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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Signs of the times in California

Since its passage in 1986, California Proposition 65 has been a prime example of why voter-passed initiatives are, more often than not, half-baked, useless and misdirected. Instead of building public confidence in government, they only make government look silly and inept.

Under Prop 65, companies are required to post a sign notifying the public of the presence of cancer-causing substances.

The problem arises from the state's interpretation of that requirement. Included are Disney Downtown, the shopping and dining area of Disneyland in Anaheim. Posted there is a sign that dutifully notifies the public of the existence of cancer-causing substances. What they might be, or where, is not spelled out, making the sign approximately worthless.

Most people ignore the sign, based on its bizarre nature, but the ones who read it just laugh and



say something like, "Well, that's California for you."

Or, more accurately, "That's another half-baked initiative for you."

While most people would agree with the public's "right to know" — Prop 65's supposed purpose — they would also agree that the facts associated with such warnings ought to be meaningful, pertinent and, most important of

all, accurate.

That was among the issues argued recently in federal court, where a group of agricultural companies and organizations was asking U.S. District Judge William B. Shubb to inject a modicum of sanity into the state's proposal to label the chemical glyphosate as a carcinogen.

Glyphosate, best known by the trade name Roundup, has been widely used during the past 40 years to kill weeds. Most recently, it has been used in conjunction with a handful of "Roundup Ready" crops that are resistant to it. This allows farmers to kill weeds in their fields without killing crops.

The companies and organizations had asked the judge to stop the state's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment from requiring private companies to post signs stating that glyphosate causes cancer. They argued that requiring them

to do that would violate the Constitution's First Amendment. As in, the state government cannot require someone to say something that's false.

The state had declared glyphosate as a carcinogenic last year based on its listing as a "probable" carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The judge noted that there's a considerable gap between the "probable" in the IARC's listing and the state's determination that it is known to cause cancer.

"...A reasonable consumer would not understand that a substance is 'known to cause cancer' where only one health organization had found that the substance in question causes cancer and virtually all other government agencies and health organizations that have reviewed studies on the chemical had found there was no evidence that it caused cancer," the

judge wrote. "Under these facts, the message that glyphosate is known to cause cancer is misleading at best."

The judge points out that, as recently as 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency had determined "that there was no or insufficient evidence that glyphosate causes cancer" and that "...given the heavy weight of evidence in the record that glyphosate is not in fact known to cause cancer, the required warning is factually inaccurate and controversial."

In the end, the judge stopped the state from requiring farmers, companies and others to post signs about glyphosate.

That's only fair, since the facts — and four decades of experience — appear to back the arguments that glyphosate is not a carcinogen.

Now, if the judge could only do something about those Disneyland signs.

OUR VIEW



Potato commission proposal makes sense

A group of Eastern Idaho farmers wants to change the composition of the powerful Idaho Potato Commission and provide for the direct election of its members.

We find it difficult to argue against the logic of their proposal.

The Idaho Potato Commission is a state agency formed in 1937. It's responsible for promoting and safeguarding the Idaho potato brand.

Its efforts are funded by an assessment of 12.5 cents per every 100 pounds of potatoes Idaho farmers grow. It has a budget of \$15 million.

There are nine commission members — five grower representatives, two potato shipper representatives and two potato processor representatives.

The growers from Eastern Idaho say they are underrepresented, as most of the potatoes are grown in their part of the state.

They also take issue with how commission members are selected. The commission positions are political appointments. Growers, shippers and processors nominate three candidates to fill openings, but it's the governor who makes the final selection.

A group of growers is circulating a petition calling for the direct election of commissioners by

the members of the segments of the industry they represent.

They also want more grower representation. They propose dividing growers into seven districts, each representing about 14 percent of the state's spud production.

"Government closest to the people does the best job. It would be the same principle with the potato commission," said Stephanie Mickelsen, a potato grower near Idaho Falls who supports the effort.

That makes sense. Farmers are growing the potatoes and paying the bills to promote their crop here and abroad. The people overseeing that effort should answer directly to farmers, not governors.

We have no opinion on complaints that the commission assessments are too high.

The Famous Idaho Potato Bowl and the Big Idaho Potato Truck are high-profile promotions that critics like to debate. We think that's a little unfair because direct efforts with retailers and other buyers are quite substantial.

Petitioners claim their returns are lower than those in other potato producing states, but their assessments are higher. They aren't calling for reducing the assessments, but are using the data to buttress their argument that they need greater direct representation.

That's a fair point.

Ultimately it's up to the growers to decide whether their investment is paying off. If growers have greater trust in the system of governance they will have greater trust that the commission is working in their interest.

It's National Agricultural Safety Awareness Program (ASAP) Week

By CORY STENGEL
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Cory Stengel



When was the last time you seriously thought about safety on your farm or ranch?

With distractions like planting schedules, commodity prices and weather issues, it's not overly surprising to hear a farmer or rancher admit that safety has taken a back seat in the day-to-day activity of raising crops and animals.

But this is National Agricultural Safety Awareness Program (ASAP) Week, March 4-10. The Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) Health & Safety Committee wants to remind all farmers and ranchers that safety must play an important role in your business.

Not prioritizing safety puts not only yourself at serious risk, but also your employees, family members and anyone else who visits your operation.

The numbers speak for themselves. Year after year, research shows that farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in America. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2015, fatalities among American agricultural workers rose to 180, an increase of 22 percent from the 148 cases reported in 2014.

Farmworkers and laborers involved in crop, nursery and greenhouse operations recorded 106 fatalities, an increase of 33 percent from 2014. This matched the highest total ever reported (in 2010) for that group.

On Oregon farms, falls and slips were the most common cause of accepted worker's compensation claims for nonfatal injuries in 2016 — the most current year for available data — followed by injuries from being struck by or against an object, and overexertion, according to Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA).

Six workers died on Oregon farms in 2016, while there were five other workers whose nonfatal injuries required treatment for at least one night in a hospital.

These statistics are sobering. But a few simple steps can prevent you, or one of your employees or loved ones, from becoming one of these numbers.

A good first step is to simply recognize that a safety program is essential for any ag business to become or remain successful.

A good second step is to schedule a safety meeting, or a tailgate meeting, or a safety huddle.

Whatever you call it, what matters is that time is taken out of the workday to review and/or remind employees about the po-

tential hazards involved in what they do on the job.

Before an employee starts a new task, managers should organize a safety meeting or, as Oregon OSHA calls it, a Job Hazard Analysis. The goal is to identify potential hazards associated with the job at hand and to review what employees can do to adequately protect themselves.

These two simple actions will get your farm or ranch on the right track.

At oregonfb.org, the OFB Health & Safety Committee offers many resources to help ag producers who are just getting started with a safety program, as well as those who already have one in place.

For example, a very useful resource is "Sowing the Seeds to a Safe Agricultural Workplace." This is a 59-page guide that distills the rules Oregon OSHA has in place for agriculture — so you don't have to do the research yourself.

The guide offers how-tos, checklists, and safety practices to make sure your farm or ranch is OSHA compliant and, more importantly, is doing what it can to prevent accidents, injuries, and deaths.

The many topics covered in "Sowing the Seeds to a Safe Agricultural Workplace" include safety committees, forklifts, ladders, material handling, noise, pesticides and rollover protective structures.

The OFB Health & Safety Committee also offers information about the Worker Protection Standard and effective hazard communication, along with the popular OFB Rural Road Safety Brochure and many links to other helpful websites.

Visit oregonfb.org and explore the health and safety materials available. These tools were curated by Farm Bureau members to help lay the foundation for an effective safety and health program, or fine-tune an existing program.

Giving safety the same attention as any other key aspect of the business is essential to the success of any ag operation. And there's no better time to focus on it than during National Agricultural Safety Awareness Program Week.

The OFB Health & Safety Committee is committed to giving farmers and ranchers the information they need to get this important job done right.

Cory Stengel is chairman of the Oregon Farm Bureau Health & Safety Committee.