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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

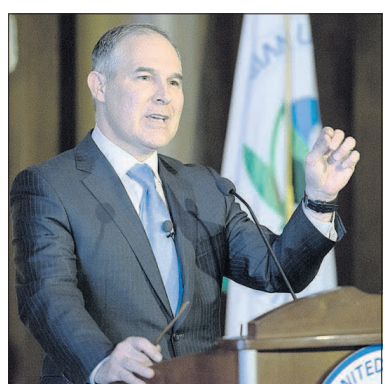
'New day' long overdue at the EPA

The New York Times last week highlighted a March 1 meeting in Washington, D.C., between officials of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Farm Bureau in the weeks before rejecting a decade-old petition to ban chlorpyrifos, the most widely used pesticide in U.S. agriculture.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt joined the meeting briefly, telling participants that it was “a new day, a new future, for a common sense approach to environmental protection.”

Common sense at the EPA is something of an oxymoron given the agency's recent history:

- Critics suggest the Farm Bureau and other groups have undue access to Pruitt, and that Pruitt is showing favor because he agreed to listen to their plea.



EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has declared “a new day, a new future, for a common sense approach to environmental protection.”

Those same critics, however, were silent when it was discovered that environmentalists had direct access to Lisa Jackson, President Obama's first EPA director, via her private email account and an official account she maintained

under an alias — Richard Windsor.

- Critics were also silent when it was revealed that EPA staffers communicated with activists by text messages in an effort to thwart public record laws.

- Al Armendariz was EPA's Region 6 administrator in 2010 when he gave a speech describing the agency's regulatory enforcement tactics. “It is kind of like how the Romans used to conquer villages in the Mediterranean — they'd go into a little Turkish town somewhere and they'd find the first five guys they saw and they'd crucify them,” he said. He resigned when a video of the speech came to light in 2012.

- In 2015 contractors working for the agency to clean up an abandoned gold mine in Colorado accidentally dumped

3 million gallons of heavy-metal laced wastewater into the Animas River. The agency eventually took responsibility for the spill and spent millions to mitigate the disaster. But, it declared itself immune to private damage claims. “From the very beginning, the EPA failed to hold itself accountable in the same way that it would a private business,” said Ryan Flynn, New Mexico Environment Department cabinet secretary.

- John C. Beale, a \$100,000-a-year lawyer for the EPA, for 13 years convinced his bosses that on Wednesdays he also worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. He went missing entirely for six months in 2008, and was gone “on assignment” from June 2011 to December 2012. He remained on

the payroll the whole time, and even was awarded a 25 percent bonus.

- The EPA funded the “What's Upstream” propaganda campaign launched by the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and Swinomish Indian tribe to advocate for greater regulations on farmers to improve water quality.

The public didn't perceive a problem with water quality, so campaign backers ginned up imagery and a fall guy that would move the public to demand increased regulations. But it was fake, and all paid for by the EPA. The agency said it didn't know what was going on, but it turns out it did.

All things considered, a new day probably isn't such a bad thing at the EPA.

OUR VIEW

A glimpse at the future of agriculture

In 1977, when the first “Star Wars” movie premiered, few — if any — viewers thought it would predict the future of agriculture.

We should explain.

In the movie, Luke Skywalker — “Our Hero” — first appeared as he was working on his uncle's “moisture farm” on a desert planet. This farm captured its water directly from the atmosphere, which was unique enough, but only Luke and his aunt and uncle ran the whole operation. The rest of the “workers” were autonomous droids, or robots. As you will recall, they did all of the work on the farm, and Luke's job was to repair them. He was going to town to get a spare part when he encountered Sand People and was rescued by Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Jedi knight.

While the rest of the story is well known, most people dismissed the idea of an automated farm was nothing more than the product of a fertile imagination and science fiction.

Fast forward 40 years, and the vision of a farm where robots and drones do much of the work no longer seems so far-fetched.

At a recent conference in Pendleton, Ore., researchers, inventors and farmers got together to contemplate the future of farming. The ideas they have developed make “Star Wars” seem old-fashioned. In the not-too-distant future, they see robotic workers harvesting fruits and vegetables and driverless tractors and combines planting and harvesting crops. Drones and sensors will identify portions of fields needing irrigation or applications of fertilizer or pesticide and call in other drones to do the job.

Ranchers will use drones to monitor the location and health of their cattle on the range and, when needed, to chase off predators such as wolves or coyotes.

Combine that with other advances in agriculture, from genetic editing of crops to use less water, fertilizer and pesticide to orchards, vineyards and berry farms that are designed for efficient mechanical harvesting, and you have a hint of what the future of agriculture holds.

These advances will not happen solely because they represent “progress.” They will address problems that farmers and ranchers face. Among those problems are a shortage of labor, the need for the more precise use of resources and, most importantly, the need to feed 7.5 billion people on the planet today and more in the future.

The possibilities are endless. They are limited only by the imaginations of agriculture's best and brightest innovators.

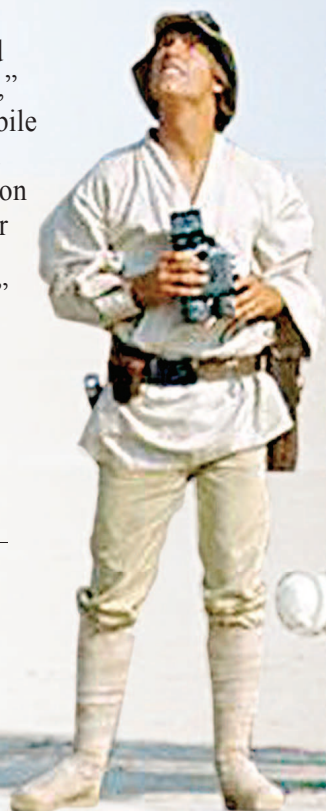
“There's a clear path toward completely automated farming,” Jake Joraanstad of Myriad Mobile Solutions, a Fargo, N.D.-based tech company, told the Pendleton gathering. “To solve the hunger problem, we have to be going there, that has to be the future.”

As technology develops in every arena of agriculture, we will see farmers and ranchers adopt it as a way to grow the food a hungry planet needs.

May the force be with us.

Wookieepedia.com

The future of agriculture? “Star Wars” character Luke Skywalker with a droid and a vaporator.



Readers' views

Collaborative needs more trust and inclusion

U.S. Forest Service “collaboratives” do not want to grant Eastern Oregon residents a vote at the table.

They want people to “participate” but not to ask for a vote in the process. That's why now, finally, when residents of Grant County ask for voting status, the Blue Mountains Forest Partners come out with defamatory statements of residents being “untrustworthy,” hoping to marginalize those trying to participate in a meaningful manner.

My mom had to sit through a shaming by the Blue Mountains Forest Partners because she was “untrustworthy,” because I question the collaboratives, and how they use economic hardship to justify restricting motorized access to the mountains of Eastern Oregon. They use “vegetative treatments” to “restore” the forest, while restricting motorized access when they help the Forest Service “develop projects.”

The collaboratives are supposed to be civil and open to diverse public input, but if that input does not align with the collaborative's stated goals, they become personal, nasty and petty.

The question is, can we get logs to the mills without “rewilding” Eastern Oregon? We did it for decades, and grew some of the healthiest wildlife populations around.

Unfortunately, the environmental community turned that on its head with their litigation strategy, and they now get to drive their message through these collaboratives, while excluding public input through voting membership.

To paraphrase a collaborative board member, “My grandmother always told me, you are the company you keep.”

The other lesson most of us learned from our grandparents was “the only thing you have is your word.”

Unfortunately, collaborative members never learned that lesson, because every time they give you “their word” they back track from it.

Eastern Oregonians should not be shamed upon requesting voting member status to “diverse and inclusive” groups, but unfortunately, that's how Eastern Oregon collaboratives operate.

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