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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

The bird that likes farming — and airports



National Park Service

The streaked horned lark was once abundant in the Puget Sound prairies of Washington state. As its population and distribution have decreased with the decline in habitat, it is most successful in such areas as the Willamette Valley. It especially likes airports.

The streaked horned lark is a breed apart. It likes airports. In fact, the largest known breeding population is at the Corvallis, Ore., airport, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Another breeding population resides at the Portland International Airport.

It also likes military bases, golf courses, prairies and farmland. Specifically, it likes any areas that are open, flat and sparsely vegetated.

“Today nesting occurs in native prairies, coastal dunes, fallow agricultural fields, seasonal wetlands, sparsely vegetated edges of grass fields, moderately to heavily grazed pastures, seasonal mudflats, airports and dredge spoil islands in and along

the tidal reach of the Columbia River,” the agency wrote.

Unlike the northern spotted owl, which likes undisturbed old-growth forests, the streaked horned lark seems to like areas that have been disturbed by jets, dredges, tractors, combines and even golfers.

Considering its preferences, this would appear to be an easy species to manage. About half of the 1,600 birds live in the Willamette Valley of Oregon — where farms, pastures and grass fields proliferate. The birds should be all set.

Comes now the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that believes the bird, which is already listed as “threatened”

under the federal Endangered Species Act, should be protected even more. The group has sued the Fish and Wildlife Service to upgrade the bird’s listing to “endangered” and to get the agency to stop allowing farming activities. The group claims the bird’s population is decreasing “due to conversion to agriculture and urban development, loss of natural disturbance regimes and resulting woody plant encroachment, and incompatible management practices. For example, when agricultural fields are converted to vineyards or are used to produce crops such as blueberries or broccoli, they cease to provide larks with habitat for breeding.”

The Fish and Wildlife Service

had allowed farming activity based in the fact that the birds gravitated to many farms. It should be noted that the bird is native to the western portion of British Columbia, Washington state and Oregon and appears to be doing best in the Willamette Valley.

Instead of seeing that as a promising outcome, the Center for Biological Diversity lawsuit seeks to shut down farming while the birds are nesting in the summer. By some convoluted reasoning, its lawyers argue, that would benefit the birds.

Experience has shown that most farming is good for the bird. The Fish and Wildlife Service appears to recognize that, and so do the birds.

OUR VIEW

Trump fulfills only half of his trade promises

President Trump has been busy in recent months fulfilling campaign promises on trade, which might be a good thing for farmers and ranchers if he were fulfilling all of his promises on trade.

One of Trump’s favorite campaign riffs was on trade, or more specifically how the United States in general and American workers and businesses in particular were being beat up by our trading partners.

“We don’t make good deals any more. I say it all the time in speeches. We don’t make good deals anymore; we make bad deals. Our trade deals are a disaster.”

Candidate Trump said Mexico and Canada were getting much more from the United States under the North American Free Trade Agreement than they were giving. He promised to reopen negotiations and make a better deal.

President Trump reopened talks on NAFTA with Canada and Mexico. So far there’s no new deal, better or worse. Canada and Mexico are, respectively, the second- and third-largest importers of U.S. agricultural goods. They account for about \$41 billion in ag exports.

Farmers are understandably nervous. Do they want a better deal? Yeah. Can they afford to have no deal? No.

Trump promised to reopen talks on NAFTA and get a better deal. So far he’s delivered half.

As a candidate Trump liked to talk about how foreign steel and aluminum makers were unfairly dumping under-priced goods in the U.S., hurting American steel workers. Earlier this month President Trump threatened to increase tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum.

That made steel workers happy, but farmers are left worried that their products will bear the brunt of any retaliatory measures steel-exporting countries place on the U.S.

Then there’s the Trans-Pacific Partnership. U.S. farmers had a big stake in the multi-lateral trade pact with Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. But it wasn’t very popular during the campaign.

Bernie Sanders said TPP was a “global race to the bottom” to boost corporate profits. As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton called TPP the “gold standard” of trade pacts, but candidate Clinton said that when she read the final text she couldn’t support it. Donald Trump said the deal undercut American workers and companies.

All three said they’d walk away from the deal. Trump won, walked away from the deal and said he’d negotiate better bilateral treaties with our biggest trading partners.

Last week the remaining 11 partners signed the TPP, sans many of the provisions insisted upon by U.S. negotiators and the U.S. itself. No word on any new bilateral agreements with countries that buy the bulk of farm exports from the Pacific Northwest. U.S. farmers export \$135 billion in products each year. They have a lot riding on trade.

Having walked away from “bad” trade deals, it’s time for Trump to fulfill the other half of his promises and replace them with treaties that serve the interests of U.S. farmers and ranchers.

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Associated Press File
As a candidate, Donald Trump said he would negotiate better trade deals for U.S. farmers and manufacturers, but as president he hasn’t been able to deliver.

Trade: an American value

By SCOTT A. YATES
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Scott Yates



What are the three priorities determining a Pacific Northwest wheat farmer’s success? 1. Trade. 2. Trade. 3. Trade.

Upward of 90 percent of the wheat grown in 20 Eastern Washington counties is exported. Include Idaho and Oregon in the calculation and around two-thirds of the nearly 300 million bushels of wheat produced in the Pacific Northwest in 2016-2017 will wind up in bellies other than Americans’.

But trade isn’t important just to PNW wheat farmers. America as a whole exports around 45 percent of the wheat it produces. Last marketing year, Mexico was the biggest importer, surpassing Japan for the first time.

It’s ironic then that exports of wheat to both of these countries is currently under a cloud. The unsteady status of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, has wheat farmers in the Midwest and Northern Tier states holding their breath against the possibility of a Mexican standoff.

TPP fallout

Here in the Northwest, there’s no breath holding. President Trump’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement last year, leaving the remaining 11 countries to come up with a treaty of their own, has already teed up a trade catastrophe.

Under the deal crafted by the 11 countries, Canada and Australia, two of America’s pre-eminent adversaries in the quality wheat markets of the world, will see a substantial reduction of a tariff into Japan. Currently, the U.S. controls about 50 percent of Japan’s 3.1 million metric ton market, with most of the other 50 percent divided between Canada and Australia.

Under the new treaty, the Japanese suggest our market share will decline dramatically and along with it, the price of wheat in the U.S. — by about 50 cents a bushel. Given the number of bushels we produce, that means America’s wheat farmers will have \$500 million less each year to spend on everything from crop inputs to groceries and charities, while our Australian and Canadian competitors will have that much more.

But it’s not just money

in the future we’re losing. If our absence from the TPP lingers any amount of time, we’ll also lose the millions of dollars we’ve spent developing the Japanese market over the last 70 years. Squandered might be a better word.

The U.S. has a competitive advantage in producing high quality wheat and Japan wants to continue buying from us to meet their consumers’ needs. They are very comfortable with the system that has evolved in tandem with America’s farmers and are loath to change it. In meetings we’ve held with the Japanese, they ask again and again about America re-entering the TPP.

Hopes dashed

Although Japan is at the top of our minds now, Vietnam is another TPP member where the U.S. once had high hopes. Other countries are also at risk. Indonesia is considering joining the trading bloc, and it is the second biggest wheat importer in the world, soon to surpass Egypt as No. 1.

At a conference I recently attended, it was suggested that communicating shared values are three to five times more important than sharing facts. You’ve heard the facts, but trade is also a value — one that America has embraced almost continuously since its founding. Along with capitalism, trade is what made America the juggernaut of the 20th century.

We should not abandon our values, any more than we should abandon regions of the country where Americans have seen the American dream pass them by. But the notion that we can prosper without trade is antithetical to everything that makes us American.

President Trump indicated recently he’s open to the U.S. joining a renegotiated TPP. At a time when Pacific Northwest farmers are already reeling from prices below their cost of production, that would speak volumes to the rural residents who voted for Trump — as well as our loyal, long-time Japanese customers.

Scott A. Yates is director of communications and producer relations for the Washington Grain Commission.