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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Ag employers between a rock and a harder place

Producers and processors who use a lot of migrant labor are used to being between a rock and a hard place. Those hoping President Obama's recent executive actions to defer deportations and offer work permits to illegal immigrants might make their lot easier may be disappointed.

There are 12 million illegal immigrants already in the country. Many fill invaluable roles in our economy, particularly in agriculture.

Farmers who raise vegetables, fruit and nursery crops depend on immigrant labor, as do many processors and packers. It's generally agreed that most of

these workers, as many as 85 percent in some areas, are in the country illegally and are providing employers with fake papers.

There's no question producers and processors need the labor. So, an informal "don't ask, don't tell" arrangement exists between employers and employees.

So when the president announced he was taking executive action that would defer deportations and grant work permits to as many as 5 million illegal immigrants, many employers could be heard to breathe a sigh of relief. Illegals made legal, even temporarily, could be a boon to employers for all kinds of reasons. The president's programs are

currently tied up in court, but immigration officials are taking applications. As part of that process, applicants must prove they've been in the country the required time period. Employment records can help establish worker eligibility for the program.

When an employee reaches out to an employer to help provide documentation for the application, it quickly becomes obvious the worker is in the country illegally.

Enter Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The Washington Farm Labor Federation asked ICE if employers who become aware through this scenario that an employee is

illegal can have safe harbor from prosecution as the worker completes the application process.

No. Applying for a program doesn't make an applicant eligible for employment. Employers who hire, or continue to employ, workers who they know to be undocumented are liable for audit and prosecution for violating immigration law.

Once you know an employee is in the country illegally, you have to fire them.

Welcome to the harder place.

This is why we've been opposed to extralegal attempts to change immigration policy.

We think the president has overstepped, and lacks the authority

to offer work permits to millions of illegal immigrants. But even as the president moves to make illegals legal, his administration stands by to enforce the laws as they apply to employers.

Only Congress can change immigration law, and change it Congress must.

We continue to call for a program that secures the border, revises the guest worker program, and grants illegals currently in the country a reasonable path to permanent residency.

It's time to bring everyone in from the cold, whether through some grand bargain or by incremental reform.

OUR VIEW

Common sense emerges on GMOs

It appears common sense has taken over the Oregon Legislature as it considers how best to get farmers to cooperate with one another on genetically modified crops.

Legislation is making the rounds that prescribes mediation for neighboring farmers hoping to resolve the conflicts that may arise when GMOs are grown near organic or other types of crops. Conflicts may arise over cross pollination, the timing of planting or other issues.

The proposal, House Bill 2509, would use a carrot-and-stick approach.

If a problem comes up, the state Department of Agriculture would be called upon to mediate between the farmers. The mediator would develop a plan to avoid whatever problems might exist.

That's the carrot.

If, for some reason, one farmer or the other decides the plan offered by the mediator wouldn't work and goes to court, he would be liable for all court costs and attorney's fees — his and the other farmer's — if he loses the case.

That's the stick.

The proposal has the overriding goal of nudging farmers to cooperate with one another. In some quarters, the GMO issue has become so polarizing that the first step seems to be calling lawyers instead of calling the neighbor. As a result, some disagreements have

been exacerbated instead of being resolved.

The proposal also will provide empirical examples of how many such problems exist and their nature. Until now most examples have been anecdotal.

HB 2509 is remarkable in that two diverse farm groups support it. "We feel this is highly preferable to any kind of mandates and practices that favor one type of crop over another," Oregon Farm Bureau President Barry Bushue told the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water.

"It creates an incentive for people to mediate coexistence conflicts," said Ivan Maluski,

policy director for Friends of Family Farmers.

In past weeks, we have noted that farmers have been actively seeking non-judicial means of addressing the many types of regulatory problems they face. We've also noted that the regulators seem open to less confrontational means of reaching agreements. If the full Legislature passes HB 2509 and Gov. Kate Brown signs it — and they should — this would be another example.

Neighboring farmers who are of goodwill should be able to negotiate whatever issues exist over growing GMO crops. With help from an ODA mediator, that would be made easier.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

Free trade lemmings take over Washington, D.C.

By ROGER JOHNSON
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Roger Johnson



Our elected officials in Washington — both Republicans and Democrats — are wandering the halls of Congress like lemmings in a sort of "free trade trance," and if they don't come to their senses soon, we'll all pay the price.

These free trade lemmings are convinced that their unbridled, free market view of trade — the notion that we should sign every agreement possible because more trade in and of itself is necessarily better — is good for the nation in the long term.

To achieve this, they hand the president the authority to negotiate these deals in secret — widely known as Fast Track — with our potential trade partners and then at the ninth hour are pressured to either sign on the dotted line or not, foregoing any chance of amendments that might protect American jobs, American workers or the environment.

Congress has signed plenty of these agreements in the past; let's see how the track record looks to date. After signing massive trade agreements including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the U.S.-Korea Trade Agreement, the prosperity and jobs that were promised to flood our nation and lift our middle class like the rising tide have failed to appear. In 2014, the trade deficit increased to \$505 billion, representing nearly 3 percent of the nation's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and acting as a drag on the overall economy. The U.S. has carried the weight of a trade deficit every year for the past 41 years.

There are a number of reasons why these agreements are not working for us and one of the largest is currency manipulation, which allows governments to keep their currencies undervalued and boost exports, limit imports and create large current-account surpluses. Malaysia, Singapore and Japan, three known currency manipulators, are involved in the current Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations, one of the massive deals currently being considered by Congress.

For example, the U.S. deficit with Japan reached nearly \$80 billion in 2013, and currency manipulation was the most significant cause of the deficit. It is estimated that the trade deficit with Japan alone resulted in 896,600 jobs eliminated in the nation across nearly all congressional districts.

And then there's the trade deal with South Korea, which is celebrating its 3-year anniversary. When we signed this deal, the American public was promised an increase in exports and at least 70,000 new jobs. Instead, our exports to South Korea are down and we've lost 84,000 jobs. For every new U.S. car sold to Korea since we signed the deal, they sell us 14 new cars,

all made with jobs that could and should be here.

Even agriculture, which has fared fairly well in these trade deals, lost big on this one. U.S. exports to Korea have taken major hits as beef exports are down 5 percent, pork is down 4 percent, poultry is down 41 percent and grains are down 21 percent. At the same time, Korean exports to the U.S. increased by 28 percent.

Many might wonder why one of the nation's largest organizations representing family farmers and ranchers is coming out against massive trade agreements. Trade can and has benefited U.S. agriculture, which represents about 10 percent of net exports from the U.S. Agriculture exports have been greater than U.S. agriculture imports for more than 50 years and has been one of the only clear winners in these deals. The \$39 billion surplus generated by farm exports helps counter the enormous U.S. non-agricultural trade deficit.

There are two answers to that. First, we're not only farmers and ranchers, we're Americans, and we're tired of seeing our great nation drawing the short straw in every trade deal we sign. Fairness is ingrained in the American psyche and culture, so looking at the real economics of these deals just rubs folks the wrong way.

The second reason is more practical. As farmers and ranchers, we understand that the vast majority of the products we grow — whether it's tomatoes or cattle — are sold domestically. And if we continue to lose good jobs and dig ourselves into a deeper debt hole as a nation, our major market — our fellow Americans — won't have the means to purchase the food, fiber and fuel we grow. So family farmers and ranchers lose too, big time, in the long run.

We need to take a new approach to trade that focuses on reducing the U.S. trade deficit as its primary goal. We must also refuse to enter agreements that will subvert the jurisdiction of our important domestic laws protecting workers, our children and the environment. Finally, trade is a concept whereby the assumption is that both parties can benefit by swapping goods, which is why we need to stop thinking of trade as a baseball bat to single-handedly bludgeon other nations into changing their behavior. Just look how well that mindset worked with Cuba.

The easiest way to keep the lemmings from charging over the cliff is to deny this president, and every president of any party that follows, fast track authority.

Roger Johnson is president of the National Farmers Union.

A snapshot of you, and of the Capital Press

By CARL SAMPSON
Capital Press

We recently asked our online readers to tell us about themselves.

We posted a link to a survey on www.capitalpress.com and asked them a few questions.

What we got in return was a snapshot of who reads the Capital Press online. The answers will help us tailor our online news coverage and advertising content to best meet readers' needs.

We found that our online readers are much the same as those who read the print editions of the Capital Press — most operate diversified farms and ranches. Of the 681 readers in Oregon, Washington state, Idaho and California who answered, about half have beef cattle, 20 percent have sheep and 12 percent have dairy cattle, either as stand-alone operations or as part of diversified operations.

Nearly all of the respondents who have livestock said they planned to buy livestock handling equipment during the next two years.

The crops our readers grow vary as widely as the

Western landscape. Alfalfa, hay and silage are the top crops, followed by wheat and other small grains, grass seed and other seed crops, berries, corn and vegetables. About 8 percent use organics.

Many are also expanding their operations. About 30 percent plan to build or purchase a farm building in the next two years.

It's also no secret that nearly all of our online readers have one or more tractors, and 25 percent plan to purchase a new tractor within the next couple of years. About 20 percent will also buy other types of equipment and implements.

ATVs are also integral parts of their farm and ranch operations. About 90 percent have one or more, according to the survey.

GPS technology is also rapidly becoming part of our readers' operations. About 25 percent already use it, and more plan to adopt it in the future.

About the Capital Press

Since some readers were so kind as to share a little about themselves with us, it's only appropriate that we share more about us with them. The Capital Press remains the largest independent agriculture newspaper in the West. Our survey found that our readers turn to the Capital Press first for news and information about agriculture. Though most of our subscribers are in Oregon, Washington state, Idaho and California, we also have readers in every state and overseas.

We're particularly excited about the additions we've made to the online edition of the Capital Press.

The online edition of the Capital Press is a "turbo-charged" version of the Capital Press readers receive in their mailboxes or buy at the feed store each week. If readers like the print edition, they'll love the online edition. It is updated throughout the day with the latest in state, regional, national and international agriculture news, complete with commodity price reports. We also have reporters following agricultural issues in the field and

in the state capitals around the West.

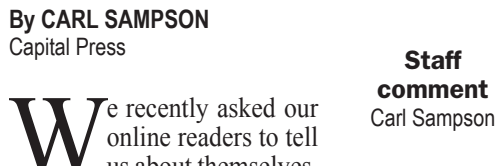
An important new fixture on our online homepage is a calendar that features upcoming agriculture-related events around the region. A unique aspect of it is readers can also post events. They can simply click on "submit an event" above the calendar and follow the instructions. Once it gets final approval from an editor, it will appear on the calendar.

Readers can also view the website on their smart phone or tablet simply by going to www.capitalpress.com.

Or they can save a trip to the mailbox and view the electronic edition of the printed newspaper by clicking on "Capital Press e-Edition" on our homepage. It includes exactly what is printed in the newspaper, right down to every advertisement. It'll even "read" itself aloud. Just click on an article and click "Listen" in the green area at the top of the page.

We appreciate our readers sharing a little about themselves through the survey. And we hope they enjoy the added news and features we've included on our upgraded website.

Carl Sampson is managing editor of the Capital Press.



Staff
comment
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