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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Platforms offer insight into key ag issues

The two major political parties have approved their 2016 platforms.

While presidential candidates of both stripes have in the past freely diverged from specific points in their party's platform — and we would expect the same of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump — the documents provide a point for comparison of the policy priorities of each party.

Have a look.

Each party promises to protect and advance the interests of farmers.

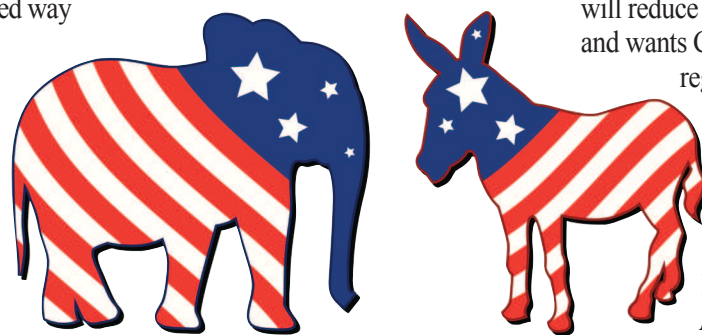
The GOP says it will change capital gains and estate tax laws to ensure farms can stay in the family. Republicans favor ending direct payment programs in favor of risk-management programs, such as crop insurance.

Democrats promise unspecified programs to “protect and enhance

family farms, a cherished way of life....” Democrats say they'll do more to support young farmers and ranchers, and will promote “environmentally sustainable agricultural practices.” It favors a “focused” safety net for farmers.

Republicans say they want to rein in the Environmental Protection Agency. The platform demands “an end to the EPA's participation in ‘sue and settle’ lawsuits, sweetheart litigation brought by environmental groups to expand the Agency's regulatory activities against the wishes of Congress and the public.” It supports legislation giving the states a larger role in protecting the environment.

Democrats take note of EPA



programs, particularly the Agricultural Worker Protection Standard, but say more needs to be done. The Democrats want to enlist farmers as “partners in promoting conservation and stewardship.” Republicans want regulators to shift from punitive enforcement to “a spirit of cooperation” with producers, processors and the public.

The Democrats promise more and stronger regulation on just about every front. The GOP says it

will reduce government regulation, and wants Congress to approve any regulation that will cost consumers more than \$100 million.

The Democrats oppose any attempt to “weaken” the Endangered Species Act. Republicans want

to block attempts by the EPA and the Corps of Engineers to “expand jurisdiction over water, including water that is clearly not navigable.”

The Democrats' platform wants to expand access to public lands, and at the same time “strengthen protections for natural and cultural resources.” It supports the creation of a trust fund to expand outdoor recreational opportunities. The Democrats want to create more jobs and billions of dollars in activity by doubling the size of the

“outdoor economy.”

Republicans want Congress to explore transferring to ranchers, timbermen and miners some public land, arguing that private owners are the best stewards of the land because conservation serves their economic interests. It favors maximizing timber harvest on public land.

We think the GOP platform is better for farmers and ranchers. But we urge caution.

Platforms are gauzy documents long on ideology and short on specifics. They are points of departure for candidates up and down the ticket who are free to put their spin on policy.

By what mechanics will either party deliver its vision?

Details are important. Even ideas we agree with can turn sour if they are realized through objectionable means.

OUR VIEW



Proposed organic livestock rules must be rewritten

USDA's proposed rules dictating how farmers and ranchers should raise organic livestock and poultry will needlessly increase expenses, make more organic farmers abandon the practice and expose livestock and poultry to disease.

In addition, many in agriculture question whether the USDA even has the legal authority to issue the rules.

USDA's National Organic Program has been successful in setting the standards for raising organically grown crops, livestock and poultry. It regulates which inputs can and cannot be used, and all farmers know the rules from the beginning. Some 3,500 farmers now produce organic livestock and poultry.

For that success, USDA must be congratulated.

The new rules, however, go far beyond those criteria and aim to force farmers to abandon modern agricultural principles and replace them with what looks good to consumers, according to the National Association of State Directors of Agriculture.

On the heels of last year's massive outbreak of avian flu at Midwest turkey and chicken farms, it appears USDA's National Organic Program did not get the message: Flocks need more protection from the spread of diseases.

The proposed organic rules do just the opposite. They require poultry to spend more time outside, where they can mingle with wild birds. In the case of avian flu, wild birds were the primary carriers of the disease.

“The proposed rule flies in the face of modern, peer-reviewed science on animal husbandry practices which should be the driving principles behind safe, efficient, sustainable and profitable food production,” NASDA wrote to USDA about the proposed organic rule.

During the avian flu outbreak, 223 flocks of turkeys and chickens were infected in 15 states. More than 48 million birds had to be euthanized, according to USDA. The overall cost of responding to the crisis and its impact on the U.S. economy was estimated at \$3.3 billion.

“In short, last year's (highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak) was the most devastating animal health incident in our nation's history,” NASDA wrote. “As written, the proposed rule changes will effectively create a contradictory regulatory framework where organic producers will have to expose their poultry and livestock to enhanced mortality, predation, animal health, and biosecurity risks or allow their organic certification to lapse.”

The rules would also have a huge impact on organic dairy farmers, the agriculture directors wrote.

The proposal would require organic livestock producers to provide “sufficient space and freedom to lie down in full lateral recumbence, turn around, stand up, fully stretch their limbs without touching other animals and express normal patterns of behavior,” NASDA wrote.

This would cause massive problems for organic dairies, the agriculture directors wrote.

“Stall systems are built at very specific dimensions for cow comfort, to allow cows to be kept as sanitary as possible, and provide for efficient manure removal,” NASDA wrote. “This proposal, which would effectively double the size requirements for dairy stalls, would lead to unsanitary living conditions and increased rates of mammary infection due to pathogen exposure.”

If anyone knows about livestock and poultry, it's the state directors of agriculture, who are often the first responders to disease outbreaks.

They are asking the USDA to rethink these proposed organic rules. For the sake of organic farmers, their comments must be heeded.

Opening new markets for American agriculture

By MARK SAMSON
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Mark Samson



If you're looking for a growth industry, check out Idaho's food and agricultural exports: The number of jobs supported by agricultural exports has been trending upward since the 1990s. More than 1 million American jobs are supported by agricultural exports, including 24,000 jobs in Idaho.

That's a substantial part of the estimated 11.5 million jobs supported by exports all across the country. Agricultural exports help support rural communities across the country, with each dollar of exports stimulating another \$1.27 in business activity.

Our state's agricultural exports support jobs in transportation, processing, packaging and many more areas; roughly 80 percent of these jobs are in non-farm sectors. So while the benefits of trade for Idaho's rural farmers and ranchers are clear, there are also positive impacts rippling throughout the entire job market stimulating our national economy.

Here in Idaho, we're accustomed to producing the best agricultural goods. Our producers keep Americans fed and clothed while contributing to the food security for nations across the globe. Their hard work is a symbol of where we come from, a reflection of our shared values, and an economic driver for our state's economy.

For the U.S. economy as a whole, agricultural exports represent a consistent success story through good times and challenges. Agricultural exports have grown much faster over the past decade than even manufacturing exports.

In fact, over the past seven years, U.S. farmers and ranchers are responsible for exporting \$1 trillion in food and agricultural goods to countries around the world. At USDA, we're working aggressively to maintain this historic momentum by expanding foreign markets to help drive demand for American-grown goods.

We're leading more trade missions and as a result generating more sales than ever before. We have saved U.S. businesses billions of dollars by removing unfair barriers to trade. In 2015 alone, USDA resolved more than 150 trade-related issues involving U.S. agricultural exports valued at \$2.4 billion. And we've worked to expand trade relations with many of the world's fastest-growing nations.

More simply, as the rest of the world continues to become more developed and populations grow, so does the demand for American agricultural exports.

That is why the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement is so important to Idaho. The TPP is a 21st century trade agreement that helps to level the playing field for American businesses while ensuring the highest labor and environmental standards. U.S. trade with the 11 TPP countries accounted for 42 percent of U.S. agricultural exports in 2014, contributing \$63 billion to the U.S. economy. Easier access to these markets with fewer taxes on our goods allows for even the smallest-scale producers to expand their reach.

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, ratifying the TPP will boost annual net farm income in the United States by \$4.4 billion.

The TPP also removes 3,900 taxes on U.S. agricultural goods, such as beef, wheat, potatoes and dairy products grown right here in Idaho. Failure by Congress to pass the agreement, however, costs the U.S. economy a permanent loss of \$94 billion each year.

With TPP, local products are able to compete on a more level playing field, reaching high-demand markets both at home and abroad. And, most important, TPP provides the United States an opportunity to help write the global rules on trade rather than nations like China.

While China moves forward with its own trade deals that don't reflect our interests and our values, TPP promises to make a lasting contribution to the American economy by giving more Americans a fair shot, more higher-paying jobs, and households with paychecks that go further.

Strong trade deals like TPP that meet our standards, reduce taxes and level the playing field for our businesses can power Idaho's economy for decades to come.

Let's hope Congress gets the message.

Mark Samson is state executive director of the Idaho Farm Service Agency. Wally Hedrick, director of Idaho Rural Development, co-authored this article.