

# Farmer's Perspective

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Funded by Oregon State University  
Extension Service

# Farmer's Perspectives

*“Most farmers would (say that) they are in their element when they are out in a hundred acre field tilling that ground. That’s what I tell people, if somebody said you got one thing that you’re going to do what would that be? Well that would be being out in the middle of the field somewhere doing something. I mean that’s just what we do”*  
(Walt).

# Project Goal

- Discover perceived barriers or incentives in following Best Management Practices



# Description

- Interview growers within SWV GWMA
  - Names provided by OSU Extension
  - Eight agreed to participate
  - Promised confidentiality of identity



# Methodology

- Informal interviews used to formulate semi-structured open-ended interview questions
  - List of questions will be provided on GWMA website
- Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes

# Common Themes

- Economics
  - Impact of Agripac Cannery closing
  - AgriBio Tech (ABT) bankruptcy
  - Minimize inputs, maximize yields
- Information Sources
  - Where do farmers get information
- Technology
  - Yield monitoring
  - GPS units
  - Soil sampling
- Risk Perception
- Role of Fieldmen
  - Third party services (SureCrop, Simplot, etc.)

# Impact of Cannery Closing

Growers were impacted by Agripac closing, either directly or indirectly

Those who were previously growing cannery crops were forced to change

Indirect impacts resulted from an increase in grass seed production



# Impact of Cannery Closing

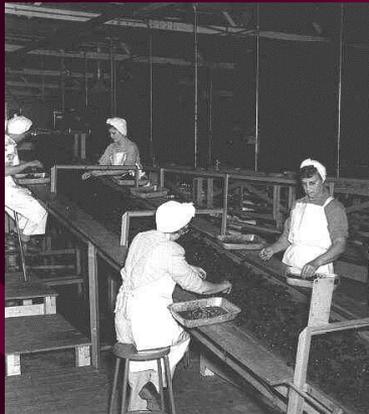
*“There’s a few who went to specialty crops, you know vegetable seeds and specialty crops, but that’s a pretty limited market, so the small portion of their acreage went to that sort of thing, but the biggest portion ended up as grass seed or something like that. Commodities” (Harry).*



# Impact of Cannery Closing

Some claimed that row crop soils used for grass seed ended up out-yielding traditional grass seed production.

As growers transitioned into grass seed, they had to change their techniques and invest in different equipment.



# AgriBio Tech (ABT)

After cannery closed, growers switched to grass seed, only to have one company, AgriBio Tech claim bankruptcy in 2000.

Many growers never got paid.



# Economics

- Defining Best Management Practices
  - Most growers responded as minimizing inputs and maximizing yields
- Inputs/Investments/Expenses
  - Soil fertility enhancements, pest management, machinery/equipment, fuel, labor, etc.
- Markets (Local and International)

# Risk Perception

Are elevated nitrate levels in drinking water causing a concern within the farming community?

Does risk cause people to take action?

# Risk Perception

“...people won't act to preserve the environment (regardless of what environmentalists and policymakers tell them to do) if they perceive no threat to it. They must also have some good reason (for example, preserving irrigation water or a tax incentive) for taking action to reduce the environmental threat.”

– Conrad P. Kottak, Anthropologist

# Risk Perception

- Overwhelmingly, growers responded that they don't feel overly worried about their drinking water.
- Participants claimed to have their well water tested.
- It appears that the 10ppm threshold dictates whether growers perceive that their water is okay or not.
- Distance (in miles) sometimes influences perception of risk.

# Risk Perception

*“I think that part of that is, the area here and the area that we get our water (are) closer to where we have had no problems, so we don’t worry about it I guess. Coburg is a problem, but we are outside of Coburg by about 5 miles” (Harry).*

*“Ours was around that 10 ppm level when my children were conceived and growing up and there hasn’t been...they’re normal I guess, what you’d call normal” (Walt).*

# Conclusion

“The first step to address the  $\text{NO}_3^-$  leaching problem is to become aware of the risk” (Feaga et al. 2004).

Farmers are economically tied to their land.

Market is vulnerable to major disruptions.

They need accurate data related to health risks for long term decision-making.

# Summary

- Relevancy of Study
  - Provide insight to GWMA committee
  - Interviewed farmers who incorporate information from OSU Extension
- Possible influences of study
  - Time (Season) of study
  - Only interviewed farmers that have regular contact with OSU Extension
  - Investigator's gender and background

# Recommendations

- Provide educational opportunities that communicate related risks associated with elevated nitrate levels in drinking water.
- Show sensitivity to farmer's economic viability.
- Farmers recovering from recent financial disruptions. GWMA recommendations need to be aware of this.

# Final Say

*“Farmers love to be independent. We love to do everything ourselves. We love to be in control of our own destiny. But there’s sometimes when you have to give up that control cause you can’t afford not to, so you kind of gotta pick and choose”  
(Walt).*