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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

New position shows University of Idaho means business

The University of Idaho means business, and in Idaho business usually involves agriculture.

UI President Chuck Staben has created a new special assistant position that will focus strictly on issues and projects involving agriculture.

John Foltz, now the interim dean of UI's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, will fill the new role once the new dean, Michael Parrella, takes over next month.

The new special assistant will allow Parrella to focus on college-

level issues — always a handful for administrators new to a job.

In the meantime, Foltz can concentrate on big-picture projects and ideas that require more attention than administrators with a full plate can devote.

And he will have a direct line to UI President Staben instead of being subjected to a bureaucratic chain of command. That presumably means things will get done without sinking into the morass of academia.

Among the projects at the top of Foltz's to-do list is a livestock research center. Both

the university and the livestock industry have talked about it for more than a decade.

Idaho is one of the top dairy and beef cattle-producing states, so it only makes sense to build on that momentum to address livestock issues.

"The need for this center has not gone away but in fact ... it's really increased in terms of nutrient management, waste management, labor and all the issues the industry faces," Foltz told the Capital Press.

We are impressed that Idaho leaders are ready to accept the

challenge of serious research on livestock-related issues, including nutrient management and manure lagoons.

In his new job, Foltz can devote his full attention to developing a plan for the livestock research center — and making it a reality.

He will also be able to tackle other agriculture-related issues and opportunities as they arise, including research focused on the development of drones and precision agriculture.

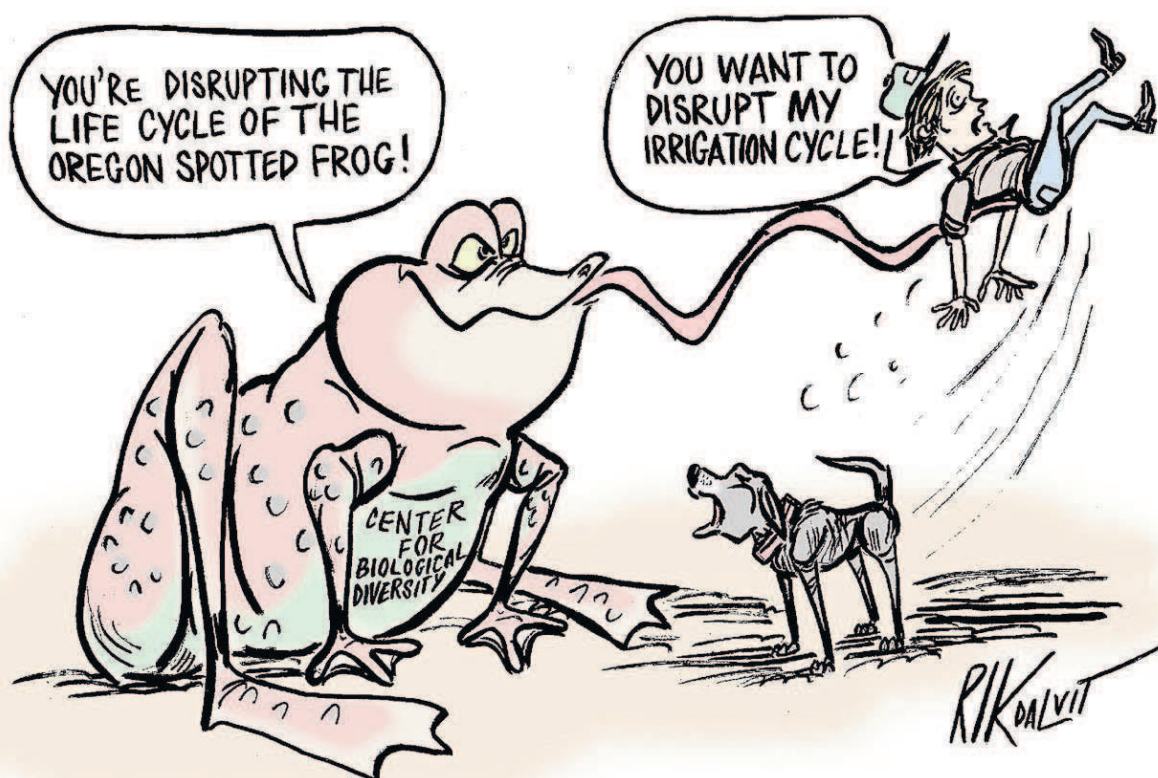
The state of Idaho and the University of Idaho have long

impressed many with their laser-like focus on building the state's economy in general and agriculture in particular.

This new position is one more piece of evidence for how a state with a "can-do" attitude can maintain its role as a leader in agriculture.

Idaho's robust economy is proof that when the state government, University of Idaho and agriculture work together, all things are possible.

This new position at the University of Idaho will continue to demonstrate that in the future.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

Saving frogs, killing farms one lawsuit at a time

Environmentalists have filed a lawsuit to save the Oregon spotted frog, and it could cost 4,600 farm families their livelihoods.

The Center for Biological Diversity is suing the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates the Crane Prairie and Wickiup reservoirs. The reservoirs are an important water source for the 3,650 farmers and ranchers of the Central Oregon Irrigation District and nearly 1,000 more belonging to the North Unit Irrigation District.

The dams are nearly 100 years old, and have not wiped the frogs from that stretch of the river. Plaintiffs say that the frogs are only surviving on the margins of their natural habitat, and that they are further threatened by the current operations.

The lawsuit alleges the reservoirs have altered natural water flows in the Deschutes River to the point of interfering with the frog's life cycle.

It alleges that the frog's egg masses are flushed out when the water levels in the reservoirs rise rapidly. When water is later released from the

reservoirs for irrigation, other egg masses along their margins are dried up.

River flows are reduced as water accumulates in the reservoirs, stranding adult and juvenile frogs on dry land. Their populations are isolated, resulting in in-breeding, the group claims.

Plaintiffs maintain that the bureau has violated the Endangered Species Act by operating the reservoirs in a harmful manner before it completes a required consultation about the effects on the frog.

Plaintiffs say that the government can deliver water to the irrigators, it just has to manage the operation of the reservoirs in a way that doesn't harm the frogs.

And there's the rub. If you accept the plaintiffs' argument, more water would have to be stored in the reservoir during irrigation season, reducing the amount available for agriculture, and more water would need to pass through dams during the winter, decreasing storage levels.

"They can still deliver water to the

irrigators, they just need to do it in a more careful way," Noah Greenwald, endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity, told the Capital Press. "They have to do things more gradually and at different times of the year."

In other words, they can't have as much as they need, and they can't have what they can get when they need it.

The irrigation districts are not deaf to the plaintiffs' cries. They want to take steps to save water and be less dependent on the reservoirs. But they say holding water back and reducing stream flows in the summer might in turn harm salmon and other endangered species in the river. More work for the environmental bar.

It seems to us the farmers and ranchers are in greater danger than the frogs.

The frogs have found a way to survive the ebb and flow as it has developed over the last century. Nature has found a way. But if you cut off their water, the farmers and the ranchers won't fare as well.

Photos tell ag's story more than 1,000 words at a time

By JESSICA WHARTON
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Jessica Wharton



'Tis the season for agritourism — horse-drawn carriages, countryside views and, of course, social media pictures capturing the scenery and bustling activity of holidays on the farm.

Consumer interest in agriculture, especially during the fall and winter, provides farmers and ranchers with a unique opportunity to connect with non-ag consumers like never before. It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but when that picture is shared online by a farmer or rancher, it can be worth a million "likes."

With the holidays here, social media campaigns and hashtags, such as #ThankAFarmer, are a quick and easy way to educate people about where their food comes from and how it's grown. The season offers unlimited options for engaging photos, from snow covering the fields to families sitting at the dinner table with the food they grew: Personal photos impact consumers.

Sharing high-quality photos with informative or personal captions on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter can increase followers as well as consumer trust.

Photos are proven to be the most engaging type of content on Facebook, with an 87 percent interaction rate from fans, according to Social Media Examiner.

And photos on Twitter can boost retweets by 35 percent. While followers might not always agree with the message attached to photos, they will always believe what they see with their own eyes.

Knowing that consumers believe the stories farmers and ranchers tell, especially when supplemented with "behind-the-scenes" looks at everyday life on the farm and real-time photos, is key to creating meaningful connections and constructive dialogs about agriculture. As the gap between urban and rural lifestyles widens, it's crucial that everyone involved in agriculture advocates for ag and connects farm to food for consumers.

This year, the American Farm Bureau, in conjunction with the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, is hosting a photo contest to accurately portray today's agriculture and the safe practices of farmers and ranchers.

With four submission categories — Farm Families, Farm Labor, Technology and Consumer Outreach — holidays on the farm are an ideal time to snap a few pictures that resonate with consumers. For more information on how to register and to view the contest rules and regulations, visit the 2015 Farm Bureau Photo Contest webpage at <http://www.fb.org/programs/photocontest/>.

The holidays are the perfect opportunity to connect with consumers and start real conversations about food and where it comes from. Whether sharing photos through the Farm Bureau photo contest or on social media, each photo is worth much more than just a thousand words.

Jessica Wharton is a communications assistant at the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Letters policy

Write to us: Capital Press welcomes letters to the editor on issues of interest to farmers, ranchers and the agribusiness community.

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.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308

End of year priorities clear the way to focus on trade in 2016

By PHILIP ELLIS
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Philip Ellis



Cattlemen and women can rest a little easier as they move into the New Year knowing several policy victories were contained in the Omnibus Appropriations bill.

For NCBA, top among these was country of origin labeling. Cattle producers have long known that consumers were unaware COOL labeling existed, and it had no discernible impact on the price or demand for U.S. beef. However, the largest issue remained the threat of retaliatory tariffs and the long term damage that violating our trade agreements would have had on future trade negotiations.

While NCBA continued to urge action to avoid these outcomes, unfortunately it took within hours of implementation

of tariffs for Congress to act.

While COOL certainly captured the headlines, the Omnibus bill contained many more priorities for cattle producers including language to continue congressional oversight of the dietary guidelines process. With passage, Congress made it clear that the current and future dietary guidelines will be based on scientific agreement and limited to nutrition and dietary information.

The bill also increases scrutiny of beef imports from regions with known animal disease issues, funds wildfire reserves, continues prohibitions on environmental permitting and reporting and blocks the

Department of Interior from designating de facto wilderness areas.

Just as timely, Congress also passed tax extenders legislation, which always seem to fall to the last minute, forcing producers to either make decisions during the year speculating on the tax ramifications or push major decisions to the last days of the year in order to take advantage of these provisions. While that is again the case this tax year, the good news is Section 179 was made permanent at \$500,000, 50 percent bonus depreciation was extended through 2019 and the Conservation Easement Tax Credit was permanently extended.

This was remarkable news for NCBA, as we've been working on certainty in the tax code for a number of years, and without the appetite by Congress to take up full tax reform, it sub-

jected many of these critical provisions to short-term extensions. Now with permanent and multi-year extensions, producers will be able to plan with their financial adviser to grow and expand their operations.

This end to 2015 puts the cattle industry in a great place to set our sights on expanded trade and access to Asia and the Pacific Rim in 2016. While the priorities for the industry will be set by our producer leadership in San Diego, Calif., we know that passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership will be a major focus for the year ahead.

The cattle industry has already lost over \$100 million in trade into Japan, thanks to a preferential trade agreement between Japan and Australia. That gap will continue to grow as the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement continues to ratchet down Japan's tariff on

imported beef.

The good news is the Trans-Pacific Partnership, negotiated by the U.S. trade representative, would reduce Japan's tariffs on imported beef below Australia's preferential agreement upon passage. That would instantly level the playing field, and allow U.S. producers to seize and build on our lost market share. The cattle industry cannot afford to push passage of TPP back. Every day without an agreement costs us market share in the Pacific.

With over \$7 billion in U.S. beef exports in 2014, exports help stabilize our markets, allow our producers to fetch a premium for muscle cuts internationally, and add value to variety meats that otherwise would sell for little to nothing domestically. Trade represented \$350 in value per head in 2014, and it represents the future of the prof-

itability of the beef industry.

I hope you'll visit our website at www.TPPNow.com to see more benefits to the cattle industry from trade and learn how this agreement will impact your bottom line.

We were pleased to see so many priority issues the Omnibus bill. While this wasn't an ag bill, it addressed the industry's top concerns and will allow the NCBA to focus on passage of the TPP in 2016. I look forward to seeing many of you at the Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show in San Diego, Calif., Jan 27-29. For more information and to register, visit www.BeefUSA.org, or call (303)-694-0305.

And from my family to yours, we wish you a Happy New Year.

Philip Ellis is president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.