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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Congress should legalize industrial hemp

We support efforts underway in Congress to make industrial hemp a legal crop for U.S. farmers.

Hemp is a cousin of marijuana that lacks the chemical properties that produce pot's high. Nonetheless, it is classified with marijuana as a Schedule 1 controlled substance under federal law.

Hemp has been grown for fiber for centuries. Colonial Virginia required its cultivation in 1691 and it became an American staple until the 20th century. By the 1930s it had been lumped together with marijuana and made illegal by most states — some say at the bidding of cotton interests.

During World War II the federal government encouraged farmers to grow hemp to replace jute and other fibers from Japanese-held areas in the Pacific necessary for the manufacture of rope. The plant proved so prolific that farmers in the Midwest still



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

Hemp grows in an Oregon field. Congress needs to take the next step and legalize the crop nationwide.

struggle to stamp it out of ditches and fence rows more than 70 years later.

In the meantime, products — clothing, foodstuffs, cosmetics and essential oils — made from hemp outside the United States have become a staple in almost every store in the country. So

while the federal government bans hemp production in the United States, it approves for importation products made from the same vile weed.

That's the government for you. As several states have legalized and regulated marijuana production and trafficking, there

has been an effort to liberalize policies on hemp production. The mishmash of state legalization schemes and the lack of much processing capacity have left would-be growers in a lurch.

We've never embraced "legal" marijuana and have been only lukewarm about hemp because it remains illegal under federal law. For years we have advised farmers against growing hemp because of the considerable potential downsides should federal narcotics agents decide to swoop down on the farm.

But the law could soon change. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican from Kentucky, has inserted language into his chamber's version of the farm bill to make hemp legal again.

"We've won the argument that this is not about marijuana," McConnell said about hemp. "Now we just need to pass the law. And I'm in a uniquely well-

situated position to make that happen."

That he is.

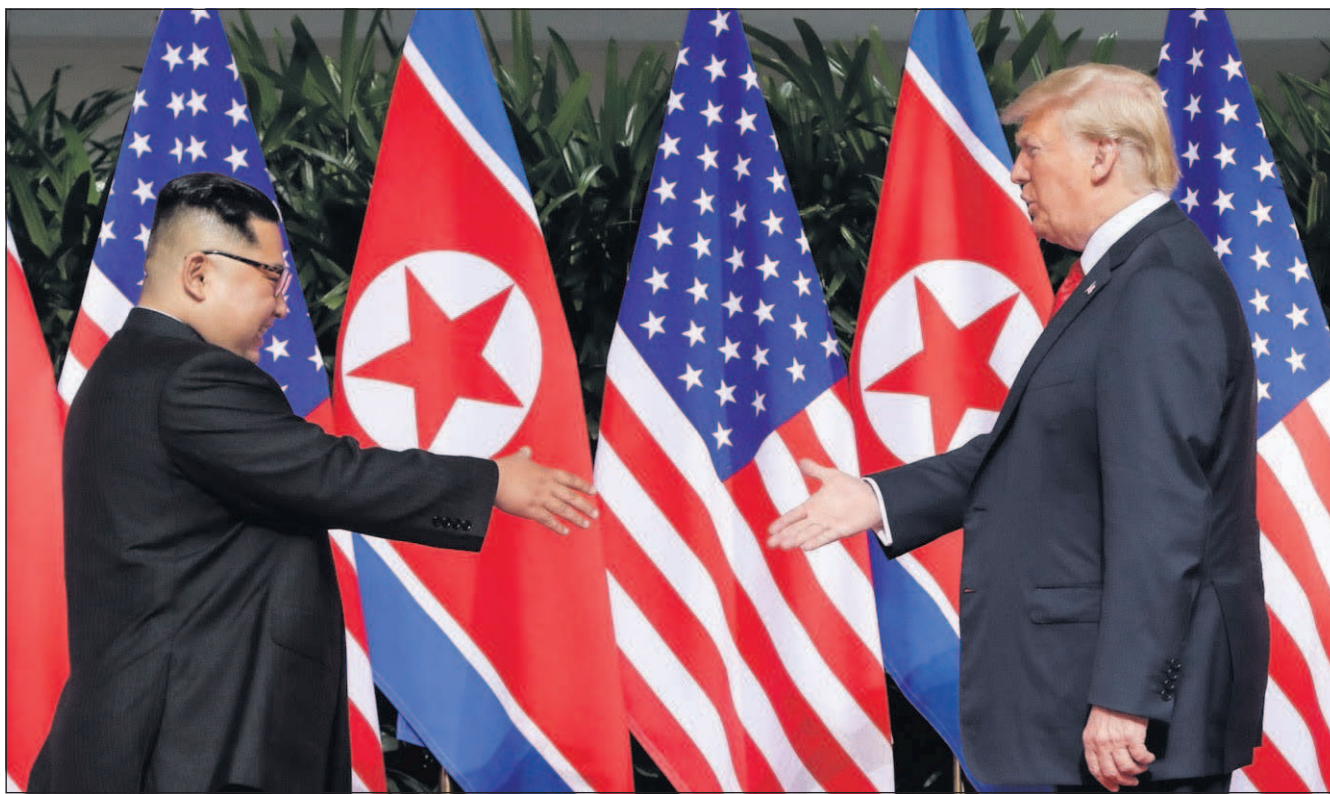
Hemp is not marijuana. Concerns that hemp fields will be used to conceal illicit marijuana grows, one of the main reasons many have opposed its legalization, are probably overblown.

Hemp is clearly a crop that has commercial applications. Before growers can capitalize on that potential, processing infrastructure needs to be built and both raw materials and finished product must be able to move freely across state lines. First, it must be legal.

It's not clear that hemp is the highest use of prime ground and precious water. And it remains to be seen if it can be wildly lucrative for growers once restrictions are lifted.

But farmers should have hemp in their portfolio and the chance to make something of it. Hemp should be made legal.

OUR VIEW



Associated Press

U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korea leader Kim Jong Un reach to shake hands June 12 in Singapore. The president likes to talk about making deals but has a hard time reaching agreements even with allies.

It's time for Trump to prove himself on trade

The sight of President Donald Trump making nice with Kim Jong Un, a sworn enemy of the U.S. who has threatened to nuke our nation along with Japan and South Korea, provided a jolting contrast to the president's bizarre performance at the recent G-7 economic summit, where he thumbed his nose at our strongest allies — and trade partners.

Confusion may be part of Trump's game plan, but he can't seem to get beyond that. Part of his negotiating tactic is knocking the other parties back on their heels by emphasizing that he is willing to do anything, including walk away.

Fair enough. Anyone who has ever bought a used car knows that. The thing is, we're not negotiating for an '87 Buick. We're talking about multi-billion-dollar trade deals with our allies that could make or break U.S. farmers, ranchers and others. Japan alone buys an average of \$800 million worth of wheat a year from U.S. farmers. Upwards of 90 percent of the wheat grown in the Northwest goes to Japan and other overseas customers. Because Trump unilaterally bailed out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Canada and Australia, both major wheat producers, will have a \$65 a ton tariff advantage over the U.S. on wheat they sell to Japan.

Some "deal." Other commodities face similar scenarios, all of which spell trouble for farmers and ranchers, whose livelihoods are at stake because they depend on trade.

Trump says his showboating has worked for him in the past.

"My whole life has been deals," he said at a press conference last week. "I've done great at it, and that's what I do."

That being the case, we have to wonder why he's thus far failed to negotiate new trade deals with our most important allies. When he took office, one of the first things he did was tear up the TPP, which includes three of our best trade partners, Japan, Mexico and Canada. Then he went after China and South Korea, two other important trade partners.

Only in South Korea was his administration able to renegotiate the KORUS deal. Funny thing, because it's a lot like the original deal.

Trump said he would procure bilateral agreements with our major trade partners.

It's been 18 months, and we're still waiting. During that time, U.S. farmers have seen overseas markets they nurtured for decades put at risk, they've seen retaliatory tariffs put on their crops and products, and they've seen zero

progress from Mr. Big Deal.

In fact, they've seen the opposite of progress. His tariffs on steel and aluminum from overseas have only resulted in retaliatory tariffs, many on U.S. agricultural exports.

Trump has had plenty of time to negotiate trade deals with Japan, Mexico and Canada. He's had plenty of time to sit down with the Chinese and the Europeans.

And we're all still waiting.

Trump has done some good things, mainly by reining in federal regulations such as those governing the Waters of the U.S. But trade is the arena that will make or break nearly every U.S. farmer and rancher.

Shaking hands with the North Korean dictator was easy. The little guy seemed thrilled by the photo opportunity. We hope the meeting leads to an actual disarmament agreement of some type, but with Trump's growing track record of failing to follow through on his "deals," we're not holding our breath.

It's been a year and a half since Trump said he would negotiate replacement deals for TPP and upgrade the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Time's up, Mr. President. Quit messing around with the sideshows and get U.S. trade back on track.

Oregon OSHA focusing on heat safety

By CORY STENDEL
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Corey Stengel



As summer heats up, the Oregon Farm Bureau Health & Safety Committee wants to alert farmers and ranchers who are employers that the Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has launched an emphasis program to make sure workers are being protected from heat-related illness on the job.

According to a study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2015, exposure to environmental heat led to 37 work-related deaths nationwide and 2,830 nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work.

In response to these sobering statistics, Oregon OSHA will be looking to see if employers — those with employees exposed to excessive and continuous heat — have heat illness prevention measures in place. This will include job sites with workers who wear protective clothing or equipment that impacts their ability to naturally shed heat.

Starting this year, when Oregon OSHA visits workplaces between June 15 and Oct. 1, inspectors will likely ask employers about their heat safety program.

The goal is to prevent heat-related illnesses and deaths by raising awareness among workers and employers about the health risks associated with working in hot environments. The primary focus is to educate and inform employers with indoor hot processes and/or outdoor workers, particularly those in agriculture, construction and forestry.

Heat-related illnesses generally occur when body heat generated by physical work is aggravated by environmental heat and humidity. Indoor worksites where heat-related illnesses may occur include those with hot processes, such as seed and grain elevators, food processors and canneries, to name just a few.

Outdoor operations typically affected by hot weather include most crop-production agriculture, landscaping, firefighting, forest activities, construction and demolition.

Another consideration is when the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is required. The use of non-porous (non-breathable) full-body suits, such

as for pesticide applications, can cause heat-related illnesses among the workers during even relatively mild work activities without any additional sources of heat.

A company in Texas was cited \$7,000 for not having a work rest regimen, not ensuring that employees had access to fluids, and not providing heat stress training to employees.

To help Oregon farmers and ranchers protect employees exposed to hot conditions, the OFB Health & Safety Committee offers a program template. The goal is to help employers create a plan that effectively addresses heat hazards and keeps workers safe.

Find the program template at <https://oregonfb.org/programs/ag-health-safety/> (or go to oregonfb.org under the Health & Safety page under the Programs menu).

Other valuable resources from the committee include "Sowing the Seeds to a Safe Agricultural Workplace," a 59-page guide chock full of useful health and safety information for farms and ranches; the popular Rural Road Safety brochure; and a document full of important information about the Worker Protection Standard, hazard communication, respiratory protection, and more.

Corey Stengel is chair of the Oregon Farm Bureau Health & Safety Committee.

Letters policy

Write to us: Capital Press welcomes letters to the editor on issues of interest to farmers, ranchers and the agribusiness community.

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.

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