



# THE DIRT

## CLASS 45 SELECTION PROCESS

The competition was heavy in the selection process for Class 45, with over 30 budding leaders completing the written application and interview process for the 18 participant spots. Selection of the cohort is not only based on the strength of an applicant as an individual but equally important is the building of a dynamic cohort. Each cohort must ensure varying industry backgrounds, a range of leadership experience, work background, diversity of opinion and thought, geographic representation around the state, and more. The Selection Committee spent a full day reviewing and building out the cohort. AgForestry Leadership was developed from the need to bring together those that challenge you and push your boundaries...ultimately learning from one another. Class 45 applicants are being notified this week and introductions will be made to the AgForestry Network in August.

# CLASS 44 WRAPS YEAR ONE

Modules one and two are completed marking the end of the first year for Class 44. With the summer months off from attending seminars, the class works on their Public Policy Projects. There are four groups in the class and in this issue two groups share a look into their project. Next month the other two will be shared.

## GROUP ONE:

### AG PEST AND DISEASE RESPONSE REVOLVING FUND

*Team members: Andy Perleberg, Tyler West, Rosa Dekker, Amber Itle, and Maggie Elliot*

From fields of golden wheat to lush rows of fruit and vegetables, bustling livestock operations, and shellfish farms dotting the coast, Washington state is home to a rich expanse of agriculture. These industries serve as the economic heartbeat of rural communities, embolden international trade, and promote a vibrant local food system. Rooted in the cyclical rhythms of the changing seasons, regardless of the nature of production, agriculturists are bound by an intrinsic respect for the land and way of life. We are also linked by a common threat: pests and diseases.

While agricultural production will always be vulnerable to the introduction of novel pathogens, fungi, viruses, insects, etc., the key problem remains Washington state currently has no funding to prepare and immediately respond to the hosts of pests and diseases posing a risk. Once an outbreak occurs, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) must wait to procure funds at the next legislative session, missing the crucial window to treat the problem early. Our state's agricultural industries face increasing economic risk associated with outbreaks, which have risen in frequency and severity due in part to global trade flows and shifting climate patterns.

Our public policy project seeks to enact an Agricultural Pest and Disease Response Revolving Fund in the Washington state legislature. This measure would empower the WSDA with permanent funding to prepare, prevent, detect, and eradicate identified threats before they become established. This approach will imbue substantive cost savings, protect biosecurity and food safety, safeguard export access, and shield agricultural, processing, and transportation industries from severe financial damage.

Our team is collaborating with partners at the WSDA to submit this measure as part of the agency's request package to the Governor's Office. If accepted, the proposed bill would be encompassed in the Governor's Budget. We are currently performing stakeholder outreach and developing the Decision Package which is due to the agency in mid-July. We are excited to propose a project with the capacity to strengthen the resiliency of our enduring agricultural systems in the state.

# GROUP TWO: ADDRESSING COMMERCIAL DRIVER SHORTAGE IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Team members: Natalie Sahli, Derek Friehe, Wioletta Skotnicka-Kowalec, and Eric Dixon

Our public policy group is comprised of four members from Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Friehe Farms, the South Columbia Basin Irrigation District and the Department of Natural Resources. Following early advice provided by AgForestry Executive Director and alumni, Vicky Scharlau, we are pursuing a policy solution to an issue affecting us all: the shortage of commercially licensed truck drivers.

Based on tonnage over 80% of agricultural products are transported by truck in the U.S. and according to the American Trucking Association, there is a nationwide shortage of 80,000 commercial truck drivers with this number expected to double by 2030.

In 2022, WSU released a report containing six recommendations for streamlining Commercial Driver License (CDL) issuances to address the shortage of commercial drivers in Washington. One recommendation proposes expanding existing recruitment for young drivers. We explored the idea of youth recruitment through learning more about the first and only high school CDL program in the state at Connell High School. After connecting with Career and Technical Education professionals, including AgForestry alumni Lindsey Williams at Walla Walla Community College, we learned of a movement to expand CDL programs into more Washington high schools.

Continued on next page.



Under the shadow of the Washington Monument in DC,  
Eric Dixon and Derek Friehe unveil their project in March 2023



## GROUP TWO: ADDRESSING COMMERCIAL DRIVER SHORTAGE IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONTINUED

These conversations inspired our initial proposal to reduce the minimum age for a Commercial Learners Permit from 18 to 17 for students enrolled in high school CDL courses. This change would allow students to obtain the mandatory hours of drive time to gain their CDL prior to graduation, ultimately increasing the presence of younger drivers in the workforce.

Unfortunately, we recently learned that a change to the Code of Federal Regulations would be necessary to implement this proposed change. Additionally, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Association did not support our proposal given reduction to the safety standard.

We are currently exploring alternative solutions within our network to address the commercial driver shortage. Promising solutions include increasing state testers at Department of Licensing, and adopting federal medical exceptions for drivers. Ultimately, we look forward to pursuing a project that will meaningfully affect the agriculture, forestry and natural resource industries dependent on commercial drivers.

### WHAT WE'RE READING



*The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We can Prosper Together*

*By Heather McGhee*

Read by: Justin Stang (Class 44), Wholesale Manager at Hama Hama Co.

Heather McGhee delivers a thought-provoking and interesting account of how systemic racism and historical inequity in the US has shaped American politics in a way that has left all the country's residents, regardless of race, from enjoying the many benefits of our vast wealth. Basically, racism has vast costs for us all. Her work is culturally relevant and examples of the zero-sum mentality she describes can be seen in almost every facet of our public policy, elections, and media coverage. In terms of my leadership journey, I found

the book to be an exceptional continuation in the adjustment and expansion of my perspective and the lens through which I view the world. While the subject matter can be heavy, I consider the work a must read for gaining a deeper understanding of the history and significance of so much of our public policy and its impacts - both past and present. Moreover, my hope is that this new cognizance and conversation can help contribute to shape better policy ideas and implementation moving forward.

## IN REMEMBRANCE

### Our Diamond in the Rough: Albert Roberts

*Sharon Podlich, Class 20*

Sometimes a person's passing leaves a void that is felt across time and miles. When Albert Roberts died, I knew a big hole was torn in our Class 20 family. Even though we no longer see each other as often as we did some 24 years ago, the threads of connection that grew in those two years are strong, and the sense of loss was deeply felt across the state as class members shared the news.

We knew Albert as a machinist, farmer, and rancher from Okanogan County. He was humble, frugal, hesitant, and really struggled with those early speeches. We would eventually learn that Albert started in North Dakota, was a veteran of the Vietnam War, and was not just a machinist, but a superman of creativity with iron. He ended up in Okanogan at the invitation of friends. Through this group, he met his wife, Carey Hunter, Class 25, because he had a pickup and she needed firewood. We were blessed to witness Albert find his voice. He became our co-class speaker at our graduation celebration and nailed it.

Attending his Celebration of Life, I was impressed by how his voice had grown in his community. At the service no one hesitated to speak: from those who knew him for years to those who only knew him a short time. Everyone was struck by Albert's smile, the sparkle in his eye, his ability to create, his neighborliness, his intelligence, the way he could discern important from not, and his mentoring.



It was clear that Albert made an impact on all.

The theme throughout the stories was how experiences in AgForestry had changed Albert. A fellow Conservation board member remarked that Albert was a true representative of their region and had impressed upon governing agencies the importance of Okanogan County to the state.

Because of the significance of AgForestry to both Albert and Carey, the family established the Albert Roberts Leadership Fund. They are grateful for the help they received in leadership training. They want to offer support to a future small, rural farmer, or rancher. I encourage graduates and friends of AgForestry to honor Albert's memory by donating to this fund.

## THANK YOU WEBER FARMS

Thank you Weber Farms for hosting AgForestry's June Board of Directors meeting and to Calloway Northwest, LLC for the delicious lunch!



## THANK YOU SUPPORTERS

Hansen Logging, LLC  
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Washington State Hay Growers Assn

## CORPORATE MATCH

Mandy Galbreath (32) matched by AgWest Farm Credit

### Mission

We cultivate leaders in agriculture, forestry, and natural resources who communicate, collaborate, inspire, and serve.

### Vision

To positively impact and enrich lives and communities in Washington State to meet challenges faced by agriculture, forestry, and natural resources.

### **Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation**

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