

The Coalition for Agriculture's Future is a large group of agri-business, private sector and association groups and other businesses that are concerned about the role agriculture will play in Idaho's future.

We understand clearly the role agriculture played in Idaho's development over the nearly 150 years since the first settlers came here. Family farms and the generations of families who farm them have shaped and molded the very foundation of our individual and community moral values, work ethic and spirit of common community. Those values have made us who we are and what we stand for. They have given us a social quality of life envied by others around the country.

But our attraction is proving to be our undoing. As tens of thousands of new residents move here the result is that Idaho is changing. We are becoming more urbanized, more metropolitan based in our thinking. The values forged by generations of family farms are slowly being eroded and replaced by the urban mindset.

The drive by our metropolitan areas to attract commercial development has resulted in a political state of mind in which the intrinsic public value of agriculture is seldom even considered in land use considerations. Agriculture may add \$3 Billion to the Treasure Valley economy but that holds little weight when our governmental bodies allow irresponsible urban development of historic agricultural lands, largely by using conditional use permits to trump comprehensive plans.

Let us be clear. The Coalition for Agriculture's Future is not anti-development. But we do want to preserve and promote Idaho's agricultural heritage and traditions that have forged the values and character of Idaho's people and crafted the foundations of responsible stewardship of our natural resources.

And that's where voters come in.

The general election is now just a few weeks away. Treasure Valley voters will decide just who they want to serve as their County Commissioners and their representatives in the state Legislature. This provides us the chance to challenge candidates, regardless of party, to lay out their specific vision of how to best incorporate land management principles and practices that can preserve and protect Idaho's agricultural heritage and traditions.

Don't let them give you the stock, politician answers. Make them tell you specifically what they will do to make sure future development incorporates good stewardship of our ag heritage, traditions and land rather than blind, unchecked commercial growth.

Our future does not have to be an either or situation. We can protect our agricultural heritage and have sustained development. We just need the right people in office to get it done.

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