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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

'Food system' works just fine, thank you

Washington state legislators are in a bind. They are checking every pants pocket and all of the Capitol's couch cushions looking for change.

The reason: They need to scrape together enough cash to keep the state Supreme Court off their backs after it ordered them to spend more on education.

Since the Legislature is looking for ways to save money, we have a suggestion. Reject House Bill 1562, which would continue the state food policy forum.

First some background. In 2012, then-Gov. Christine Gregoire directed state agencies to get together and examine food policy and food-related programs and issues.

Five years later, that simple concept has burgeoned into



Washington State Food System Roundtable. Not one of the 28 members is a farmer, yet they produced a draft prospectus laying out how the "food system" ought to operate over the next 25 years.

Among the recommendations:

- Support breastfeeding.
 - Decrease "toxic diesel soot" from food-related transportation.
 - Increase the number of "climate friendly" farmed acres.
 - Increase fish populations.
 - Reduce or eliminate tax incentives for non-food crops.
- You get the idea. There are

many ideas but few relate to food.

The irony about food system forums and roundtables and other similar efforts is the U.S. has the best food system in the world. All a person has to do is visit a grocery store. Plentiful fresh meats, fruits and vegetables are available year-round, prices are reasonable, customers have a wide choice of items and organically grown items are widely available for those who prefer them.

For people who need it, help is readily available in the form of SNAP food stamps and WIC coupons for mothers of young children.

Many markets even help customers bag their groceries. For customers who cannot make it to the store, some grocers offer delivery.

We're not sure what the food

policy forum can do to improve it. Probably nothing.

That's why we think it prudent that the legislature just let the forum, and its \$259,000 budget, quietly fade away.

It's not about feeding children in need. It's not about helping farmers produce more affordable food. It's seems to be mainly about far-ranging discussions and producing reports.

No matter what this forum advocates, the real food system, which includes farmers, ranchers, processors, distributors and retailers, will continue to feed Washington's 7.1 million people.

And they will continue to be sustainable and environmentally friendly, not because the legislature or some food system forum told them to, but because it's the right thing. They've been doing it for generations.

OUR VIEW



Pre-emption of local GMO regulations must remain

Biotech critics are calling on Oregon lawmakers to overturn a prohibition against local government restrictions on genetically engineered crops because the state has not enacted regulations.

Such regulation that is required should come from the state. Voters with little first-hand agriculture experience can be easily swayed by emotional arguments short on facts and long on fear mongering.

Legislators agreed.

In 2013, the Oregon Legislature passed a law that pre-empted cities and counties from setting their own rules over seeds, which blocked most local ordinances banning genetically modified organisms, or GMOs.

Groups that opposed the pre-emption bill say state inaction since it was passed has justified the passage of House Bill 2469, which would carve out an exemption allowing local GMO regulations.

"Oregon farmers can't wait another four years to protect themselves from this harm," said Amy van Saun, a legal fellow at the Center for Food Safety nonprofit group.

Beyond ideological resistance to GMOs, the practical concern for organic growers and some conventional farmers is a fear that their crops will be contaminated through cross-pollination.

That's a reasonable fear, as accidental contamination of a farmer's organic crops would render them unsellable

in the organic market. But there is scant evidence that anyone in Oregon has yet been so harmed.

In 2015, Oregon lawmakers passed House Bill 2509, which created mediation protocols for growers who believe nearby farming practices are interfering with their operations.

Because of an error in that law, the Oregon Department of Agriculture actually lacked the authority to implement the program.

Nonetheless, since the law was passed the agency has received no requests for mediation under the program. Growers can seek similar mediation through the USDA, but none have expressed interest to that agency, either.

It is possible that growers are working out problems with their neighbors without involving government. That's what good neighbors do.

The lack of official complaints does not minimize the potential for cross-pollination contamination or other issues. And the unintended release from field trials of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass that has taken hold in Malheur and Jefferson counties is evidence that things can get out of control.

We are not arguing against a reasonable regulatory scheme that does not favor one type of crop or farming practice over another.

We are against 36 separate regulatory schemes, particularly those that impose outright bans.

Managing water resources: Where do we go from here?

Oregon Ground Water Association

Guest comment

Oregon Ground Water Association

In recent months, water in Oregon has become a topic of much interest, ground-water in particular.

Some opinions have painted a dire picture of the state of the water resources in Oregon, and have cited poor management by the Oregon Water Resources Department as the cause. The Secretary of State recently completed an audit of the OWRD, with findings that basically show the department to be understaffed and overworked.

The members of the Oregon Ground Water Association (OGWA), made up of ground water professionals of every discipline and representing the state's ground water specialists, see things from a very different perspective. Currently there are many groups and parties actively pursuing more sustainable water use practices throughout Oregon. The question now being posed is: "Where do we go from here?"

The OGWA would encourage Oregon's water management to focus on long-term sustainability, considering all water uses and users equally. The first step for improving management of this vital resource is developing a better understanding of water use in the state. The OGWA is in support of providing additional money to the OWRD from the state's general fund specifically targeted to improve data collection and research to further our knowledge in the use of this resource.

A recommendation from the OWRD audit included improvements in the well inspection program on newly constructed wells. Coupled with the need for improved information as the basis for water management standards, the OGWA also supports efforts to review every newly constructed well report to ensure compliance with well construction standards. A review of every well log is important to ensure the standards are consistently followed and to prevent further declines of water levels, which in some areas are attributed

to commingling of aquifers in improperly constructed wells.

Ground water reserves may also be increased through the processes of aquifer recharge (AR) and aquifer storage and recovery (ASR). These applications, supported by the OWRD and the OGWA, involve taking surface water during low-demand times and storing it underground for use when ground-water demand is much higher. AR and ASR are processes which hold much promise for stabilizing and maintaining ground water supplies throughout the state.

The OGWA also supports statewide conservation efforts. While OWRD has the task of managing Oregon's water resources, everyone who uses water in Oregon has the responsibility to use water without waste. There are many organizations, agencies and utilities that are actively promoting and funding projects to improve the efficiencies of irrigation water delivery and application. The OWRD, through Senate Bill 839, has provided \$8.89 million in funding for irrigation efficiency projects, helping to improve water use efficiencies.

The OGWA is encouraged by the improved efficiencies and management of water use in Oregon. However, continued improvements in our understanding, and in the evolution of how we use this resource must endure. The OGWA would like to encourage Oregon residents to support advancement in sustainable management and water use practices in this state.

The above was written by the Government Affairs Committee of the Oregon Ground Water Association. The OGWA is a nonprofit association made up of well drillers, pump installers, geologists, hydrogeologists, engineers and others who work in the groundwater arena. The president is Michael Klobes. For more information, call 503-390-7080 or go to www.ogwasite.org.

Readers' views

Provide more balance in Trump coverage

As a dairy farmer that works hard to be informed about what is happening with this new administration, I have been following the Capital Press quite closely in the months following the election.

I am really fed up with the blanket approval you give this administration despite the fact that so far

what Trump has presented agriculture with is anything but positive.

1. He waited until a couple days before inauguration before even announcing the Secretary of Agriculture, a warning signal that he has placed agriculture and food policy at the bottom of his priority list.

2. He wants to and is actively seeking to export and incite the workforce that all sectors of our agricultural system heavily depend on with no mention of implementing an effective legal system for people that

are here now working on America's farms.

3. I found the title of last week's front page article "Ag reaction split on Trump's withdrawal from TPP" to be far from accurate and actually quite misleading. Most of the reaction in the article is negative. Ag groups and individual farmers are freaking out about the loss of potential trade opportunities for commodities and the labor issue and you are failing to recognize it and cover it honestly.

4. Your failure to cover the human

side of the negative rhetoric that has been spewed at the workforce we depend on in agriculture is beyond unethical. These people work their tails off to produce America's food. They deserve some respect and they deserve to have agriculture stand up for them.

Cover the issues pertaining to agriculture and Trump in a more honest, balanced fashion, please! There are people in ag who aren't happy about the writing on the Trump wall!

Rebecca Lammpan
Bruneau, Idaho

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.