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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Another environmental pipe dream

We've heard the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency called a lot of things, but lax isn't one of them.

If anything, the EPA has gone overboard time and again as it has tried to put the screws to farmers, ranchers and foresters across the West. Witness the What's Upstream boondoggle in which the EPA funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars to an effort aimed at getting a new law passed in the Washington Legislature. The campaign offered untruths — that all farmers are polluters, among them — and photos from outside Washington to “bolster” its case.

Comes now Northwest Environmental Advocates, which says the EPA and another agency have been slacking and need to



Courtesy of Cow Palace Dairy

At a cost of \$500,000, the Cow Palace Dairy near Sunnyside, Wash., is rebuilding a storage lagoon to prevent nitrates from seeping into the groundwater. It will have two layers of synthetic liner, plus a middle layer that will detect leaks. The dairy is also rebuilding eight other lagoons in the next few years at a total cost of about \$4.5 million.

whip the Washington Department of Ecology into action. The environmental group has sued EPA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration asking a judge to withhold federal

funds from Ecology because it hasn't imposed best management practices on Washington farmers, ranchers and foresters.

The environmentalists' demands came in the form of a

lawsuit in which they claim that “nonpoint source pollution is a serious and widespread problem.” Then the lawsuit's argument stumbles over its own facts. It admits that only 2.8 percent of the state's rivers and streams have even been checked for pollution — and that was in 2008.

That's not much of an argument. We consistently see environment groups using outdated and incomplete information to argue how farmers and others are polluting. It seems to us that if they were interested in stopping pollution, they should look for it first.

We can't speak for all farmers, but we know that a farmer who is found to be polluting will do his, or her, level best to rectify it. Just one example is the Sunnyside, Wash., dairy that will

spend upwards of \$4.5 million to double-line its lagoons as part of a legal settlement. Other dairies in the area will do the same thing.

Our suspicion is that Northwest Environmental Advocates dreams of someday telling farmers and ranchers — and everyone else — how to do their business. In its lawsuit, the group wants the EPA and NOAA to force Ecology to write best management practices for farmers and ranchers.

In our opinion, the environmentalists are really following their pipe dream and aiming for two “best management practices.”

1. Stop farming.
2. Stop ranching.

They may not like the result of those so much:

3. Stop eating.

OUR VIEW



Associated Press File

Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Mont., speaks with a supporter in Billings, Mont., as he campaigns for re-election earlier this year. Edging closer to completing his Cabinet, President-elect Donald Trump announced his choice of Zinke as Interior secretary Dec. 15.

Zinke a solid choice for Interior post

Ryan Zinke, a retired Navy SEAL and one-term congressman from Montana, is Donald Trump's pick to lead the Department of Interior.

An avid outdoorsman, Zinke caught the attention of Trump's oldest sons, Donald Jr. and Eric, who are also hunters. That reportedly tipped the balance toward Zinke, and away from Washington Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

We think McMorris Rodgers would have been an excellent choice. Nonetheless, we are pleased that Trump has picked a Westerner, particularly one who has been critical of the federal government's land management policies.

The Department of the Interior includes the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It controls 20 percent of the country's land mass.

Zinke holds diverse positions that defy efforts to peg him.

He opposes the controversial

Waters of the U.S. rule, which if it were not being blocked by the court would vastly increase the federal government's authority over private land use. He supports responsible development of energy resources on public lands.

He believes federal lands should stay in federal hands, a position that runs afoul of the Republican National Committee platform but agrees with Trump's views.

We've never been keen on the idea either. That's not because we're big fans of the federal government's current management, but because we think in the long run natural resource interests will be better and more uniformly served by federal control. We can't imagine ranchers and loggers in Oregon, Washington or California would get a better shake from the liberal politicians who control those states.

Zinke says the real issue isn't ownership of the land, but proper management of the land. If confirmed, he'll have a lot to say about how the BLM manages

that land, and undo some onerous regulations. He wants public lands to be accessible to all Americans, but wants to ensure ranchers who lease BLM grazing lands get a fair deal from their landlord.

That seems all anyone can really ask for, or expect.

“I will work tirelessly to ensure our public lands are managed and preserved in a way that benefits everyone for generations to come,” Zinke said in a statement. “As inscribed in the stone archway of Yellowstone National Park in Gardiner, Mont., I shall faithfully uphold Teddy Roosevelt's belief that our treasured public lands are ‘for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.’”

Zinke often describes himself as a Teddy Roosevelt Republican and conservationist. He should do fine as secretary as long as he remembers that Roosevelt believed public lands should be managed for multiple uses that include conservation, but also grazing, logging and mineral extraction.

Consumers will speak for agriculture

By BRIAN QUIGLEY
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Brian Quigley

American agriculture today is by no means a unified group of farmers, ranchers and primary food producers that comprise a united front.

The group runs the gamut from GMO farmers, non-GMO conventional farmers, farmers who farm both GMO crops along with non-GMO crops, large corporate farming businesses and small family farms all the way to organic and biodynamic farmers with separate groups of ranchers, livestock related industries, primary food processors and similar primary agricultural industries mixed in between the extremes.

Hardly a unified, harmonious membership with the same perception of what direction American agriculture needs to take.

With that as the backdrop, it becomes next to impossible to speak with a united voice on behalf of American agriculture. Agricultural interest groups must somehow determine which specialized agricultural interest to support, as many are diametrically opposed.

The recent edition of the Capital Press is a good example of the complexity of American agriculture today. There is an article on why GMO alfalfa has not yet seen the wide acceptance by growers as genetically modified versions of corn, soybeans, cotton and sugar beets. The article sites different reasons including export markets being reluctant to accept genetically modified products.

In the Opinion section of the same week, there is another article, “Speaking a little louder to food companies” that suggests the decision the Dannon Co. is making is simply lacking the necessary input from their suppliers and that the solution is for suppliers feeding GMO feedstock to “turn up the volume.”

However, turning up the volume on this one side means turning down the volume on the side of the dairy farmers who do not feed GMO feedstocks. It begs the question if Farm Bureau may be too broad of a title.

The Dannon Co. (Dannon USA) is a subsidiary of Groupe Danone — a multi-national corporation headquartered in France that has a history in food products that goes back almost 100 years in Europe and 75 years in the U.S. Dannon USA is a part of a worldwide food organization that includes consumer products such as yogurt, beverage companies such as Evian and Volvic, and nutritional and infant food formulations.

Additionally, Groupe Danone owns an 85 percent share of the U.S. organic dairy company Stonyfield Farms. One can go to the Stonyfield Farms website and make use of the interactive supplier map, which gives the consumer information about farmers with information about the farms, families and products in the

Stonyfield supply chain.

I do not see this as an example of Dannon's failure to listen to suppliers. One further point that I wish to make about Groupe Danone and Dannon Co. is that if you look at the corporate hierarchy you will find that the upper echelon of Dannon USA management comes from Groupe Danone's vast international group of businesses and have a decidedly international business approach.

As witnessed by the slow acceptance of GMO alfalfa in international markets, it should be no great surprise that Dannon USA made the decision that they made in switching to non-GMO feed for the cows producing milk for certain of their products.

I agree with Ms. Perry that modern corporate marketing executives could benefit from some down-to-earth discussions about the facts of agricultural life with suppliers.

However, I would find it difficult to imagine Dannon USA not having determined that they could support such a decision from a supply perspective that would allow them to make the switch without putting their present and future production in jeopardy. I would be curious to know if Dannon USA Sourcing had any discussions with their suppliers, letting them know of their desire to make the label change and allowing them to continue as suppliers if they changed their feeding practices (as ultimately it is a change of agricultural practice, what feed you give the cows, that we are talking about here).

Apparently not all animal feed producers are producing genetically modified products. I am not referring to organic producers, I am saying that there are conventional growers willing to grow non-GMO feed crops. They are part of today's American agriculture, too. Yet they are being overlooked in the polarization of organic versus GMO.

This move by Dannon USA may well be a pivotal moment in the direction of American agriculture. The decision will now play out in the marketplace where it will end up either being a good marketing idea or a bad one.

A good idea in global trade terms means profitability for Dannon USA and the shareholders of Groupe Danone. A bad idea means a marketing failure that results in a loss of revenue and market share and the corporate executives behind the failed plan likely losing their jobs.

You can turn up the volume as loud as you wish, but the consumer's dollar at the point of sale is what will direct the future path of non-GMO and GMO feedstock in this case.

Brian Quigley of Camano Island, Wash., has a lifelong involvement in agriculture.

Readers' views

Merry Christmas from Trump administration

Farmers, ranchers and agriculture in general will receive a belated Christmas present in January.

President-elect Donald Trump will be sworn in Jan. 20, and on that day and the nomination pro-

cess will begin for the new director of the EPA: Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt. Pruitt understands the illegal precedent set by Obama's former EPA Director Gina McCarthy, who was the face of Obama's global warming/climate change initiative. EPA issued regulations and rules that were not authorized by Congress. Some

were stayed by federal court orders.

Under Director Pruitt, the EPA will work with farmers, ranchers, and agriculture with the full realization that it is these entities that are delivering the safest, most inexpensive food products to the American public, as well as exports to other countries.

The public can expect

more sympathetic public hearings, a thorough understanding of the challenges these farmers, ranchers and companies face, and direct access to the EPA, and through their congressmen.

It is a Merry Christmas present to agriculture from the new administration.

William Riley
Soap Lake, Wash.