

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 9, 2011

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Oregon Farm Bureau Federation

## Young farmers more optimistic

The next generation of Oregon agriculture producers has piqued media interest in the wake of a recent [New York Times article](#) about how more young people are getting into small-scale farming.

Mike Hathaway, chair of the Oregon Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee, is all for it.

“If a young farmer finds a market for his or her product and is able to make a living, I think it’s awesome,” says Hathaway. “I think it’s great that Oregonians support local farmers.”

Unlike the “indie rocker” types described in the *NYT* article, Hathaway is a clean-cut 27-year-old who represents the fifth generation of his family to farm in Benton County. He raises hazelnuts, grass seed, and a variety of row-crop vegetables.

The family farm is 500 acres and sells its product to commercial buyers. But it’s small enough that Hathaway gets to stay involved in the day-to-day production.

“At a larger farm, I could possibly make more money, but the job might become less of a lifestyle,” says Hathaway, who prefers spending more time outside than in an office. “But regardless of the size, it’s important to treat your farm as a business in order to stay profitable, while also providing a safe, high-quality product for consumers and taking good care of the land and water.”

Staying optimistic is another job requirement for farmers, whose crops depend on so many factors beyond their control: weather, commodity prices, and costs for supplies to make the farm run, to name a few.

Like respondents to the recent [American Farm Bureau Federation’s Young Farmers & Ranchers survey](#), Hathaway feels optimistic about his future in agriculture.

Results of the 19th annual YF&R survey reveal that 87 percent of those surveyed at a national conference are more optimistic about farming and ranching than they were five years ago.

This is the highest optimism level ever in AFBF’s annual YF&R survey, which was initiated in 1993. Last year, 80 percent of those surveyed said they were more optimistic about farming than they were five years ago. The previous high was in 2008, when 82 percent said they were more optimistic.

“I’m feeling particularly positive now because we’re seeing higher commodity prices,” says Hathaway.

The 2011 survey also shows nearly 90 percent of the nation’s young farmers and ranchers say they are better off than they were five years ago. Last year, 82 percent reported being better off than they were five years ago.

Nearly 94 percent considered themselves lifetime farmers, while 96 percent would like to see their children follow in their footsteps. The informal survey reveals that 87 percent believe their children will be able to follow in their footsteps.

Despite the high level of optimism, the young farm and ranch leaders express concerns. The number one concern is economic challenges, with 22 percent ranking profitability as their top concern. Government regulations were also a top concern of many of those surveyed, with 17 percent ranking that as their top concern. Nearly 10 percent ranked tax burdens as their No. 1 concern.

Hathaway agrees that profitability and government regulations that may hinder his ability to farm are his top concerns.

Issues like these are why active participation in an organization like Farm Bureau is so important, he adds. "Farm Bureau represents the interest of Oregon's family farmers and ranchers in the state and national Legislatures," says Hathaway. "Farm Bureau gives Oregon agriculture a united voice, and we need to speak up if we are to protect our way of life and our ability to farm."

See more survey results from the American Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers survey here:

<http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=newsroom.newsfocus&year=2010&file=nr0311c.html>

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Attached is a photo of the OFB Young Farmers and Ranchers Chair Mike Hathaway.

\* Note to Editors: "Farm Bureau" is a registered trademark; please capitalize in all cases.

*First established in Oregon in 1919, Oregon Farm Bureau is organized in all 36 Oregon counties and has more than 8,000 member families that are professionally engaged in agriculture. Barry Bushue, an east Multnomah County berry and nursery stock producer, is OFB's 15th President.*