

Cowboy poet headlines Farm Bureau dinner

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President stresses importance of farmer unity

MOSES LAKE -- A Montana cowboy poet showed Grant County farmers a wide range of emotions when he spoke in their midst.

Ken Overcast, author of a syndicated column entitled "Meadow Muffins" and host of the radio program "The Cowboy Show," was guest speaker at the Grant County Farm Bureau annual banquet, held Thursday evening at the Moses Lake Inn and Conference Center, and his songs, poems and stories were humorous one moment, melancholy the next.

Prior to the meeting, farm bureau president John Bates said the concluding year had been a good one. The meeting included the election of officers for the coming year,

"I don't think we accomplished everything at the legislative level that we would have liked to have done," he said. "We lost on some issues, but we won some too."

Grant County Farm Bureau membership is up from last year, which Bates pointed to as a positive.

Bates said he would like to see victories in the coming year on water and tax issues, including the

Odessa Sub-Area Aquifer and Department of Revenue straw burning audits.

"It's important that farmers unite, and I think that Farm Bureau is an excellent vehicle to do it," he said. "If you have issues confronting you as a farmer, Farm Bureau has the lobbyists in place, we're financed, we've been around a long time so we have connections and even if the Farm Bureau position is different than what you would do, you have the opportunity as a member to come and change policy and change the direction, because it's truly a grassroots organization."

Overcast's performance included a haunting poem about visiting an old, abandoned homestead and seeing ghosts of the people who had resided there in the late 1800s. He also sang a romantic song that he said he would allow the men in attendance to steal, as it had gotten him more kissing with his own wife when he wrote it for her, offered new translations of Gene Autry's films, which he said he hadn't seen since he was a boy.

Overcast told the audience he was really impressed with the area's farmland, noting his father nearly moved to Moses Lake in the 1950s when the sugar plant moved to town from Overcast's home in Montana, which began to go downhill shortly thereafter.

"John was telling me the sugar beet business isn't too good out this way, either, so maybe you just as well keep it," he said, referring to Bates. "I don't know if it's going to do us any good now or not."

Overcast also noted the diversity of crops in the Grant County area, as opposed to where he lives in Montana, located next to the Canadian border, "so we generally have summer a couple of days every year, right in the middle of July," he said to chuckles, calling his guitar the best piece of agricultural equipment he ever purchased as he strummed it.

Overcast concluded his portion of the evening with a rendition of his popular story, "The Kamikaze Cow," wherein he relates the comedic tale of trying to replace a maddened cow's deceased calf with an orphan.

Throughout the evening, Overcast proffered lines that drew many guffaws from the crowd.

On where things began to go wrong: "I don't know about you, but I think the world started downhill when they took the cowboy movies off the matinee. You can just measure it right back to there."

Interrupting a stirring rendition of "Ghost Riders in the Sky" to explain a certain sound: "A lot of people might think that's a feeble attempt at a coyote call, or maybe a wolf howl, or maybe it's a black Labrador with a bellyache. But it's not. That is a Montana cowboy mating call. It's never worked this side of the Idaho border that I know of, but I'm gonna try anyway."

Encouraging audience members to pursue their dreams: "There's a lot of people that say I don't sing good enough to make records, but I keep making them anyway. (Pphpht!) Raspberries!"