 acres) contin-



Nehalem River Ranch in Nehalem is owned and operated by first-generation rancher Jared Gardner. Photo: Jared Gardner.

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ued to decrease, a consistent 20-year trend.

In an effort to combat these trends, a diverse coalition of agricultural and conservation groups is championing House Bill 2729 to fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) at \$10 million.

"Oregon's land use program has slowed the loss of farmland, but it is not enough. We need the legislature to invest in efforts to stem the tide before we lose even more land to non-agricultural uses," said Allen, who also serves as one of 11 citizen commissioners for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program.

Farms in Oregon and throughout the nation are being lost to a range of types

~~retire and there is no succession plan in place. Agricultural lands make up 25 percent (16.3 million acres) of Oregon's land. Yet two-thirds (10.45 million acres) of Oregon's agricultural lands will change hands in the next 20 years, according to research from Oregon State University.~~

Funding OAHP will allow Oregon to access federal matching dollars for projects that preserve farmland and support Oregon farmers and ranchers. If the proposed funding bill HB 2729 passes during this legislative session, farmers and ranchers can apply for state-level grants to protect working lands, enhance natural resource values, and assist with succession planning.

"There is a well-funded federal program offered by the Natural Resources Con-

~~stated that plastic pollution~~ farmers preserve their land," said Sarah Beaubien, Senior Director of Stewardship at the Tillamook County Creamery Association.

"But Oregon has left millions of federal dollars on the table because we have not had a state matching grant program. Until now. But if the state legislature wants to back up their commitment to Oregon farmers, it needs to fully fund this program," Beaubien said.

Democratic Gov. Kate Brown signed a bipartisan bill authorizing creation of OAHP in September 2017. OAHP offers a suite of voluntary tools including grants for permanent working lands conservation easements and 20- to 50-year covenants, as well as succession and conservation management planning.