

OUR VIEW



TRUMP



CLINTON

Clinton, Trump split over WOTUS

Hillary Clinton supports the EPA’s “Waters of the U.S.” rule. Donald Trump says he would eliminate it if elected.

The candidates made their comments in statements published Sept. 20 on farmfutures.com.

“I support the rule, but know we have to work with all stakeholders to ensure its common sense implementation,” the Democratic nominee told the publication. “I was pleased the EPA worked hard to ensure the Clean Water Rule maintains longstanding exemptions for common farming practices, while clarifying the Clean Water Act and ensuring much-needed certainty for all stakeholders so our families and businesses can rely on clean water.”

Her Republican opponent took the opposite position.

“I will eliminate the unconstitutional Waters of the U.S. rule, and will direct the Army Corps of Engineers and EPA to no longer use this unlawful rule and related guidance documents in making jurisdictional determinations,” Trump said. “I will also ensure that these agencies

respect the valid exclusions under environmental statutes for agricultural practices. As importantly, I will appoint a pro-farmer administrator of EPA.”

EPA and the Corps of Engineers worked on the rule for a couple of years in the hopes of reconciling two separate Supreme Court decisions in cases involving the Clean Water Act. The object was to better define what constitutes “waters of the United States,” which the act gives the federal government authority to regulate.

Despite the government’s protest to the contrary, farm and ranch groups worried the feds would use the opportunity to expand their authority over “waters,” and therefore adjacent lands not previously subject to regulation under the Clean Water Act. Such a designation could have profound and expensive consequences for landowners.

We’ve never been a fan of WOTUS, as it is popularly known, because the rule expands the authority of the federal government, specifically the bureaucrats the rule charges with making the determinations.

The attorney general of North Dakota

— joined by Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, South Dakota and Wyoming — filed suit. On Aug. 27, North Dakota U.S. District Judge Ralph Erickson granted a preliminary injunction delaying the rule’s implementation.

In his ruling, Erickson said the states were likely to succeed on the merits because the EPA had adopted an “exceptionally expansive” regulatory scheme, allowing the EPA to regulate “waters that do not bear any effect on the ‘chemical, physical and biological integrity’ of any navigable-in-fact water.”

Now it’s up to the courts to decide. That won’t happen before the election. Should the rule stand, the next president will decide how the rule is implemented.

Hillary Clinton supports the rule, and Donald Trump doesn’t.

WOTUS is just one important issue. Before casting their vote, farmers and ranchers should factor those positions as well as the candidates’ positions on trade, immigration, taxes, private property and environmental issues.

Editorial Board

Guest comment

Duane Grant



GMO labeling rules that matter and rules that don’t

By DUANE GRANT
For the Capital Press

Some people can pick between Coke and Pepsi in blind taste tests. Only a few can explain what separates bourbon from whiskey. And it often takes a parent to know which twin is which.

Yet nobody — absolutely nobody — can tell the difference between sugar that comes from GMO crops and sugar that doesn’t.

You can look at the sugar with your eyes. You can taste it with your mouth. You can even have expert scientists study it at the molecular level using ultra-powerful gas-spectrometer analysis.

And still, nobody can tell the difference.

So why would anybody want the U.S. Department of Agriculture to try?

A few anti-biotech activists are demanding that USDA make the futile attempt, as part of a new federal GMO disclosure law. Over the next few months, regulators will propose a series of specific rules — and one of the first they’ll have to consider involves refined products.

“USDA’s biggest task in writing the rule may be deciding whether highly refined products like beet sugar, soybean oil, and high fructose corn syrup would need to be labeled because they are derived from genetically modified plants,” wrote Agri-Pulse, a weekly newsletter.

This may be a big task, but it has a simple answer: Putting GMO labels on highly refined products is pointless.

In July, President Obama signed the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act, passed a few weeks earlier by bipartisan majorities in Congress.

It wiped out the threat of states creating a confusing patchwork of expensive and contradictory regulations for labeling food with GMO ingredients. In return, the law mandated national standards — and now it’s up to USDA officials to propose what this will mean in practice.

Logic would suggest that a food should carry a GMO label only when some element of it can be traced back to a GMO source.

With highly refined products, however, this is impossible — and sugar offers a great example of why.

I grow sugar beets on about 7,000 acres in Idaho, and also belong to a cooperative that supplies about 10 percent of America’s sugar.

We prefer to grow GMO beets because they make economic and environmental sense, helping farmers like me to fight weeds and conserve natural resources as we produce more food on less land than ever before.

When we harvest our beets, we pull up the conical roots that contain a high concentration of sucrose. Next we slice them into strips that look like french fries. Then we boil these pieces, freeing the sucrose from the fiber. Finally, we evaporate the water and crystallize the sucrose, producing the pure white sugar that you buy in grocery stores.

By the time this intense process of refinement converts our crops into granules of sugar, it has erased any indication that the original plant was the product of biotechnology.

Even if it didn’t, it wouldn’t much matter: GMO foods are safe and healthy to eat, according to everybody who has examined the matter, from the American Medical Association to the World Health Organization.

Yet nothing distinguishes the sugar of GMO beets from the sugar of organic beets. They are totally the same, all the way down to the molecular level.

So why would we want to label sugar as GMO or non-GMO? It doesn’t make any sense.

It would also be a lie.

We label products to inform consumers about their contents. Slapping a GMO label on a package of sugar, however, would reveal nothing about the makeup of the sugar. It would simply identify a mode of agricultural production.

That’s not a label for food. That’s a label for a farming practice, which is not the same thing. Pretending otherwise is either an act of ignorance or an act of deception, and it’s outside the scope of the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act, too.

As regulators develop the particular rules that will govern the details of the new federal law, they may encounter a number of thorny questions with no obvious answers.

The labeling of highly refined products, however, is not one of them.

This is a clear case of a rule that doesn’t need to be written.

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OUR VIEW



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife File
This 2014 photo shows a female wolf from the Minam pack outside La Grande, Ore., after it was fitted with a tracking collar.

Wolves thrive even without lawsuits

You must forgive us if we feel a bit gobsmacked every time a pro-wolf group runs to the judiciary to complain that their favorite apex predator isn’t getting enough love from wildlife managers.

It is an act aimed at getting publicity and raising money and has little or nothing to do with the welfare of gray wolves in the West.

The wolves are doing just fine. Really.

There is no shortage of gray wolves. Some 55,000 live in Canada, and 10,000 or so are in British Columbia alone. Up to 11,000 live in Alaska. An estimated 4,000 roam the Great Lakes region of the U.S. More than 1,200 more are in Montana and Idaho. The populations in Washington state and Oregon are growing at an annual rate of more than 30 percent, meaning they will double every few years. Wolves have even taken up residence in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

So what, exactly, is the problem? The pro-wolfers appear to have won the battle, and the war. Why are they pressing their case against wildlife managers for not providing “adequate” protection for wolves?

In our opinion, it’s about money. Environmental and conservation groups can never declare victory and go home.

They can never congratulate themselves for a “mission accomplished” and move on with their lives. That’s not how it works.

How it works is the wolf cause is held up as a “matter of the life and death,” and is usually accompanied by a plea for money.

The irony is the gray wolf would have succeeded even if radical conservation groups never existed.

If a conservation group were to tell supporters, “Yep, the gray wolf populations are now in good shape, thanks to us (and a poorly written Endangered Species Act). It’s time to get back to our lives,” that group would never be able to raise a penny. Instead, their money pleas will continue, along with efforts to stop livestock grazing on public land. Because of poorly written federal laws and a judiciary that is easily swayed by fuzzy logic, these groups will continue.

The irony is the gray wolf would have succeeded even if radical conservation groups never existed. By reintroducing wolves to Idaho and Yellowstone National Park and protection from wildlife managers, the wolf population would have increased even without conservationists hollering from the back seat.

Wolves are robust, smart and have a survival instinct unsurpassed in nature. Because they live in packs and follow food sources, they spread naturally across the landscape. In fact, they were never reintroduced in Washington and Oregon; they dispersed from Idaho and British Columbia naturally. If they find food, they will stay. If they don’t, they will move on.

A relatively small number of wolves have created problems by preying on livestock, killing sheep and cattle. If every one of those wolves had been killed immediately, the overall population would still be rapidly growing.

Yet in Oregon, wolf groups are again heading to court, arguing that wildlife managers are not providing adequate protection. Note: Wolves will not be killed anywhere in Oregon without the express permission of wildlife managers. In all phases of the state wolf plan, non-lethal methods of stopping wolves from attacking livestock must be undertaken before lethal removal will even be considered.

In our book, that’s good protection for wolves.

So it goes. Lawsuits, fundraising, even the occasional mindless threats against anyone who happens to get caught up in the issue. And all the while wolves are doing just fine.