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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Teenagers harvest an important lesson

Harvest is a special time of year in rural America. In the area surrounding tiny Shelley, Idaho, — population 4,409 — it's even more special, because of a tradition its farmers and high schools have maintained through the years.

Generations of students from such schools as Shelley High School and West Jefferson High School have pitched in to help with the potato harvest. The students receive two weeks off to work on area farms during this most important time of year. By doing

that, they earn money for college or other activities and the farmers get the help they need to get their crops in.

Though many farmers have mechanized their potato harvest, others still rely on the cadre of teenagers to sort and move potatoes — or whatever other chores need to be done.

In our estimation, that's the way it should be. Not so long ago, other areas of the country relied on teenagers to help pick apples and other fruit, strawberries and other crops. A casual conversation on the

subject will still bring up comments such as, "I used to do that when I was a teenager" or "That's how I paid for college."

While it still takes place in some areas, state and federal regulators discourage farmers from employing teens, who are ready, willing — and need the work.

But when teens help with harvest, something more occurs. A connection is forged between the sweet, hard work of the farm and the next generation. No matter where those teens head once they graduate from high school, they

will remember the long hours spent sorting potatoes or doing other jobs on the farm.

And when some Internet blowhard offers a fiction-based theory about how to farm, those students will be able to correct them.

A further benefit is that harvest helps teens to become a contributing part of the community. They realize they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Almost everyone who lives in the country understands that they depend on their neighbors, and their neighbors depend on them.

When someone needs help, it's common for neighbors, friends — and even total strangers — to pitch in.

During the best of times such as harvest and the worst of times, they know to step forward whenever and wherever they are needed.

Whether it's branding time, a wildfire threatening the ranch or anything else, neighbors know to help out each other.

In a very real sense, that lesson may be as important as any others those teenagers will learn in the classroom.

OUR VIEW

'Wolf-friendly beef' idea patronizing to ranchers

There isn't anyone who hasn't said something that sounded better in their head than it did when they said it out loud.

That's what we thought when we heard that conservation groups in Washington participating on the state's wolf advisory panel suggested helping ranchers by creating a premium label for "wolf-friendly beef" for producers who employ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife wolf protection measures.

Dan Paul, state director of The Humane Society of the United States, said as with cage-free eggs, some consumers would be willing to pay more for beef raised with wolf protection measures.

Really?

First, we'd point out that all beef raised on grazing land in wolf country is "wolf-friendly." It all can fall prey. Ranchers in Washington and Oregon can't legally shoot a wolf, as they are protected either by state or federal law. In fact, we would argue beef protected by extensive measures championed by the panel is less friendly to wolves. If the measures work — and producers say the results are mixed at best — wolves have to work harder for their meal.

Second, we think the number of people who would pay more for beef in order to somehow help wolves would be small.

Though we don't necessarily think it's true, people who buy cage-free eggs believe they're getting a better quality product because of the way hens are treated. The reasoning goes

that cage-free hens are exposed to less disease and stress, therefore their eggs are better.

But there is no corresponding perceived quality enhancement for "wolf-friendly" beef. The benefits from such measures go exclusively to the wolves and their champions.

Ranchers are quick to point out that to recoup the cost of the suggested counter-measures, "wolf-friendly" products would have to be priced 50 percent more than comparable conventional (wolf hostile?) products.

We'll give the wolf advocates the benefit of the doubt that they are sincere in their desire to help ranchers cope with wolves on the range. But a new marketing ploy is not a substitute for a viable management plan that includes a full range of control options, including lethal measures for problem wolves.

And this is why ranchers are frustrated with efforts they find, at best,

patronizing.

The Cattle Producers of Washington has withdrawn from the Wolf Advisory Group, calling it "inept and pointless" and saying it has prevented any action by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife in dealing with wolves that kill livestock.

Though there are some with more strident views, most ranchers at least grudgingly accept that the reintroduction of wolves into the West is a *fait accompli*. They know they'll have to find a way to survive in a new paradigm that includes another predator.

Conversely, wolf advocates and government wildlife agencies must also accept that ranchers can't be expected to provide wolves an unlimited buffet. The tab must be paid, or the losses be stopped.

State-sponsored elimination of ranchers is no more palatable than the wholesale extermination of wolves.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

Pick for ag board out of step with Oregon agriculture

By KENDRA KIMBIRAUSKAS
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Kendra
Kimbirauskas



Recently, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown appointed Marty Myers, general manager of Threemile Canyon Farms LLC, a subsidiary of North Dakota-based R.D. Offutt Co., to the state's Board of Agriculture. In appointing Myers, the governor overlooked a family farmer, Monmouth dairyman Jon Bansen, who had also applied for the position. This appointment sent a message to agricultural producers across Oregon that Governor Brown, when given a choice, will side with corporate agribusiness over hard-working family farmers.

While Myers is a nice man, the fact is he represents an out-of-state corporation with a checkered past in our state. Threemile Canyon Farms is the very definition of a factory farm, confining over 60,000 cows in an intensive milk production operation where the cows never graze on pasture. Over the years the facility has been at the center of several controversies, including labor violations, allegations of animal abuse, and a major source of air pollution.

In 2005, Threemile revealed they were releasing 5.6 million pounds of ammonia into the air each year, a byproduct of decomposing liquefied manure. The U.S. Forest Service fingered Threemile's ammonia as one of two major sources of acid rain and haze in the Columbia Gorge.

Rather than mitigating ammonia emissions, Threemile lobbied for the operation to be exempted from Oregon clean air laws. During a Dairy Air Quality Task Force created by the Legislature, Myers was instrumental in crafting a "do-nothing" plan of action.

Myers stands in stark contrast with Monmouth dairyman Jon Bansen. Unlike Myers, who lives in the Portland area, Bansen lives and works on his farm with his wife and children. He is a third-generation dairy farmer producing high-quality organic milk for the Organic Valley Cooperative. Bansen's farm, Double J Jerseys, is a pasture-based system, where the cows are grazed rotationally outdoors nearly year-round on 600 acres.

The appointment of Myers over Bansen should raise the eyebrows and the concerns of farmers across Oregon. Notably, a 2013 Oregon Employment Department report found that between 2002 and 2007, shortly after Threemile doubled the number of dairy cows in the state, nine family dairy farms went out of business every month on average.

Factory-scale dairy operations across the country have expanded herds, driving down milk prices. Family dairy farmers haven't been able to compete, and many

have closed down their farms. Increased Asian demand for milk products is likely to increase this problem in Oregon. Dramatically increasing Oregon cow numbers to meet this demand, as some have argued for, won't help independent family dairies. If anything, our state will see a surge in the growth of dairy production from "Threemile-esque" operations. Not only will these massive factory farms present significant challenges for the communities in which they set up shop, they will make it even more difficult for independent producers to compete — possibly driving the final nail into the coffin of many already-struggling independent dairy farmers.

Myers' appointment should also draw considerable scrutiny of the appointment process for the Oregon Board of Agriculture. Unlike most agency boards and commissions, appointments to the Board of Agriculture are not confirmed by the Senate. This allows the Department of Agriculture and the governor's office to work in secrecy to secure the appointment of their preference without any public scrutiny. Further, the Board of Agriculture is exempt from Oregon Government Ethics requirements that public officials provide statements of economic interest to ensure financial conflicts of interest are disclosed and addressed.

This is not good government.

At a time when Oregonians have cause to be on high alert for inappropriate conduct at the highest levels of state government, it would appear that this appointment to the Board of Agriculture is simply more of the same "pay-to-play" politics that we've seen in the past. Threemile Canyon Farms LLC has spent \$178,500 on lobbying in Oregon since 2012, and gave \$30,000 to Gov. John Kitzhaber's re-election campaign in 2014.

It's time for serious reform to prevent the kind of backroom dealings that allowed an out-of-state corporation to gain a seat on Oregon's Board of Agriculture. With nearly 85 percent of Oregon farms family-owned and -operated, and most small and mid-sized, Governor Brown's appointment is completely out of step with the future of Oregon agriculture.

Kendra Kimbirauskas is a third-generation producer and currently raises a variety of pasture-raised livestock in Linn County. She is co-founder of the group Friends of Family Farmers and chief executive officer for the Socially Responsible Agricultural Project.

Impending deadline could stop rail shipments in their tracks

By ERIN ANTHONY
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Erin Anthony



Spring planting may seem quite far off, but farmers are already looking ahead with a wary eye on something that may derail all their plans — a nationwide railroad shutdown. Unable to comply with the looming Dec. 31 deadline for implementing positive train control, railroads are warning customers that they might stop rolling altogether — and soon, unless Congress gives them more time.

Positive train control is a GPS-based train control system designed to prevent collisions and over-speed derailments. Under the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, railroads are required to implement PTC systems by the end of this year on mainline tracks that carry "toxic by inhalation," or TIH materials like anhydrous ammonia — a key fertilizer ingredient — as well as passenger traffic.

BNSF, Union Pacific and other large rail carriers say they've

been working on PTC since the mandate was put in place in 2008, but it's a very large, complex system made up of multiple independent technologies, many of which didn't exist seven years ago.

According to information from the Federal Railroad Administration and the railroads themselves, no Class I freight railroad will be in compliance with PTC requirements by the end of the year. At least one railroad — BNSF — has said if Congress doesn't extend the deadline, it plans on stopping all traffic on lines that are required to have PTC installed, and they won't wait until the end of the year to do so.

To ensure there are no TIH shipments on their systems as of Jan. 1, 2016, many railroads plan on issuing TIH notices prior

to Thanksgiving. Faced with the likelihood of fewer rail shipments in the last quarter of this year and potentially no shipments in early 2016, fertilizer manufacturers, who work around the clock to ensure an adequate supply for on-time planting, will probably cut way back on production, according to the Fertilizer Institute. And even if — and that's a very big "if" — fertilizer manufacturers don't slow down, fewer shipments in late 2015 will be a big problem for spring planting in 2016 because rail shipments of fertilizer are distributed equally across the year to meet demand.

The American Farm Bureau Federation and other organizations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Retail Federation, highlighted the catastrophic consequences that would follow a shutdown of large segments of the nation's freight rail network, in a letter to Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. From farm inputs and goods to coal, automobiles, retail consumer

goods and chemicals like those used to purify water for drinking, a major service disruption would have cascading impacts on the nation's food, energy and water supplies, as well as transportation, construction and nearly every sector of the U.S. economy.

As compliance with the PTC mandate is simply not achievable, the groups are urging Congress to act by Oct. 31 to extend the deadline to allow railroads enough time to put the system in place. In its multiyear highway bill, the Senate has given the railroads another three years to meet the PTC deadline, but the House has yet to act on its version of the bill.

Unless Congress acts it's not only rail shipments that will be grinding to a halt; farmers, ranchers and the rural communities and the national economy they support will also be well off track.

Erin Anthony is editor of the American Farm Bureau Federation's FBNews e-newsletter and website.

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