

OUR VIEW

Internet know-it-alls try to take over science

It must be hard to be a scientist these days. The work is often difficult and thankless — heck, most of the public doesn’t even understand the basics of any type of research. They wouldn’t know the difference between a chromosome and a chrome bumper on an F-150.

Such ignorance doesn’t stop a loud — and litigious — minority of critics from taking to the Internet or trooping into court every time something they don’t understand attracts their attention. It’s been seen a lot in agriculture, as semi-informed, self-anointed “experts” rail against everything from gluten to genetically modified corn.

Yet when they are quizzed they know next to nothing about the science. In short, they know what

they read on the Internet and not much else. We’re reminded of the car insurance advertisement on television in which a woman says her new friend that she met through the Internet is a French model. The guy, when he shows up, can’t even say “Bonjour” — but it said on the Internet that he was from France.

Most recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was dragged into court over an experiment its scientists have been conducting in an attempt to rescue the northern spotted owl from possible extinction. Though the spotted owl ranges from the Pacific Northwest southward into Mexico, it was declared “threatened” under the federal Endangered Species Act. That designation has done massive damage to the region’s timber

industry, because the spotted owl prefers old growth trees as its habitat.

Nowadays, the sight of a logger is not causing the spotted owl problems. Instead, it’s a relative. The barred owl has moved into Northern California and Northwest forests in recent years. Compared with the spotted owl, the barred owl is a bully. It is a better hunter and outcompetes with his spotted cousin in nearly every way.

Wildlife scientists whose job is protecting the spotted owl could do one of two things: nothing, which means the spotted owl would likely succumb to the barred owl; or they could try an experiment to take pressure off the spotted owl by reducing the number of barred owls.

They chose the latter and came up with an experiment in which barred owls would be killed. Remember: The barred owl is not a protected species but is threatening a protected species.

That experiment was enough to get the Fish and Wildlife Service scientists dragged into court. Friends of Animals and Predator Defense, two animal rights groups, argue that the agency violated the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to evaluate alternatives to lethal removal of barred owls.

Again, barred owls are not protected, yet in the eyes of these groups, the agency should have come up with another way to get rid of them. Hmm, maybe they could feed the barred owls GMO gluten, if there were such a thing.

Federal scientists were caught in a quandary only an environmental lawyer could love. They could kill the barred owls and get sued, or they could let barred owls kill spotted owls and get sued. Either way, the environmental lawyers win.

U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken saw through the groups’ arguments and has allowed the scientists to continue the experiment that could, if successful, return the population of northern spotted owls to health.

But the story isn’t over. The environmental groups say they may appeal the judge’s decision to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

That would accomplish exactly nothing, except give these groups something to write about — on the Internet, of course.

OUR VIEW

Inslee’s climate change impact immeasurable

It seems fashionable these days for executives, thwarted by the democratic process used by elected legislative representatives, to take unilateral action to impose big-ticket policies on citizens.

Unable to get the Legislature behind a carbon credit scheme to roll back greenhouse gases to half of 1990 levels by 2050, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee is taking on the job himself. Washington will suffer as a result.

Inslee issued an executive order July 28, kicking off what’s expected to be a yearlong process by the Department of Ecology to develop ways to limit greenhouse gases released in Washington.

Inslee said he couldn’t wait any longer for lawmakers to pass his climate change agenda, claiming he had the authority to move unilaterally under the state’s Clean Air Act.

“Carbon pollution and the climate change it causes pose a very real and existential threat to our state,” Inslee said in announcing the plan.

Whether Inslee has the authority is an open question to critics of the plan. What is certain is that without legislative authority, any regulatory effort will lack the hefty carbon fee structure that was part of Inslee’s failed bill.

That proposal would have capped greenhouse gases from some 130 businesses, including one fertilizer plant and eight food processors. The businesses, which emit at least 25,000 metric tons of carbon a year, would have been required to bid for



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

a limited number of carbon credits to continue operating. The number of credits available would gradually be cut in half by 2050.

The Office of Financial Management estimated the auctions would cost businesses \$1.2 billion in the first two years, though the agency notes that nobody knows exactly what credits will cost once the bidding starts. “If the auctions generate higher prices than those assumed here, the expenditure impact of the bill could increase substantially,” according to a OFM report.

Eastern Washington legislators were particularly worried about the lop-sided impact the measure would have on rural residents, farmers and ag processors, the bread-and-butter of the economy in east side communities.

Inslee blames Republicans for the failure of his legislative proposal. But, he couldn’t convince the Democrat-

controlled House of Representatives to sign on to the bill either.

While it’s unclear what these rules will look like, farm interests aren’t optimistic.

A carbon cap “would likely trigger significant new compliance costs that would hit ... the farmer’s bottom line,” the Washington Farm Bureau stated in an email to its members.

“When farmers and ranchers cannot make a reasonable profit, working farmlands get converted to subdivisions and developments,” according to the Farm Bureau.

“Open agricultural spaces go away. Environmental outcomes get worse.”

The impact of all of this on the Washington economy is potentially immense, and include higher energy costs, higher regulatory costs, fewer jobs. The impact of all of this on climate will be, at best, imperceptible without instruments that measure to a thousandth of a degree.

Time is short to protect farmers from COOL retaliation

By DAN NEWHOUSE
For the Capital Press

The clock is ticking for American farmers and manufacturers to avoid billions of dollars in sanctions and tariffs on U.S. exports to our biggest trading partners.

On May 18, the World Trade Organization rejected a U.S. appeal and ruled in favor of Canada and Mexico on mandatory country of origin labeling requirements for beef, pork and chicken products. WTO found that COOL requirements for muscle meat cuts were in violation of U.S. obligations with our trading partners, Canada and Mexico.

This is the fourth time WTO has ruled against the U.S. on COOL requirements. Why is this ruling significant? Unless Congress acts to protect American producers by bringing U.S. rules into compliance, Canada and Mexico have taken steps to retaliate within the next few weeks against the U.S. to the

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tune of \$3 billion in annual sanctions on American agricultural and non-agricultural goods.

Retaliation over COOL requirements will not just have a negative impact on American beef, pork and chicken products: retaliation can apply to hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of Washington exports of apples, cherries, pears, potatoes, wine, and manufactured goods as well.

In arguing against repealing COOL, some falsely claim that COOL requirements are really about food safety. However, meat products produced or imported in the U.S. are already subject to mandatory inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety Inspection Service. Additionally, before arriving in the U.S., imported meat

products are required to be produced with an equivalent food safety system to that of the U.S.

The reality is that all meat products sold in the U.S., regardless of origin, must be inspected to equally rigorous standards. The repeal of COOL will have no impact on the FSIS food safety inspection program, ensuring that the U.S. continues to produce the safest food supply in the world.

If COOL is not about food safety, does that mean it implies an economic benefit? Compliance with COOL actually adds additional costs for American packers, processors, producers and, ultimately, consumers. Given Washington’s proximity to Canada, processors depend on Canadian cattle, but under the mandatory COOL requirement, U.S. and Canadian cattle must be processed separately, adding increased cost with no safety benefit. Further, even when repealing mandatory COOL, there is nothing preventing

producers from continuing to market their products as U.S. cattle — it just is not a requirement.

Congress must act quickly to prevent potentially devastating retaliation in the form of sanctions and tariffs, which is why I cosponsored legislation to repeal country of origin labeling requirements as an urgent response to the WTO’s ruling. I recently voted with the House on a bipartisan basis, 300 to 131, to pass this legislation to shield American farmers from retaliation by simply repealing the COOL meat cut provisions to make the U.S. compliant with our obligations.

The U.S. must play by the rules we agreed to with our biggest trading partners and export markets. Time is running out to avoid the costly penalty of trade sanctions, which is why I urge the Senate to pass mandatory COOL repeal.

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse represents Central Washington’s 4th District in Congress.

Want to boost the ag sector? Build new pipelines

By ELAINE KUB
For the Capital Press

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comment
Elaine Kub

Agriculture relies on affordable energy to stay competitive. The cost of crude oil and natural gas directly impacts farmers’ ability to maintain a healthy bottom line, driving the costs of necessary expenditures like diesel fuel, irrigation, fertilizer, lubricants and more.

In the past five years, crude oil production in the U.S. has skyrocketed, bringing a surge of economic activity. Our country will surpass Saudi Arabia and Russia as the world’s most prolific producer of fossil energy in 2015. For the first time in decades, the once vaporous concept of American “energy independence” is within reach.

The boom has been good news for farmers, helping to keep energy prices and operating costs under control. But it has also brought some growing pains — especially in the Midwest — due in large part to the strain that greater production has placed on the region’s freight transportation infrastructure. The increase in crude oil trains has reduced the freight capacity available to transport grain and other commodities. Without action, the future of shipping agricultural goods will be defined by delays, price spikes and uncertainty.

I recently partnered with the American Farm Bureau Federation to attempt to quantify the financial impact of regional transportation strain on farmers in the Midwest. We found that the surge in crude oil traffic — combined with other factors — caused millions of dollars of losses to farmers, elevators and end users. The Agriculture Department confirms that \$570 million were lost from Upper Midwest farmers’ profits during the 2014 harvest season alone. In North Dakota, the insufficient freight environment could be expected to reduce the average corn farmer’s income by \$10,000 relative to a “normal” year.

Grain producers are uniquely dependent on efficient rail systems, especially in crude oil traffic “hot spots.” The nature of grain production and use renders the industry inflexible with regard to the freight methods that it must use. Grain farmers simply must have access to efficient rail in order to manage shipping costs, minimize delay and get their products to market in an economically competitive manner.

Fortunately, a clear path forward does exist.

Modern pipelines servicing the Bakken region can help provide a solution by channeling hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude oil per day off of the rails and roadways.

The merits of expanding our pipeline infrastructure are many. Pipelines significantly reduce transportation costs, are more efficient, and are impervious to weather or traffic related delays. If other industries were physically able to send their products through a pipeline, they would be delighted to do so.

Comprehensive improvements to the freight network in the Upper Midwest are needed. Rail carriers have responded well to the recent breakdown in service, devoting ample resources and energy to improving capacity and reducing delay. But in order to make the most of our newfound energy resources without compromising the competitiveness of our agricultural sector, improved transportation infrastructure devoted to energy is essential. Pipelines are an essential part of that equation.

Elaine Kub is the author of American Farm Bureau Federation’s recent study, “Insufficient Freight: An Assessment of U.S. Transportation Infrastructure and Its Effects on the Grain Industry,” and “Mastering the Grain Markets: How Profits Are Really Made.”

Letters policy

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