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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Stop adding jobs to Oregon Department of Agriculture

The list of chores activists have for the Oregon Department of Agriculture is growing all the time. Among them are regulating genetically modified crops, canola and water quality. Now they want ODA to regulate the use of antibiotics in livestock.

The way the activists' agenda is growing, pretty soon the state will be doing everything the USDA and U.S. Food and Drug Administration already do, and more.

That's the problem. USDA and the FDA have the jobs of regulating agriculture and food. Those agencies have multi-billion-dollar budgets, battalions of employees and the resources to do massive jobs.

The state of Oregon doesn't. In Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget, ODA would receive \$117.4 million during the next two years. More than half of that, \$68.7 million, would come from fees, licenses and registrations that farmers, ranchers and nurseries pay. The rest comes



from the federal government, the state's general fund and even the lottery. Perhaps an ODA bake sale will be next.

Legislators have spent the past couple of months scratching around trying to balance a profoundly unbalanced state budget. As it now stands the

state budget is \$1.7 billion out of balance. What legislators need to do is reduce the number of things state agencies such as ODA do, not add to the list.

The antibiotic proposal is particularly troubling. Activists are convinced the FDA is doing an inadequate job of curbing

the use of medically important antibiotics in livestock. They say farmers and ranchers are overusing the drugs even though the FDA already requires farmers, ranchers, veterinarians and drug companies to work together to drastically reduce their use.

Because the state government

is cash poor, it may be presumed that the only way ODA could afford to take on extra duties such as antibiotic regulation is to charge another a fee to livestock owners. Activists certainly aren't going to pay for it.

That would be one more financial cinder block tied around the legs of ranchers and farmers during the current downturn in the agricultural economy.

The governor's proposed 2017-2019 budget already includes \$6.2 million in added fees for farmers, nurseries and ranchers. By our lights, that's already too much.

We have an idea. Let the USDA and FDA do their jobs — which include regulating agriculture at the national level — and let ODA do its job.

That idea may not meet the high standards of activist groups for purity, but it'll allow farmers and ranchers to stay in business and still provide Americans with plentiful, healthy and affordable food and fiber.

Readers' views

Congress should support biofuels

As federal policymakers begin debating the next round of farm-focused legislation, it is important to recognize the values that serve as a foundation of U.S. agricultural strength. These values not only support the sustainability of Oregon's family farms but also the communities that we live in.

Everyone knows the daily trials of being a farmer, but few recognize the long-term gambles that farms make when picking a commodity to bring to market. Even after solid, long-term planning, natural and man-made factors can dramatically impact the bounty of a harvest and whether commodity prices will keep pace with costs. In the end, the ability for all farmers to be flexible, to maximize yields, and repurpose waste is critical to our success as a farming community.

One of the great green energy revolutions of the 21st century has been the partnership between the agriculture and the energy sectors in the creation of biofuels, especially as corn ethanol has matured and become increasingly eco-friendly thanks to strong support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It's a partnership that works for the farmer and the consumer and one that needs to be protected moving forward.

Support for biofuels provides a vital market for rural communities and generates high-quality animal feed for other agricultural industries as a co-product of ethanol production.

Best of all, these fuels displace imports from hostile foreign governments and promote local investment in our own renewable resources here at home, key goals of the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Biofuel alternatives burn cleaner and thanks to greater efficiencies in U.S. agriculture, farmers can grow more biofuel on less land than ever before.

Alternative commodities, sustainability, new markets — these are the values that should drive federal policy. As family farmers in a major agricultural state, we hope that leaders in Washington, D.C., like Congressman Greg Walden, are listening.

Long-term stability in the RFS and other federal farm policies are good for all

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.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308; or by fax to 503-370-4383.

Americans and the farmers that feed them.

*Kent Madison
Madison Ranches Inc.
Echo, Ore.*

Searching for consistency

The juxtaposition of your two "Our View" opinions in the Feb. 17 edition left me somewhat confused.

In the article "Food System Works Just Fine, Thank You," you make the very clear and important point that the Washington State Food System Roundtable is comprised of 28 members and none are farmers, yet they set future food system policy. And at the cost of \$259,000.

In this case, you propose to NOT trust in the state Legislature, but allow the "real food system" (farmers, ranchers, processors, distributors and retailers) to continue to do what they have done for generations. This position being well-reasoned, in my opinion.

Yet in the "Our View" opinion "Pre-emption of Local GMO Regulations Must Remain," quite the opposite approach is taken.

Here is a case where Oregon lawmakers passed legislation in 2013 yet have not acted in four years to create a mediation procedure and authorize the Oregon Department of Agriculture to implement the program.

This does not bolster one's faith in the Legislature's ability to create law and policy that is timely, effective and superior to local counties handling their own local ordinances.

At the end of the day, you have decided to side with the legislators that certain questions that affect the lives of county residents are simply too contentious or complex for them to make an informed, unbiased decision and therefore those citizens ought to concede that the lawmakers in the Capitol are better able to sift through

all the lobbying dollars, the emotional arguments, the bad science and fear mongering and can best look out for "everyone's" interests.

It didn't seem that was your approach in the Food System Roundtable editorial.

I remain optimistic that local folks can think and act for themselves.

As local governments give up autonomy and authority it sets a template for state and federal overreach in areas such as management of federal lands from D.C. instead of formulating policy together with local ranchers, loggers, and miners.

It can open the avenue for greater federal land grabs such as Owyhee Canyonland Monument or the Cascade-Siskiyou expansion.

It can lead to federal dollars being used to portray local farmers as polluters with no heart for the environment or federal agency overreach of the Clean Water Act.

Democracy doesn't guarantee that you get your way, it is supposed to guarantee that powerful minorities don't ride roughshod over the majority.

*Brian Quigley
Camano Island, Wash.*

Control groups key in GMO studies

I commend Patricia Michl for the well-documented guest column regarding the dangers of GMO foods. (Studies Cast Doubt on GMO Foods, 2-10-2017). But Norm Groot of the Monterey Farm Bureau takes issue with Ms. Michl. He accuses her of a double standard for not mentioning anti-GMO activist organization money going into university research. (Capital Press 3-3-2017).

Where is the big money from anti-GMO activists like Greenpeace or the Organic Seed Growers Association that is going to universities for GMO studies? There is

little to none. The big money is all on the side of the biotech companies. Nevertheless the true science is likely on the side of the anti-GMO activists.

Journalist Mike Snow reported in Acres U.S.A., August 2016, page 79, that "All told, 1,803 scientific studies have reported adverse reactions to GMOs, while about 1,700 others — most conducted by industry — declared them harmless. But rare long-term studies have produced results that are troubling."

These rare long-term studies that found problems with GMOs are the Seralini and Judy Carman studies. What can explain the fact that there are hundreds of studies on both sides of this issue that reach opposite results? Samsel and Seneff in the Journal of Biological Physics and Chemistry (2015) pages 129-130 have likely found the answer. The authors tested three distinct rat chow products and nine different dog and cat chows and found contamination from the GMO dance partner glyphosate and its metabolite in all of them.

If the control group in a study is ingesting the same materials that are supposed to be tested in the experimental group, then the study is not measuring anything and it will find no statistically significant differences.

This may have happened with the industry-sponsored studies. In contrast, the Seralini and Carman studies carefully managed the control group's feed to prevent GMO and glyphosate contamination.

The Seralini and Carman studies are the gold standard for GMO research not only because of their length but also because they made sure to have a real control group.

*Tom Stahl
Waterville, Wash.*

Gates should invest in manure converter

In reference to the Janicki Bioenergy article dated March 11, I must not be understanding the details. The \$2 million price sounds like a true bargain and that amount is pocket change for Bill Gates.

As a true visionary, environmental supporter and fellow Washingtonian, why hasn't Gates invested?

*Glenn Kral
Brookings, Ore.*

Support congressional action on Cottonwood court decision

By NICK SMITH
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Nick Smith



A bipartisan group of federal lawmakers recently introduced legislation to address the so-called Cottonwood court case that is bringing desperately needed forest projects to a halt.

Congressional action is needed because the case will continue to bring desperately needed forest projects to a halt and threaten rural jobs, recreation and a variety of forest activities.

The Cottonwood case fits the mold of typical environmental litigation that exploits our complicated and counter-intuitive federal regulatory process.

Last fall the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision that orders the U.S. Forest Service to re-initiate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the planning level following the 2009 designation of critical habitat for the Canada lynx.

The case stems from a lawsuit against a forest project intended to protect a watershed in Southwestern Montana. Though there was no proof the project would actually harm the species, the 9th Circuit believed the Forest Service should have consulted with the Fish and Wildlife Service on its overall forest plan.

The decision threatens to block the multiple uses of our public lands, and will bring additional costs to agencies that are already struggling with budget shortfalls and the increasing cost of wildfire suppression. It will not bring any benefit to species, which are already protected by project-level compliance.

The Cottonwood decision could allow anti-forestry groups to secure injunctions anywhere there is a new listed species or critical habitat designation, and force the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service to engage in the lengthy, costly process of Endangered Species Act "consultation."

This consultation would not be about specific projects, but rather about the underlying forest plan, even if that plan is a decade old or more.

Then the case could be used to thwart any other forest activity that a litigant group doesn't like, from

grazing to snowmobiling. The 9th Circuit alone has 11 pending lawsuits and 26 pending "Notices of Intent to Sue" over ESA consultations.

U.S. Sens. Steve Daines, R-Mont., and Jon Tester, D-Mont., have introduced legislation to codify the position previously held by the Obama administration, stipulating that federal agencies are not required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service at a programmatic level when new critical habitat is designated or a new species is listed.

Companion legislation has also been introduced in the U.S. House by Reps. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, and Collin Peterson, D-Minn.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, 80 vegetation management projects and hundreds of millions of board-feet of timber are at risk due to the Cottonwood decision.

The 9th Circuit has already blocked a collaborative forest project based on the Cottonwood decision. Litigation has also been filed seeking to apply Cottonwood to forest management activities on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota.

Forestry associations and wildlife groups are calling for passage of this bipartisan solution because our federal lands are in need of treatment, habitat improvements and mitigation against catastrophic wildfire, insects and disease.

The Cottonwood case is yet another example of our broken system of federal land management, which for too long has failed our rural communities. We should urge Congress to pass the bipartisan legislation without delay, and move on to more comprehensive solutions that truly meet the needs of our citizens, wildlife and public lands.

Nick Smith is executive director of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advocates for active management of federal forest lands.