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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

NAFTA negotiations: Handle with care

Trade agreements can best be compared to clocks in their complexity. Negotiated over years, treaties such as the North American Free Trade Agreement are as complicated as they are important to the signatories.

Though they address many industries, their impact on U.S. agriculture are particularly important, since farm commodities and products represent a positive trade balance with many nations.

From the perspective of U.S. agriculture, the results of NAFTA, which has been in effect 23 years, have been mixed. It has benefited some commodities the U.S. sells to one trade partner and hurt trade with the other partner



Associated Press File

Tom Vilsack told the House Agriculture Committee last week that Mexico is the largest export market for U.S. dairy products and the North American Free Trade Agreement is why.

in the deal.

Tom Vilsack, president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, last week laid out the impact NAFTA has had on

U.S. dairy. The export of dairy products to Mexico since 1995 has increased tenfold. The nation now purchases \$1.2 billion in dairy products from the U.S., including nearly half of all nonfat dry milk exports, 31 percent of cheese exports and 38 percent of butterfat exports.

By any measure, that makes Mexico the most important export market for U.S. dairy farmers. Negotiators need to remember that as they rewrite NAFTA.

At the same time, dairy exports to Canada have struggled under NAFTA. Canada has a unique dairy market setup whose underlying theme appears to be protecting the Canadian industry at the expense of U.S. farmers. The recent spat over ultrafiltered

milk — which is left over after butter is made — illustrates that the U.S. and Canada are not on the same page when it comes to dairy trade. By reclassifying, and thereby repricing, ultrafiltered milk, Canadian regulators have effectively cut many U.S. producers out of that market.

Canadians say the move isn't addressed in NAFTA. U.S. producers say it should be.

Other agricultural commodities have also had mixed results under NAFTA. U.S. apples, potatoes, wine, lumber, sugar and wheat have encountered trade problems with Mexico, Canada, or both.

An effective NAFTA would have avoided those problems and others facing a variety of

industries cited by the Trump administration in announcing its intent to revisit the agreement.

The U.S. beef industry is perhaps unique in that it has thrived under NAFTA in both Mexico and Canada. That success also needs to be considered as preserved as negotiators open talks.

For farmers and ranchers, there is plenty to talk about in renegotiating NAFTA. For other industries, there is plenty as well.

Our hope is that, in re-opening those talks the progress that has been made under NAFTA is not lost in the shuffle.

Trade deals are complex documents that must be handled with a clockmaker's care. NAFTA is no different.

OUR VIEW

Good news from the ports

The Pacific Maritime Association says it has reached a three-year contract extension with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

That's good news for farmers in the Northwest. The shipment of feed, food and fiber to customers in Asia and beyond is fundamental to Western farmers. A long list of crops including hay, beef, pork, Christmas trees, apples, berries, potatoes and nuts are all shipped from West Coast ports.

It was three years ago that a labor dispute at the ports led to a work slowdown that cost farmers hundreds of millions of dollars because they couldn't ship their crops. Perishable fruit had to be dumped, hay crops piled up and producer income fell.

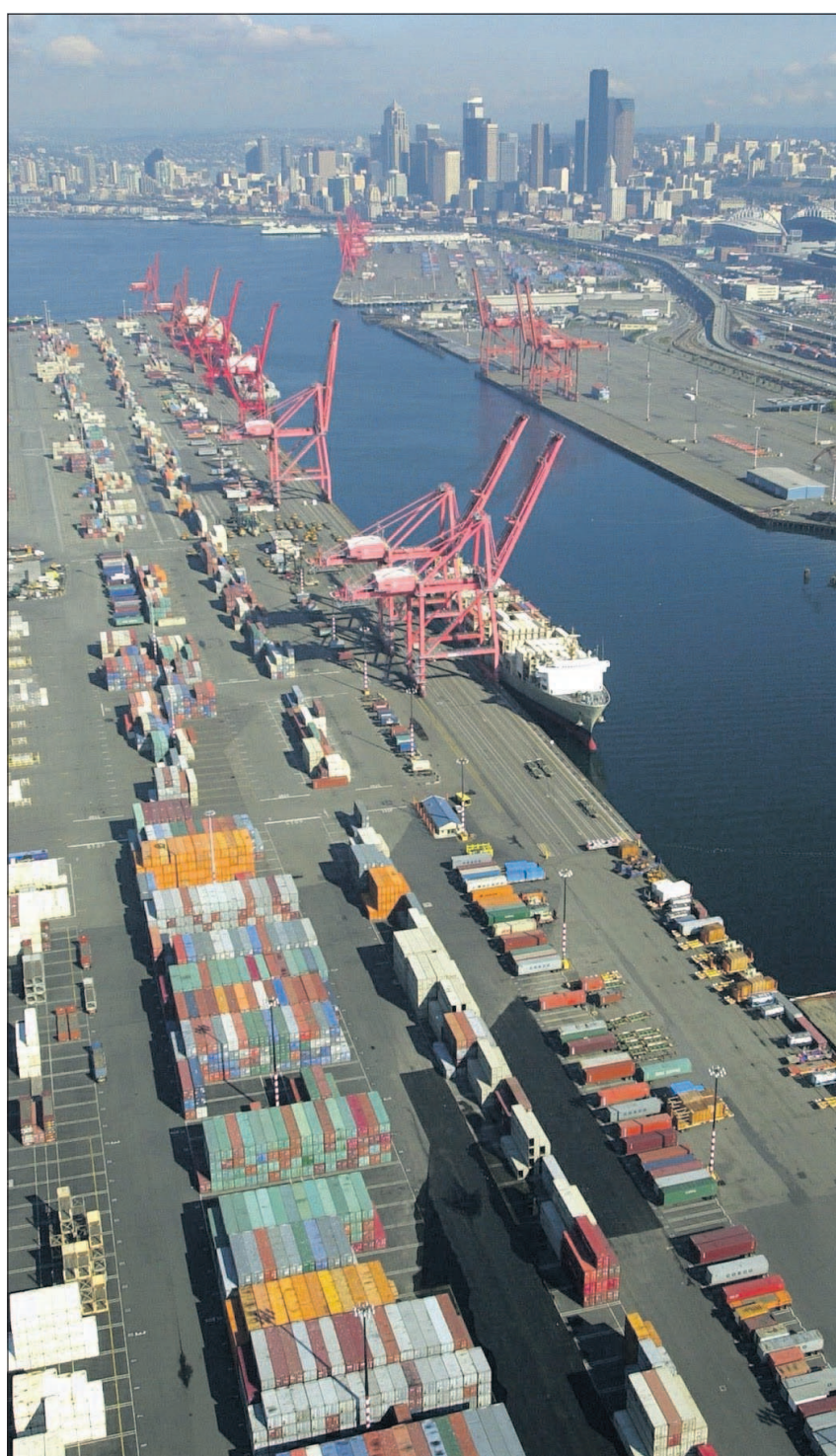
Worst of all, the disruption cost farmers market share as trading partners looked for new vendors. There are plenty of foreign competitors ready to step up. Japan started buying hay from Argentina. Korea found new sources of meat during the 2014-2015 port slowdown. Losses in meat exports alone were in the hundreds of millions of dollars each month.

"Agricultural exporters are greatly relieved that we have now removed one of the primary motivations for the West Coast meltdown of a few years ago," Peter Friedmann, executive director of the Agriculture Transportation Coalition in Washington, D.C., told Capital Press.

The contract extension covers workers at all 29 West Coast container ports. It extends until 2022 the current pact, which is set to expire in 2019.

In light of the damage it caused, the work slowdown was a misguided strategy. It hurt producers, manufacturers and retailers. It hurt port communities. It hurt the longshoremen.

We hope the contract extension signals an end to the foolishness that nearly crippled this country's agricultural trade with the Pacific Rim.



Terminal 18 at the Port of Seattle. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association have extended their contract until 2022.



A mother cow stands near her dead calf in a grazing area in Stevens County, Wash. This sight has become increasingly common in northeast Washington, which now has at least 15 wolfpacks.

Courtesy of Len McIrvine

The merciful bullet

By LEN MCIRVIN
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Len McIrvine



As I looked into the dark, pain-filled, pleading eyes of the calf lying on the ground in a dense thicket, many thoughts flashed through my mind. This had been a strong, healthy heifer calf (in human terms, she would have been a 5- or 6-year-old girl — halfway between birth and puberty, with hopefully her whole life ahead of her).

As I looked at the calf's ripped and torn, blood-soaked body, with her shoulder ripped from its joint, her hindquarters and her back and upper leg deeply punctured and lacerated with dozens of wolf bites, I had to ask myself, "Why?"

Why is this becoming a commonplace event for cattlemen and sheepmen all over the West as they see their herds ravaged by wolves?

The mother cow mournfully bellows to her unmoving, fatally wounded calf. Her udder is swollen with milk but is never again to be suckled by her baby. Showing her love and concern, the mother cow stands watch over her calf all day long, refusing to leave the area where it was attacked by wolves. Her grief-stricken cries haunt me as she continues to call to her dying baby.

Once again I ask myself, "Why?" Why this terrible waste to satisfy the desire of a few people who just hope to hear a wolf howl?

I couldn't help but think "Why" once again as the state Department of Fish and Wildlife officer asked my grandson if he could dispatch the victim, stating that he would then transport the body to the dump. What a waste of a healthy, young calf to end up in that place where she will rot or be eaten by scavengers.

I looked again at those dark, pain-filled and pleading eyes of the calf as my grandson compassionately placed the Merciful Bullet between them. Even though this is an experience I have lived through over 100 times, I still cannot accept this merciless killing of our herd by wolves.

Wolves kill whatever they want to kill, but death by wolves is slow, and horrible, and a long time coming. In the case of this

calf, she could have lived for days, or lived until the wolves came back and started eating her alive. With tears in my eyes, I am asking all the good friends, neighbors and citizens in our area, state and nation for help in ending this situation.

God has said He put man on earth to have dominion over the animals. For those of you who believe there is a Lord, you must assume this responsibility and demand that this terrible carnage ends and that our predators are managed to the point that our herds and flocks, our pets and our wonderful herds of game animals can survive.

There are only 3 factors involved in controlling the population density of wolves:

1. The first factor is disease and parasites, which invariably come when wolf population reaches its saturation point (these are transmittable to humans).

2. The second factor is starvation. The starvation factor kicks in at the point when there is no food source available. At this point, they become cannibalistic and start eating each other, thereby controlling their own population.

3. The third factor and the most viable and effective population control of wolves is man; but in today's political correctness, man has been taken out of the equation. This is the scenario we are facing today.

As a cattleman who has been involved with cattle all my life — nearly three-quarters of a century, I am asking for your help as we deal with the consequences of an exploding wolf population. Local control is the only answer. Let's do everything possible to assure that each county sheriff has complete control and is totally in charge of all the wolf predation that affects his citizens and their property.

Len McIrvine is a partner in the Diamond M Ranch near Laurier, Wash. He's a member of the Stevens County Cattlemen's Association in northeast Washington.

Idaho's water accounting procedures protect state's sovereignty

By GARY SPACKMAN
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Gary Spackman



On May 4, some water user organizations and delivery entities predicted in a Capital Press guest opinion that there would be "little-to-no storage water" for Boise River irrigators this summer. They said, "this year's weather conditions" and the State of Idaho's water accounting procedures "are creating a 'perfect storm' that will have 'devastating consequences,' and irrigators' 'storage water allotments' will be 'exhausted by the time natural flows in the river were depleted in June or July.'"

As it turns out, all of those dire "predictions" were wrong. Let's look at the facts:

Flood control releases have ended, the Boise River Reservoirs have filled, and the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) confirmed on July 20 that all irrigators received full storage water allotments. There is more than enough water in

the reservoirs for the entire irrigation season — for crops, for lawns, for golf courses, and for gardens — and to maintain instream flows in the Boise River. Further, since storage water use did not begin until well into the irrigation season, much of the stored water will not be used this year, but rather will be "carried over" for future use.

Is this unusual in flood years? No. As common sense tells us, in flood years there is more than enough water to refill the reservoirs after flood control releases end. And, if operational decisions result in a failure to fully refill the reservoirs, the USBR makes up shortfalls in irrigators' storage water allotments with water the USBR holds in uncontracted storage space.

The dire predictions from

last spring were based on allegations from some water user organizations that the state "developed a theory" of water accounting that "challenges our irrigators' storage water rights" and "disregards the reservoir operating plan developed over 60 years ago."

The state's system of accounting for water storage and use in the Boise River Basin is not new — it was implemented more than 30 years ago and has accounted for water storage and use every year since implementation. The state's accounting system protects all water rights and accommodates the "reservoir operating plan" by allowing the USBR to use flood water captured in the reservoirs to provide irrigators with full storage water allotments.

Some water users are advocating for changes in the state's accounting system that would injure other water users and put the federal government in charge of the use and

development of Idaho's water.

The federal reservoir system is operated for two distinctly different and often-conflicting purposes — flood control under federal law, and storage of water under state law. The state's accounting system reconciles the conflict and keeps legal control of the water in the state's hands.

The water user organizations seeking change would give the federal government final authority to decide whether water that could be used or stored in Idaho will be sent downstream to benefit other states or to satisfy federal policies. Contrary to assertions by critics of the method of accounting, the issue is not about water shortage, it is about maintaining state sovereignty over Idaho's water. We believe control over Idaho's water should remain in the hands of the State of Idaho.

Gary Spackman is the director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources.