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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Onion growers face another food safety law challenge

Onion growers in Eastern Oregon and Western Idaho have had quite a time trying to deal with the mandates of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Having found a solution to one regulation that would have all but put them out of business, they now face another that could cost the industry \$200 million to implement and puts its survival in question.

The law was passed by Congress late in 2010 with the goal of mandating best safety practices for producers and processors while making it easier for regulators to trace foodborne illnesses back to their source.

To enforce the act, the Food

and Drug Administration wrote 1,200 pages of proposed rules to address food safety controls for the growing, harvesting, packing and holding of produce for human consumption.

Many of the proposals were impractical and too costly. Others just weren't necessary.

For example, ag water provisions in the rules originally proposed a standard that would have been impossible for onion growers who irrigate from open ditches to meet. No approved treatment method existed, nor would it be economical if it did exist.

It would have required produce

growers whose irrigation water exceeded certain thresholds for bacteria to immediately stop using it. That would have made it impossible for most people in the Treasure Valley to grow onions.

Following an outcry, the FDA relented. Rather than limiting growers to fixing the water, the revised rules allow other mitigation options. The final rule allows growers whose water exceeds the standards to comply if they can show that bacteria dies off at a certain rate in the field.

And Oregon State University was able to show that very thing.

Now comes the issue of crates.

The FDA's rules require growers

to store onions in plastic crates. The industry now uses wooden boxes — about a million of them in the Treasure Valley.

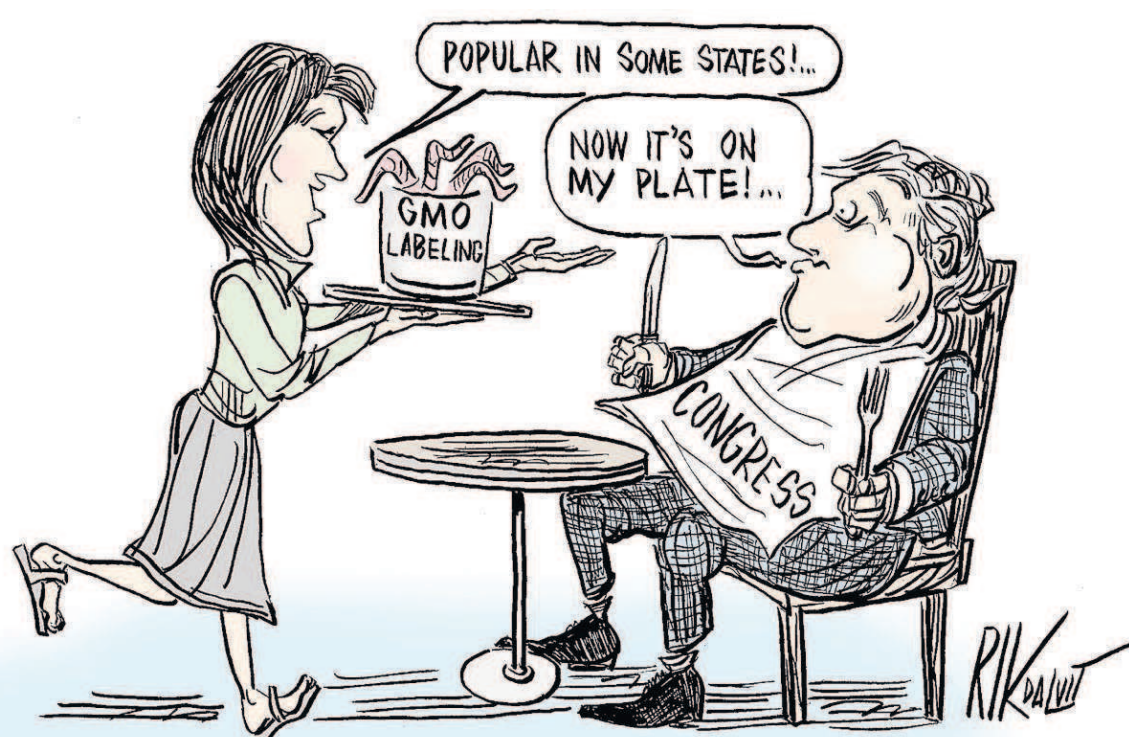
The plastic crates are smaller, holding about 900 pounds as opposed to the 1,600 pounds the boxes hold. The wooden boxes cost \$60 each, the plastic crates cost \$150. Growers say it would cost \$200 million to buy enough plastic crates to hold the crop, plus storage facilities would have to be altered to accommodate the different sized containers.

OSU has found that the change wouldn't reduce the level of contamination found in stored onions.

In a test of 10 wooden boxes of onions and 10 plastic crates of onions stored for six weeks, researchers found no difference. Because disease-causing bacteria die off on onions left in the field to cure, the common practice in the region, the onions stored in either container weren't contaminated to begin with.

We hope FDA takes note, as it did in the earlier case.

No one can argue that food shouldn't be safe, or that reasonable precautions shouldn't be taken. But Congress didn't intend to put whole segments of the food production and distribution chain out of business when it passed the act.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

What a federal GMO labeling law does

Inching its way through Congress is a proposal to require labels on foods that have genetically modified ingredients.

While we continue to question the need for such mandates — most people don't even know what a GMO is — our friends in Congress appear to just want to get the issue off their plate.

What Congress came up with was a proposal that appears to meet the needs of the people who insist on "knowing what's in their food" and, at the same time, forecloses on the possibility of each state coming up with a different GMO labeling law.

That alone makes this legislation worthwhile. The idea that Vermont, whose labeling law went into effect July 1, could exempt food with meat in it from its labeling law can best be described as random.

What isn't random in the law is the state's exemption of dairy products, including cheese, from GMO labeling. Vermont is known for its delicious

hard, white Cheddar, at least some of which is made using fermentation-produced chymosin that scientists create through genetic engineering, according to an article by Jon Entine, executive director of the independent Genetic Literacy Project. The FPC itself doesn't contain a GMO, but it's a product of genetic engineering, according to his article.

FPC is a lower-cost way of making cheese and replaces rennet. It is now used in most of the hard cheese made in the U.S., according to the article.

For the record, organic cheese does not use FPC.

Now you know one reason Vermonters such as Sen. Bernie Sanders are so uptight about protecting their state's GMO law — and its exemptions.

Some people love labels. They honestly believe that pasting a label on a can of soup or a box of crackers will change the way people eat. Some years ago, Congress required labels with nutritional information on food

packages. The thinking at the time was that people would read the labels and choose more healthful food.

Instead, we now find ourselves in the midst of a national obesity epidemic. On average, more Americans are overweight now than ever.

So much for that label theory.

In addition, if consumers really want to avoid GMO food, they already have two label options. They can buy food with the Certified Non-GMO label, or they can buy USDA certified organic food. Many foods with those labels can be found in almost any grocery store.

We hope Congress does indeed get the GMO labeling issue off its plate, and that President Barack Obama signs it into law. Our hope is he will realize that, while the need for another label on food is questionable, it's the federal government's job to make sure labels don't impede commerce.

By having a single national standard, farmers and food processors will at least have a consistent set of labeling rules from state to state.

Congress will pass a carbon fee bill by the end of 2017

By MARK REYNOLDS
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Mark Reynolds



Forgive me if I'm feeling a little exposed at the moment, but I recently made a really big promise. This isn't a tell-your-daughter-you'll-take-her-to-the-zoo-on-Saturday kind of promise. No, we're talking about a JFK, "We're going to put a man on the moon" kind of promise.

On June 19, at the start of the Citizens' Climate Lobby/Citizens' Climate Education Conference in Washington, I stood before hundreds of CCL group leaders and congressional liaisons — the heart and soul of our organization — and I promised them this:

By the end of 2017, Congress will pass a bill that places a fee on carbon and returns net revenue to American households.

Perhaps you understand why I feel exposed. There are so many moving parts and variables involved that are totally outside my ability to control. So what gives me the audacity to say we can do this?

Well, when I made the promise, the answer was right there in the faces of the people I was talking to. I would never entertain such an outlandish thought — let alone say it out loud — if it were not for our amazing volunteers.

Volunteers such as Pennsylvania's Jay Butera, who saw the potential of bringing Republicans and Democrats together to combat the growing threat of rising sea levels.

Two years ago, armed with nothing but his own determination, he flew down to south Florida — a region highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change — and recruited the volunteers who would form CCL's Miami chapter. He painstakingly secured endorsements from mayors, city councils and chambers of commerce, convincing local Republican members of Congress that it was time to commit to action.

His efforts eventually led to Republican Carlos Curbeo and Democrat Ted Deutch uniting to launch the bipartisan House Climate Solutions Caucus, which now has sixteen members with equal numbers from both sides of the aisle.

Still, my heart was in my throat when I asked, "Who's with me? Stand up if you're with me." When everyone stood up, my knees stopped shaking. I knew that they be-

lieve, just as I do, that this is no time to hedge our bets.

They know that bills that get introduced in Congress are a dime a dozen — that the only ones that count are the ones that pass. And they know that we're running out of time. We're getting dangerously close to the tipping point of no return on greenhouse gas emissions, the point where temperatures and seas will rise beyond our ability to adapt.

It's time for Congress to pass the most efficient and effective solution to climate change — a steadily-rising, revenue-neutral fee on carbon. We can't wait another five years until the "right" people get elected. To paraphrase former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld: You don't save the world with the Congress you wish you had; you save the world with the Congress you have.

And that is what we intend to do. By the end of 2017.

I'm confident that making this bold commitment will energize our thousands of volunteers, who have dug so deep time and time again, to find another gear within themselves and do what many consider to be impossible.

With this promise, we tap into and unleash a force that only manifests itself when a powerful commitment is made. Many years ago, W.H. Murray described that power in his book, "The Scottish Himalayan Expedition":

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness ... [T] here is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way."

Yes, we're all feeling a little exposed. But sticking our necks out so we can preserve a healthy climate for our grandchildren?

That's a risk we're more than willing to take.

Mark Reynolds is the executive director of Citizens' Climate Lobby.

How to achieve profitable milk prices

By BOB KRUCKER
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Bob Krucker

In your July 1 issue, you published an opinion of Arden Tewksbury promoting the proposed Federal Milk Marketing Improvement Act as a solution to low milk prices.

I submit a different opinion.

While everyone appreciates Arden's effort in highlighting dairy farmers' unprofitability, the political solutions to the problem he supports have not worked and will not work. Been there, done that — for decades.

Let's have a little honesty and economic reality.

Traditionally, most politicians only vote where the money is, and the money is with the processors, retailers and consumers — not with the dairy farmer.

No politician or government program is going to

change basic market economics in a way that benefits the dairy farmer.

The dairy farmer must use the basic universal rules of the marketplace to obtain a profitable and fair price for the milk the market wants.

The overwhelming driver of price is supply. Balancing supply with profitable demand equals a profitable price. The dairy farmer owns the milk supply and holds the key to price.

Price is always linked to the supply, and oversupply means lower prices. It's not about government or politicians — it is always about supply.

Dairy farmers, not politicians or government bureaucrats, must solve this pricing problem because no one else can.

A milk supply level produced by the dairy farmer balanced with profitable domestic demand will achieve a profitable milk price and sustainable profitability for the dairy farmer.

U.S. dairy farmer profitability can be achieved — if the remaining dairy farmer co-op owners demand that co-op management implement the following instructions:

1. Accept no non-member milk for processing.

2. Implement a pro-rata across-the-board reduction in the acceptance of member milk for processing until the milk supply is balanced with profitable domestic market demand, which provides a price greater than the average member dairy farmer's cost to make the milk.

3. Do not own, operate or be involved with any processing facility, make any dairy product or chase any dairy market that will not pay a price greater

than the average member dairy farmer's cost to make the milk.

4. Use the National Dairy Producers Organization's 100 percent USA trademark on all co-op-made products to promote U.S.-made dairy farmer milk.

Dairy farmers should resist the false hope of trying to achieve some magical government minimum price for milk when they could quickly obtain a profitable price for milk by properly managing their milk and their dairy farmer-owned co-ops.

Let's stop culling dairy farmers and start culling some cows and preserve as much of our existing national milk producing infrastructure as we can.

Bob Krucker, an Idaho dairy farmer, is a board member of the National Dairy Producers Organization (NDPO). He can be reached at 208-280-1830.

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