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# Opinion

## Editorial Board

Publisher  
Mike O'Brien

Editor  
Joe Beach

Managing Editor  
Carl Sampson

opinions@capitalpress.com

Online: www.capitalpress.com/opinion

## OUR VIEW

# Why some farmers choose to grow GMO crops

Urban legends proliferate on the Internet. Right next to the latest scuttlebutt about fad diets and Kim Kardashian you'll find "facts" that opponents have conjured up about genetically modified crops.

Among them is a ripe old tale about how Monsanto "forces" farmers to use its GMO seeds. This story has been making the rounds for years, and has taken on a life of its own. In the minds of the folks who believe it, seed dealers and others twist farmers' arms to make them plant GMO seeds so that big, bad Monsanto can line its

pockets. A corollary to this tale is that farmers lose money because they have to spend money to "blast" their GMO crops with pesticides.

Such tales gain credence through repetition. A quick tour of Facebook, YouTube and anti-GMO websites will uncover many other urban legends, rumors and untruths about genetically modified seeds.

All of which stands in stark contrast to the experience farmers have had with genetically modified crops. Snake River Sugar Co. Chairman Duane Grant recently talked about the experience

the cooperative's member-growers in Idaho and Oregon have had with Roundup Ready sugar beets. The plants have been genetically modified to withstand the herbicide glyphosate, which Monsanto sells as Roundup but several other companies also sell.

The facts Grant mentioned are real eye-openers.

He said that co-op members planted 178,000 acres of GMO sugar beets last year. The growers' cost of herbicides has dropped from \$66 per acre to \$11 per acre since they switched from non-GMO sugar beets in 2008. The cost of hand labor has dropped from \$60

an acre to zero, since it is no longer needed.

And, yes, the price of seed has increased, from \$44 to \$143. But at the same time, yields have also increased.

Overall, the net margin increase has been \$122 per acre, said Grant, who farms near Rupert, Idaho.

In total, the switch to GMO sugar beets has meant a \$22 million benefit to the cooperative and its members, he said.

A meta-study — which reviewed 147 other studies — found that by growing GMO crops farmers have reduced pesticide use by 37 percent. At

the same time, farmers' profits have increased by 68 percent.

If folks are looking for the reason farmers choose to plant GMO crops, it can be found in that last sentence.

Yet the urban legends will persist, as proponents continue to push to label GMO foods for no significant reason or ban growing GMO crops because, well, they saw it on the Internet.

Like many other activities in life, farming is about choice. That some farmers choose to grow GMO crops is their right, just as other farmers have the right to choose to grow organic or conventional crops.

## CHECKS AND BALANCES



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

## OUR VIEW

# Department of Labor comes to its senses

The U.S. Department of Labor has finally come to its senses and has dropped lawsuits alleging two Oregon blueberry growers paid pickers less than the minimum wage.

It has also agreed to return \$220,000 it had forced the growers to pay in 2012 to avoid having their newly harvested berries declared "hot goods," which would have prevented their sale, shipment or storage in a commercial facility. The DOL will also give each grower \$30,000 to help cover legal expenses.

It is a victory for liberty. What took so long?

The dispute began in 2012 when inspectors came to the farms during harvest.

Using a formula of dubious origins, the inspectors determined that employees who recorded picking more than a certain amount had actually been aided by "ghost workers." Because pickers are paid on

a piece rate, the agency claimed each received less than the minimum wage.

Inspectors claimed Pan-American Berry Growers and B&G Ditchen violated wage laws, and threatened to have their crops declared "hot goods."

Growers were left with the choice of either paying a fine or losing their crop in a protracted legal battle.

It was extortion, a blatant attempt to deny the growers their due process rights.

That wasn't just our opinion. Members of the Oregon congressional delegation thought so, and members of the House Agriculture Committee told DOL officials that they thought so, too.

More importantly, two federal judges ruled DOL denied the growers' due process rights because its threat left them with no viable choice but to pay.

Internal documents released in civil litigation that followed showed that the department had no

case. Of the thousands of alleged "ghostworkers," DOL had been able to find but a handful.

And rather than be chastened when the courts set aside the original settlements, the DOL doubled down and amended the original complaints to claim that the farms also unlawfully withheld wages and hired pickers "off the books" in 2010 and 2011. It also sought to add defendants, and asked for a permanent "hot goods" injunction.

Thankfully it appears someone at DOL headquarters has finally pulled the plug on the whole sad affair.

Our government is tasked with protecting the due process rights of its citizens, and respecting the outcome of the process. When instead it tries to repress those rights and takes vindictive police action against its vindicated target, it becomes oppressive and shares the traits of a totalitarian state.

# U.S. House puts federal regulators on notice

By ERIN ANTHONY  
For the Capital Press

Guest  
comment  
Erin Anthony



With the launch of a new oversight subcommittee focusing on the administration's energy and environmental policies and House passage of the Regulatory Accountability Act, H.R. 185, House lawmakers are putting the Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies on notice: Business as usual is over.

In both the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, Congress set out policies that regulators are supposed to follow. Yes, EPA and other regulatory bodies do have some leeway in writing and implementing the regulations for these laws and many others. Over the years, however, where Congress gave EPA an inch, the agency has taken a mile. Both the proposed Waters of the U.S. rule and the proposed regulations related to new and existing coal-fired power plants overstep the regulatory authority Congress granted the agency in the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act, respectively.

With House action to tighten the reins on the regulators less than a month into the new Congress, lawmakers are setting a clear agenda, and close to the top of that agenda is holding regulators' feet to the fire.

In late December, Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, newly appointed chair of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, announced he would form a new panel, the Interior Subcommittee, to watch over the EPA, as well as the Agriculture, Energy and Interior departments. Responsibility for those agencies previously fell to two subcommittees, one that focused on energy and the other on regulatory affairs.

Chaffetz's concerns aren't exclusively with regulatory policy. General mis-

management and personnel problems are also very much on his radar. In addition, he has been vocal about what he sees as unlawful limits on the ability of Utahans to access federal lands, which comprise two-thirds of his state. Chaffetz has appointed Rep. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., to lead the subcommittee.

The Regulatory Accountability Act, which passed with bipartisan support in the House last week, would give all stakeholders a greater voice in a federal regulatory process that is too often one-sided.

The legislation provides a much-needed update to the nearly seven-decades-old Administrative Procedures Act, which needs to be amended to ensure that the public and the regulated community, in particular, are afforded a transparent, fair and open regulatory process.

The bill would require agencies to be more open and transparent on data justifying a rule. The most costly rules would be subject to on-the-record hearings. Agencies would be required to consider such rules' impact on jobs and the economy. Moreover, agencies' ability to use guidance and interim final rules would be constrained.

Farmers and ranchers are optimistic lawmakers' efforts will bring EPA and other regulatory agencies' real mission back into focus: to execute the laws passed by Congress in the least costly way and, with strong public input, to find the most efficient regulatory solutions that benefit all Americans.

Erin Anthony is editor of *FBNews*, the *American Farm Bureau Federation's* official e-newsletter.

# A small victory for private property rights

Proponents of private property rights won a small victory this month in Bannock County, Idaho.

At issue was a grass-covered, private farm road that wends its way from a public road across four privately owned parcels to the U.S. Forest Service's Bell Marsh Creek area near McCammon. For decades the owners have allowed locals to use the trace to access their favorite public hunting grounds in the national forest.

For several years there was a gate across the road. As long as people didn't let the cows out and picked up after themselves, the owners turned a blind eye to the trespass.

The Forest Service's Pocatello office recently asked counties to clarify their lists of active public land accesses.

While the Bell Marsh Creek access appeared on Forest Service maps, owners of the property had never granted a formal easement

to either the feds or to Bannock County. More importantly, neither had ever offered up any payment for such an easement and the owners have continued to pay full taxes on the trace.

The county attorney recommended that the commission validate the path as a public access, arguing a prescriptive easement exists because people have been using it since at least the 1940s. Such a taking would not have required the owners be

compensated.

He later changed his mind — not because he recognized the owners' rights but because the county couldn't afford to patrol or maintain another public road.

At any rate, county commissioners have rejected the plan. The owners keep control of their property.

The battle to maintain private property rights is won in small skirmishes. Small victories have a cumulative impact.

## Letters policy

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**Letters policy:** Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as guest commentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

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