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# Opinion

## Editorial Board

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## OUR VIEW

# Public needs 'Fresh Look' at GMO crops

**A**malgamated Sugar Co. and Western Sugar Co. are preparing a \$4 million campaign to try to change consumer perceptions about genetically modified crops.

The proposed "Fresh Look" campaign will initially target three large urban areas. If successful, it will be expanded into a \$30 million national campaign. It will focus on young mothers who make decisions about household food purchases.

"We're losing the online debate," said Idaho sugar beet farmer Duane Grant. "We can't just sit back and let this evolve independently. We have to engage."

We agree, and are impressed that the sugar industry is making such a large investment. We hope the campaign doesn't come too late to change widely



John O'Connell/Capital Press File

Genetically modified sugar beets grow in Idaho. Two sugar companies want to provide the facts about GMOs to consumers so they can make informed choices.

held attitudes against genetic modifications that are based on a lot of misinformation.

There are nine commercially available genetically modified crops — sweet and field corn, soybeans, cotton, canola, alfalfa, sugar beets, papaya, potatoes and squash.

In the 20 years since they

began to become available, the crops have been widely adopted by farmers. Less than 10 percent of the corn and soybeans planted in the United States are non-GMO varieties.

No one has forced genetic modifications onto the market. Contrary to widely held belief, farmers have voluntarily adopted

genetically modified varieties over conventional seed stock because they offer economic benefits to growers.

Certainly sugar beet growers are a prime example. Weed control is difficult with conventional varieties, requiring a great deal of manual labor. Varieties engineered to be resistant to glyphosate herbicide, though themselves more expensive, have greatly reduced labor costs and increased grower returns.

Glyphosate-resistant varieties have also helped farmers reduce the amount of herbicides they have to spray on crops, not only improving their bottomline but also the environment.

And despite what many people believe, the scientific community says there is no greater risk from foods produced with genetically modified ingredients than there

is from food produced with conventional seed stock. The USDA, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration agree.

New advances in the technology promise to increase yields, and improve crop tolerance to drought and changes in climate.

Over the years we've seen that much of the opposition to genetically modified crops is generated by animus toward the large companies, particularly Monsanto, that dominate the seed business. That's based on a perception that big is bad, and won't be easily changed.

The campaign won't change everyone's mind. Some people will never accept genetically modified crops. But an effort of this scale should at least provide consumers with facts to make an informed decision.

## OUR VIEW



# Federal government victimized Duarte in wetlands case

John Duarte has been fighting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the last four years. The issue: plowing a farm field. The Corps said the field was wetlands and the shanks used constituted filling in the low-lying areas.

On Tuesday, Duarte accepted a settlement offer that reduced his financial exposure from potentially tens of millions of dollars to \$1.1 million.

We cannot fault him for his decision to take the deal. Every farmer has to make difficult decisions that are in the family's best interests. Sometimes that means backing away from a years-long battle.

But the settlement leaves in place the basic problem of how federal agencies steam roll farmers and other landowners. In fact, it offers a perfect example of what's wrong with the system.

First, the agencies stick their victims with outrageous high fines — often tens of thousands of dollars a day. Second, they

don't allow any opportunity for an administrative appeal without the expense of going to court.

Third, they offer a "deal" the landowners can't refuse.

That's the problem, not whether Duarte moved around a little dirt in his Northern California wheat field. The

**The settlement leaves in place the basic problem of how federal agencies steam roll farmers and other landowners.**

fact that he was tagged with a multimillion-dollar fine with no opportunity to present his side of the case is unAmerican. The words kangaroo court come to mind. The old Soviet Union had a similar form of "justice."

The administration of President Donald Trump has some good people in it, many of whom promise to stick up for farmers, ranchers and landowners. They are people like Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who have met with Western farmers and ranchers

about the problems the federal government inflicts on them.

They promised to help, to find ways to change the laws and the ways the bureaucracy works.

But when it came right down to it, Duarte faced the same treatment as before.

Whether the president's name is Trump or Obama, we wonder if, in the end, it really matters. When the federal bureaucracy embraces poorly written laws such as the Clean Water Act, the

Endangered Species Act or any number of others that impose the federal will on landowners, the outcome is no different.

President Trump has promised to change these and other federal laws. So far, his batting average in Congress puts him in the minor leagues. It's clear he needs to get his act together to prevent repeats of what has happened to Duarte and his family.

Until then, citizens such as John Duarte will be writing big checks to the federal government — and the bureaucrats will be giving each other high-fives.

## Readers' views

### Lack of capital budget impacts conservation districts

As you may know, the 2017 Legislative Session ended without passing a new capital budget. That means the Palouse Rock Lake Conservation District/Kamiak Direct Seed Grant is one of several programs that did not receive funding for the period of July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2019. The cost share programs offered by the Washington State Conservation Commission will not be available until a new capital budget passes.

Statewide 52 full-time employees with various conservation districts will be laid off due to the lack of the capital budget. Landowners who have worked with conservation districts on projects that have taken years of planning not only are delayed but in some cases can lose matching funds from other sources.

The lack of action on a capital budget has real cost impacts. Our district alone has six different programs or grants that will not be funded for the next biennium (CREP; 3 DOE Grants; WSCC programs and the state portion of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program). This means landowners and resource conservation will not be funded until a solution to the Hirst court case has been agreed to by all parties.

What does this mean for our district? The portion of PRLCD/Kamiak Direct Seed Grant funding covered by the state will not be paid until the Legislature reconvenes and passes a capital budget. The next scheduled legislative session is January-March 2018.

This is not the end of state funding for the PRLCD/Kamiak Direct Seed Grant. We view it as a temporary lull until the Legislature passes a capital budget. We appreciate patience and understanding of farmers as we delay as much work as possible until we have any funding again.

We're sorry for the stress and frustration this situation causes but we're doing our best to let state elected officials know the real impacts from not having a capital budget and urge them to take action soon.

Dan Harwood  
District Coordinator  
Palouse Rock Lake  
Conservation District  
St. John, Wash.

### Farm Bureau stands up for agriculture

I am an 82-year-old retired cattleman and have been abused by the county, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and our irrigation district. I have won those battles at my own expense, however, it was not easy.

I was just doing my job trying to make a living but the agencies did not see it that way. I purchased a place full of Russian olives (that were brought in by WDFW). I cleaned them up and was leveling the land when I received a stop work order from the wetland people that I had destroyed a natural wetland, and I must restore this natural wetland. The fine was \$1,000 per day until I restored it.

To make a long story short, after two years and \$15,000 I won. The other stories are too long to tell.

My point is everybody is after Ag. Therefore in my opinion we must find a way to unite! Basically you are assumed guilty and must prove otherwise at your expense. Environmentalists and government entities along with attorneys and judges, who have no agricultural background, are going to decide your fate.

My analysis of a judge is why should he be referred to as honorable when as an attorney he has been dishonorable in his practice, therefore he should be referred to as a dishonorable judge!

My point is that the odds are against you and we are being picked off one at a time.

When I was farming I was not a member of the Farm Bureau, however, when the wetland people came after me, a board member would help me if I joined. I agreed, and we beat the county. They then asked me to be on the board, where I have been ever since — they won't let me retire!

As I have observed, there is no one left with any clout to fight your fight except the Farm Bureau.

This letter is only out of my concern for ag, as I have witnessed farmers and dairymen being put out of business one at a time and the others spending thousands of dollars to comply in order to stay in business.

Donald M. Young  
Crown Y Ranch  
Sunnyside, Wash.