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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

The art of the trade deal: Farmers, Trump and NAFTA

We are all about to be schooled in the art of the trade deal, and it promises to be a white-knuckle experience.

Farmers in the United States have realized a lot of benefits from the North American Free Trade Agreement, the 1994 pact between the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

It's also true that U.S. farmers who have benefited from the deal would also like it to be a bit better.

Wheat growers, for example, say the pact has opened up the Mexican market, increasing exports by 400 percent.

At the same time, they have a beef with Canada. Canadian wheat sold at an elevator in the U.S. is rated the same as if it were produced here. But U.S. wheat delivered to an elevator

in Canada is rated as feed wheat and priced accordingly.

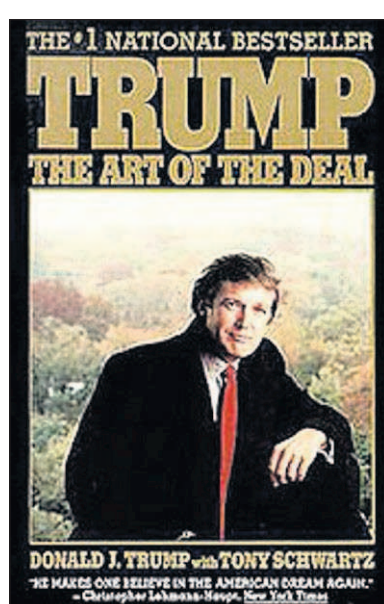
There's no incentive for U.S. farmers to take wheat to Canada, but Canadian farmers are on an equal footing with U.S. producers when they sell here.

Dairymen take issue with Canada, too. U.S. and Mexican dairy groups have a common interest in pressing for better treatment when products go north.

Everyone wants to keep what works, and fix what doesn't. But anytime you renegotiate, you run the risk of the other country's fix causing trouble. That's part of normal negotiations.

These are hardly normal negotiations.

President Trump called for talks to renegotiate NAFTA, which he sharply criticized throughout his campaign.



Last week Trump suggested that it might be necessary to withdraw from NAFTA altogether.

"Personally, I don't think we can make a deal because we have been so badly taken advantage

of," Trump said during a rally in Arizona. "I think we'll end up probably terminating NAFTA at some point."

That put farm leaders, who had supported renegotiating the pact, on edge.

"If the president were to withdraw from NAFTA, I think that would cause a lot of problems in farm country," Ben Conner, director of policy for U.S. Wheat Associates, said. "The president has a lot more negotiating experience than I do, but if they're trying to make counterparts in Canada and Mexico concerned, it also has us alarmed."

Pick up the president's book, "The Art of the Deal."

Written in 1987, the book outlines Trump's 11-step formula for negotiations. Step No. 5 is "use your leverage"

— walk away if you can't get what you want.

"The worst thing you can possibly do in a deal is seem desperate to make it," Trump wrote. "That makes the other guy smell blood, and then you're dead."

Is Trump threatening to leave NAFTA to gain leverage, or will he walk away in the hope of make a better, bigger deal some other day?

We don't know if Trump has Canada's and Mexico's attention, but he's rattled the farmers and ranchers who depend on NAFTA and other trade deals for their livelihoods.

There's ample reason to be wary. Trade negotiations in the age of Trump are not for the faint of heart.

Standby for the next White House tweet.

OUR VIEW



Albert and Eugenia Voss in the 1940s. Their Oregon farm was founded in 1853.

Courtesy of Jeannette Voss

Sustainability more than a word

"Sustainable" is in the eye of the beholder. These days it appears almost everywhere, letting consumers know that, well, the producers are sustainable.

But what does that really mean? Is it one of those squishy words like "natural," or does it have a tangible meaning?

One definition of sustainability we like is from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program at the University of California-Davis.

"The goal of sustainable agriculture is to meet society's food and textile needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," according to the program. "Practitioners of sustainable agriculture seek to integrate three main objectives into their work: a healthy environment, economic profitability, and social and economic equity."

That makes sense. If a farmer or rancher messes up the land, loses money and treats workers unfairly, he or she won't last long in business.

Conversely, if a farmer or rancher is a good steward of the land, makes money and treats workers fairly, he or she will be in business a long time.

Over the years, we've found the vast majority farms and ranches to be sustainable by any measure. In

the West, farm and ranch longevity is often measured not just in years or decades, but in generations. It is common to talk to farmers and ranchers who are the third, fourth or fifth generations on their family operations. We've lost track of how many individual farmers we've met who can measure their experience in decades. Having a half-century of farming experience is not all that unusual.

By our lights, they don't need anyone to tell them they are sustainable. All they have to do is look at the family photographs to see how many generations have successfully operated on the same farm or ranch.

A couple of items we published during the past several weeks stand out in any discussion of sustainability.

The first was about a 164-year-old farm in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Joseph and Elizabeth Voss arrived in the Oregon territory from Wisconsin, covering the 2,000 miles by wagon train. They started their farm in 1853, six years before Oregon became a state. Since then, Voss Farm has raised a variety of crops, including cattle, sheep, grains, berries, fruits and Christmas trees.

The Vosses' descendants, Jeannette Voss and Julie Edy, still operate the farm, growing cereal grains. It was honored this year as a Sesquicentennial Farm by the

Oregon Century Farm and Ranch Program, a partnership of the Oregon Farm Bureau Foundation for Education, the State Historic Preservation Office and the Oregon State University Archives.

It is one of 39 sesquicentennial farms and 1,200 centennial farms recognized in Oregon.

Another item we noted was about a wheat farm in Eastern Washington. Marci and Lonnie Green operate Green View Farm Inc. near Fairfield, Wash. Marci is also vice president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers. The caption on a photo about a media tour of the farm noted that their son, Jordan Green, is the seventh generation of farmers in the family. He and his brother, Derek, who's still in college, are carrying on the family tradition on the 5,500-acre farm, which was homesteaded in 1878 by Rufus and Cordelia Kegley.

Yes, that's seven generations, and in all likelihood, there will be more to come.

"We work hard to be environmentally sustainable and economically sustainable, too," Marci Green said. "That's what we strive for, is to have the opportunity for them to continue in farming."

As the Vosses and the Greens — and more than 100,000 other Western farm families — demonstrate, sustainability is a way of life.

Readers' views

Wolf problem recalls past coyote battles

N. Cascades elk plan doesn't follow state law

The cattle ranchers of the Western states are taking a beating from the wolves at the hands of the animal rights advocates, environmentalists and Fish and Game.

This battle with the wolves is reminiscent of the battle of the sheep ranchers in the western U.S. in the late 1960s and the 1970s with the coyotes. The federal trapping program was cut back as well as increasing the regulations limiting or outright stopping the use of certain traps and other devices to kill the coyotes attacking the sheep.

The leaders of the national and some state wool growers associations met with President Nixon and others and were given assurances that there would be a reversal of those actions, but the president reneged on his promises.

The sheep ranchers, in their frustration, decided to take a drastic step to show those demanding and making the rules and the public the devastation that coyotes wrought on sheep. The sheep ranchers started documenting the kills — date and location — and putting the carcasses in cold storage. From the Western states to Washington D.C. the carcasses were shipped and then unloaded at the White House.

Those who think compensation solves the problem are so wrong and short-sighted. The compensation for the killed livestock is a pittance compared to the loss, not just for the day, but in the long term and on many levels.

Unfortunately, in today's world the farmers and ranchers are dealing with those who have their own agenda, lack common sense and are far removed from the real world.

Several years ago, a wise Navajo sheep rancher told a group of his fellow sheep ranchers that when the last man dies, a coyote will be picking at his bones. That could apply to the wolves.

*Vermette Marsh
Davis, Calif.*

What's missing in the Draft North Cascades Elk Herd Plan (Capital Press Sept. 1)? Obeying the law?

The draft just lists problems absent any workable solutions. Not one word in draft on how the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) plans to obey RCW 77.04.012, which mandates DFW elk shall not infringe on the right of a private property owner to control the owner's private property.

Not one word how DFW plans to prevent potential loss to the beef and dairy industry from spread of elk hoof rot now confirmed in the county.

Not one word on safety and welfare concerns of their own mismanaged elk, some inflicted and suffering with deadly hoof rot disease. Again no solutions. After 15 years of elk suffering from hoof rot still no answers in southwest Washington.

Not one workable solution on how DFW intends to cut 90 elk/vehicle collisions per year by 50 percent in 5 years.

Not one word how DFW plans to fully compensate landowners for damages caused by elk intrusions on the valley agriculture or highway elk/vehicle collisions from Sedro Woolley to Concrete and Sedro Woolley to Acme.

DFW's present compensation method pays a very small percent of actual damages. Efforts to achieve full compensation are impossible because of meaningless bureaucratic red tape.

For 7 years I have been unable to raise beef cattle on 40 acres of my farm, resulting in a large net loss of farm income due to elk continuously damaging fences. DFW refuses to compensate for these damages. We are liable to keep our beef cattle off the highway and neighbors' properties. Shouldn't DFW be held to the same standard?

Citizens have to obey the law. Shouldn't DFW obey the law, RCW77.04.012? State law mandates it.

*Randy Good
Sedro Woolley, Wash.*

Letters policy

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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.